

East Sussex Rural Forum Meeting held at Uckfield Civic Centre on 21 April 2009

Summary of discussion points and recommendations

The East Sussex Rural Forum covered two topics:-

- 1. East Sussex Recession Taskforce**
- 2. East Sussex Bus and Community Transport Strategy consultation**

1. East Sussex Recession Taskforce

Presentation by Becky Shaw, Director of Policy and Communications, on key indicators of the recession in East Sussex.

Summary of discussion

- a. **Key signals that the recession is having an impact in rural areas in addition to already published statistical evidence.**
 - Shop closures / empty shops
 - Fewer customers in pubs and restaurants
 - Repossessions increasing
 - Increase in debt problems highlighted by the CAB
 - Businesses closing - livery stables
 - People not able to move / more to let signs

- b. **What actions should be taken to manage the recession in rural areas.**
 - **Improve the broadband** width and accessibility in rural areas of East Sussex to enable businesses and communities to benefit from same services as urban areas. This will help businesses immediately and as the upturn in the economy takes place. Local businesses, home based businesses and local services would all benefit from better broadband.
 - **Develop the concept of community hubs** for information and support services to those directly affected by the recession. These could be in village shops, village halls, pubs, churches or other buildings within the rural community. The use of mobile units providing outreach services by key support agencies.
 - **Ensure support services delivery to rural areas** for those who live in rural areas and are affected directly by the recession. Linked to community hub and outreach services.
 - **Support volunteers to help with community initiatives.** There are more volunteers now who are offering their time locally. The existing volunteer networks should be supported in order to be able to grow their number and range of volunteers. Signposting services should take note of these rural networks.
 - **Invest in infrastructure projects** to provide local jobs and improve affordable housing supply, transport infrastructure and other capital projects.
 - **Support entrepreneurs** and those who are investing in setting up their own business to help ensure that these are based on good businesses principles and are ready to take advantage once the recession is receding.