

# Annual Review 2014/15

*Speaking up for rural communities*





## Contents

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- 3** Foreword
- 4-7** ACRE highlights
- 8-9** Our impact
- 10-11** The ACRE Network in numbers
- 12-17** ACRE Network highlights
- 18** Our finances
- 19** Our members, funders & sponsors

ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) is the national body for the 38 rural community councils who make up the ACRE Network.

**Our vision** is to be the voice of rural communities.

**Our mission** is to provide critical evidence-based intelligence and solutions to achieve a fair deal for rural communities.

We have a strong track record of speaking up for rural communities on the national stage and delivering multi-million pound projects that enable them to find innovative solutions to the challenges they face.

Our work is supported by the wealth of information on rural matters that we collect from our members. We use this evidence to influence national policy on rural issues, from housing, health and transport to broadband, services and fuel poverty.

Our Network members – many of whom date back 90 years – have a long and fruitful history of making a difference at grassroots level. ACRE was formed in 1987 to bring them together under one umbrella, harnessing the strength of their experience to support our national work.

# Foreword



**I am delighted to present our Annual Review which showcases the activity of ACRE and its Network in speaking up for, and supporting, rural communities across England.**

In a year not without its challenges, much has been achieved and our members continue to help bring a wealth of services to people who live and work in the countryside. These include affordable

homes, community transport schemes, better broadband and new social enterprises.

ACRE itself has continued to push rural concerns onto the national agenda, speaking out on issues ranging from changes in planning policies to cuts in rural GP funding. We are also at the forefront of helping communities to help themselves as lead partner for the UK-wide £1.4m Big Lottery funded Village SOS campaign, which got off to a flying start in 2014/15.

Our profile has steadily increased with partners and stakeholders both at home and in Europe. We have appeared in a range of media from BBC TV News; to Farming Today; to Woman's Hour; as well in local, regional and national newspapers and magazines.

We have worked hard with our members and partners to strengthen ACRE's profile with the Government through contributions to a wide range of select committees, rural forums and networks. And when it seemed that long-standing financial support from Defra looked set to be withdrawn earlier this year, we were heartened by the response from MPs, partners and communities who rallied behind our cause.

We were especially pleased with the support from users and volunteers at village halls across England, who clearly value the dedicated advice service we provide. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who signed our petition or who wrote to the Secretary of State to urge our funding to be continued – you clearly did make a difference.

With Defra's investment in the Network for 2015/16 in place, we have been able to return to supporting our Network to do what it does best – delivering long-term benefits to those most in need at the grass roots.

**David Emerson CBE, Chair**

# acre Spotlight

## CHANGING FACES

The ACRE board is made up of voluntary directors whose chief role is to set out the organisation's strategic direction and ensure we are delivering our charitable aims and objectives.

In November 2014, Sue Shaw retired after seven years on the ACRE board and six as Chair. She was replaced by **David Emerson** CBE, the Chief Executive of the Association of Charitable



Foundations (ACF), the professional membership association for the UK's charitable trusts and grant-making foundations.

A geography graduate, who studied landscape management at Wye College, David worked for ACRE Network member Cheshire Rural Community Council before becoming Deputy Head of the Rural Department at NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations).

During the year, Peter Cleasby, David



Voysey and Jan Worters stepped down from the board and we were joined by two new directors, Professor **Mark Shucksmith**, Director of the

Newcastle Institute for Social Renewal and Professor of Planning at Newcastle University, and **Jon Bright**, Chief Executive of Oxfordshire Rural Community Council.



## Community Guide

ACRE published a free, practical guide to help rural communities protect themselves from flooding. The Community Guide to Your Water Environment was produced in partnership with FWAG (Farming Wildlife Advisory Group), the NFU (National Farmers Union) and the CCRI (Countryside and Community Research Institute).

Supported by Defra (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) and the Catchment Based Approach, the guide aims to



help communities understand the importance of water in their local area - and especially the impact of extreme weather. The guide was sponsored by environmental consultant Enzygo Limited.

## The Defra agreement

This was the fourth and final year of the ACRE Network's latest funding agreement with Defra. This funding supports our rural insight work, such as helping to shape and influence national and local policy by providing in-depth intelligence from across our Network.

The funding allows ACRE members to help communities to find solutions to the challenges

they face across themes including broadband, transport, services, the rural economy and housing.

Defra funding for ACRE and its members during 2014/15 totaled £2.31m. This investment enabled further resources to be levered in from a range of local and national sources, delivering significant additional benefits to rural communities.



The focus of the campaign is a 'community to community' learning network, which sees volunteers from social enterprises across the UK become mentors to share the secrets of their success

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## Village SOS

The launch of the Village SOS campaign in July 2014 saw a nationwide partnership led by ACRE receive close to £1.4m from the Big Lottery Fund to inspire rural communities across the UK to set up social enterprises.

The two-year learning, outreach and engagement campaign is aimed at rural communities who need skills or support to get a great idea or budding project off the ground – whether it's as simple as a car share scheme, or as ambitious as a community café.



The focus of the campaign is a 'community to community' learning network, which sees volunteers from social enterprises across the UK become mentors to share the secrets of their success.

Grassroots support is provided in England by ACRE's Network of 38 rural community councils; in Wales by Wales Council for Voluntary Action; in Scotland by Rocket Science, Senscot and Forth Sector; and in Northern Ireland by Rural Community Network.

Village SOS kicked off with a three-month research project led by consultants Rose Regeneration and Rocket Science. It identified good practice and case studies from the first phase of the campaign, launched in 2010, which saw more than 160 innovative village projects come to fruition.

The research also assessed the demand for support for new enterprises and mapped what is available across the UK so that projects are directed to the best sources of advice and funding.

The campaign began in earnest when Chris Cowcher joined ACRE as Village SOS Community Manager in November 2014. Flagship launch events were held in Bristol and Darlington and by the end of 2014/15, the campaign had gained around 150 primary members and more than 120 mentors. More than 250 people had attended VSOS-related events. New ideas coming forward include a community radio station, sports facility, community asset transfer projects and a new-build village hall.



## Loan fund success

ACRE was reawarded the contract to manage a £700,000 Defra loan fund for rural community buildings in May 2014.

The Rural Community Buildings Loan Fund plays a crucial role in helping community groups renovate, refurbish and construct buildings such as village halls, church halls and community centres.

It encourages communities to raise funds, knowing a loan could be available to help them meet their target and win funding from other sources.

ACRE manages around 40 live loans at any one time and makes between 10 and 14 new loans per year.

In 2014/15, £463,000 was out on loan to communities, with a further £117,000 committed and £20,000 of applications pending. The fund's utilisation rate was 82.9%, with an average loan of £19,000.

Projects ranged from essential work to a car park and installation of photovoltaic panels to extensions, refurbishments and the building of a new hall. However, not all loans were taken up as some halls met their needs through fundraising or grants.



## Getting together

The 15th annual residential training event for the ACRE Network's village hall advisers, supported by Aon (UK) Limited was held in Exeter. It was organised by ACRE and the South West advisers, and was attended by 39 delegates from 34 counties.



# Village halls service

## Survey paints picture of village life

ACRE continued to manage the national village halls service for the ACRE Network, which offers support to the estimated 80,000 volunteers who run England's village halls.

During 2014/15, we released the results of our national survey of village hall management committees, which received widespread media coverage.

### Key findings included:

- Village halls rely on more than 12 million hours of volunteering each year to deliver their vital role at the heart of rural communities.
- Hall volunteers make a total commitment worth almost £85m annually, at a notional rate of £7 an hour.
- The average age of a village hall committee member is 58 – the age range stretches from 18 to 98.
- Each village hall hosts an average of nine life events, such as weddings, christening parties or wakes



AN ESTIMATED  
£11M HAS BEEN  
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VILLAGE HALL BUILDINGS  
IN THE PAST FOUR  
YEARS

each year – a grand total of 90,000 gatherings.

- Village hall users and volunteers munch their way through a total of 47,500 packets of biscuits each week – washed down by 743,000 cups of tea. That's nearly 2.5 million packets of biscuits and 38.6 million cups of tea each year – or 9.6 million litres (2.1 million gallons).

- An estimated £11m has been invested in work on village hall buildings in the past four years.
- Around 1,000 village halls, or 10%, host a community enterprise such as post office, community shop, coffee shop, library, cinema or farmers' market. However, almost a quarter of all halls don't derive any financial benefit from this activity.

## WHY RURAL MATTERS



More than 100 delegates attended ACRE's annual conference at Holiday Inn, Regents Park, London. Why Rural Matters - The Case for Investment gave attendees the opportunity to share intelligence, inspiration and insight on rural issues in the run-up to the 2015 election. The focus of the day was the increasing contribution that rural is making to the UK economy

- and finding the key to unlocking future investment in our communities.

Our speakers were Dawn Austwick OBE, CEO, The Big Lottery Fund; Simon Baxter, Managing Director, Dijon Designs; Jon Boswell, CEO, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity; Oli Christie, Managing Director, Neon Play; Ron Crank, CEO, Coast to Capital LEP; Robert Crowder, CEO, Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire; Lord De Mauley TD, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Defra; Debra Drew, Managing Director, Fabric Architecture; Julie Girling MEP; Huw Irranca-Davies MP, Shadow Minister for Rural Affairs, Food and Farming; Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE, Director of the Newcastle Institute for Social Renewal.

The conference followed a one-day networking event and AGM for ACRE Network members.



### QUALITY ASSURED

The ACRE Standard, which demonstrates good practice in organisational management and service delivery, is now in its 11th year. The Standard is an exemplar programme for performance improvement with the capability to deliver national, network-wide benchmarking on quality. In total, 33 Network members and ACRE are accredited at the highest level, Level 3.

## The Rural Challenge

Throughout 2014/15, ACRE has worked with the Rural Coalition, a small group of national stakeholders representing private, voluntary and public sector interests. Founder member ACRE acts as secretariat for the group, which commands significant attention from Government departments and in Parliamentary circles.

In the run-up to the General Election, the Coalition launched The Rural Challenge 2015, outlining a new set of rural priorities for the next Government, at the House of Lords. The document urged the Government to address three core areas to support rural communities; the rural economy, affordable housing, and health and social care services.



## Good Neighbours

The ACRE Network secured funding in early 2015 from the Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund to create a national Good Neighbours Network in rural areas.

The project will scale up the Good Neighbour schemes supported by Rural Community Councils in parts of England to other parts of the ACRE Network. The project is led by Bedfordshire Rural Communities

Charity, and will see new Good Neighbour schemes being set up in Yorkshire, Cumbria, Sussex, Lincolnshire and Buckinghamshire.

The Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund is a £14m partnership between Nesta and the Cabinet Office to support the growth of innovations that mobilise people's energy and talents to help each other, working alongside public services.

**THE ACRE MANIFESTO** ACRE published its manifesto in January 2015, urging politicians to improve health, wealth and access for the millions of people who live in the countryside. The manifesto set out our 12 key asks in the run-up to the General Election, based on the intelligence we collect from our Network members. It formed the basis for ACRE's campaigning work on the 'bedroom tax', the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee, affordable housing, rural broadband and community transport.



## Voices from the grass roots

When it seemed Defra's long-standing financial support for the ACRE Network might be at risk earlier this year, we were heartened by the support we received from MPs, partners and the communities who benefit from the services our members provide.

Thousands of people signed our online petition or wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Elizabeth Truss, asking for the Network's funding to be continued.

Tony Dodds, of Herefordshire, asked Ms Truss: "Will you please use your influence and presence to avoid or reduce any cuts in funding to both ACRE and Community First. Their contribution to rural affairs and the environment will form part of this generation's gift to the next."

We were especially pleased by the response from users and volunteers at village

halls across England, for who we provide a dedicated advice service.

Mary Gordon, Secretary to the trustees of the Davis Hall in West Camel, Somerset, told Ms Truss: "I am filled with horror at the prospect of losing funding for ACRE who, together with our Rural Community Council, are the source of all information for the hundreds of volunteers striving to achieve Mr Cameron's 'Big Community'. "Rural Communities wanting to build or rebuild their Community facilities would be lost without the resources and information available from ACRE when it comes to legal obligations, fund raising, planning and management."

Alison Eyley, Chair of Kilve Village Hall in Somerset, wrote: "The Community Council for Somerset (CCS), and in particular our Village Hall Adviser Nicola Greenslade, has supported our organisation in many ways.

"Nicola is also a vital point of contact who can guide us towards sources of grant funding. The CCS workshops she organises have helped us connect with other halls to learn from their best practices, and a workshop information stand helped us find better Village Hall insurance which has saved us hundreds of pounds each year.

"Please reconsider the funding for Community Councils as they provide a value for money service as a source of essential advice and information to tens of thousands of unpaid volunteers, who are working so hard to keep community buildings open and thriving in rural communities."

Following these and many other voices raised from the grass roots, we were delighted that Defra was subsequently able to confirm £2.3m of funding for the ACRE Network for 2015/16.



# Our impact 2014/15

ACRE has achieved impact across a wide range of themes, agencies and stakeholders in 2014/15. Bringing the challenges rural communities face and the solutions they can develop into the focus of policymakers is one of our key roles. To support its work, ACRE gathers intelligence from its national Network of rural community councils, which has an unrivalled reach of more than 52,000 grassroots organisations.

## Working with Government ministers & senior civil servants

### On the national stage

ACRE has taken up seats on a wide range of national advisory and steering groups including; The Rural Housing Advisory Group run by DCLG, the Ministerial Roundtable for Heating Oil and LPG and the Government, Industry and Consumer Advisory Group for Oil and LPG run by DECC, the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group - Industry Off-gas Grid Working Group and the European Funding Network hosted by NCVO. ACRE was also invited to be part of the steering group run by DCLG that is reviewing the Indices of Multiple Deprivation.

ACRE has also taken up the secretariat role for the Age Action Alliance Transport Working Group run by DWP.

### Select committees evidence

ACRE gave verbal and written evidence to The House of Commons Energy and Climate Change Select Committee on the Green Deal and the Energy Companies Obligation (ECO), highlighting the issues faced by rural residents. We also gave evidence to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee inquiry into Community Rights - informing the panel on how the 'rights' had been received by rural communities.

### Provision of evidence and consultations

- The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry into broadband in rural areas and the issues faced by rural communities.
- The Department for Communities and Local Government consultation on making it easier to set up a Parish Council. ACRE highlighted the benefits of 'parished' communities in its response.
- Cabinet Office consultation on the income thresholds for charities before they have to undertake a full audit.
- Research by Defra on the role of rural libraries and the importance to communities.
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport request for evidence on use of society lotteries in raising funds for good causes.
- Commented on Defra's proposals for a Rural Tourism and Transport project and the issues that should be the focus of the project.
- Cabinet Office consultation on a new fund to support the sustainability of voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations.
- DCLG consultation on planning performance and planning contributions, setting out how the changes to S106 thresholds for affordable housing would be detrimental to rural communities.



- DECC Feed in Tariff consultation highlighting the need to widen the definition of 'community organisation'.
- Contributed to the development of the Rural Housing Policy Review chaired by Lord Best.
- ACRE met with Lord Cameron to discuss the approach the Government had taken to the rural proofing of policies across departments.

**CAMPAIGNS** ACRE has continued to be a national partner on a number of major campaigns focusing on addressing rural energy issues. These were funded by the Government and included Big Energy Saving Week, Big Energy Saving Network and national buy heating oil and LPG early campaigns working with DECC, Citizens Advice and the Federation of Petroleum Suppliers.



# “ Speaking Up

## ...for communities

ACRE chief executive Janice Banks attended the European Rural Parliament to position the ACRE Network as rural experts on the evolving European rural agenda. Additionally, ACRE attended a number of open days in Brussels run by the European Parliament to assess the range of projects available and potential partners, and to raise the profile of ACRE as the rural network for England. She also joined 400 delegates at the inaugural Scottish Rural Parliament with field visits, workshops and sessions spread over several venues.

Janice attended both the Conservative and Labour party conferences and spoke at a number of fringe events on issues including rural poverty, and micro-businesses and employment. She also took part in the Labour party's roundtable event on energy efficiency, organised by Calor UK.

Janice took part in the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors panel discussion on the rural economy with MPs, civil servants and academics.

ACRE is also a member of the NAVCA Commission on Local Infrastructure, which produced the report Change for Good aimed at local infrastructure bodies to help meet the challenges they face.

We also joined the Rural England Steering Group, an initiative led by Rural Services Network, looking at the full range of rural issues from a wide range of experts.

Head of Rural Insight Nick Chase spoke at the Rural Housing Advisory Group learning event hosted by the Homes and Communities Agency, with Lord Matthew Taylor as keynote speaker.

## ...in the media

We used social media, press, television and radio to highlight rural issues to a wider audience. In 2014/15, we issued 43 press releases and took part in 44 radio and television interviews. More than 450 stations and publications across England featured ACRE and the Network including the BBC Six O'Clock News, BBC Radio 4's Farming Today and Woman's Hour, BBC Countryfile magazine, Country Life, Country Living, Third Sector and the Independent.

### Issues covered included:

- Our opposition to the Government's introduction of a 10-unit threshold for Section 106 agreement developments.
- Our evidence to the Commons inquiry into the delivery of the Government's energy-saving initiatives for homes.
- Our call for the Government to scrap the 'bedroom tax' in settlements of fewer than 3,000 people as a minimum.
- Our lead role in the £1.4m Big Lottery funded Village SOS campaign.
- The results of our survey of village hall management committees.
- Our campaign for continued Network funding from Defra.
- Our reaction to Lord Cameron's review of 'rural proofing'.
- Our role in influencing a Home Office ruling on licensing fees.

**80,000**

village hall committee  
volunteers



**+9,828** village hall committees  
supported

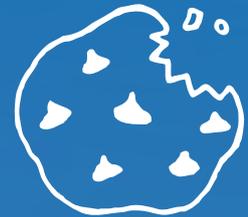


**800**

staff supporting  
rural communities  
across the Network

# The acre

Network in numbers **2014/15**



**2.5 million**  
packets of biscuits eaten  
in village halls each year



**£463,000**

of loans made through  
Defra's Rural Community  
Buildings Loan Fund



**12 million**  
hours of volunteering at  
village halls each year



**4,593**

volunteers attended

**339**

events for village hall committees



Reached

**52,783**

grassroots organisations



worked with

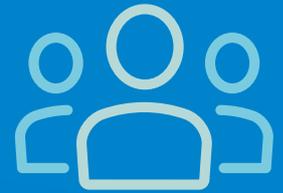
**284**

local authorities in England



**80,000**

people helped by village agent or good neighbour schemes



supported by

**340**

trustees



A combined Network turnover of

**£33.4**

million



worked with

**6,978**

partners



## CORNWALL Fishing Animateur

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) is one of the top performing FLAGs in the country. Over £1.8 million has been invested in the programme since 2012 with funding coming from the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and Defra through the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

The Fisheries Community Animateur has delivered a Social Return on Investment of £5.45 for each £1 of direct project funding. This Social Return on Investment analysis was commissioned by Cornwall Rural Community Charity (CRCC) to demonstrate the broader outcomes, benefits and achievements of the Animateur project.

The role of CRCC's Fisheries Animateur has been to work with coastal communities across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to bring about, develop

*The appointment of the Animateur has made a positive and distinctive contribution to the achievement of this social return*

and secure funding for projects that meet the aims of the Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) Strategy and wider AXIS of the European Fisheries Funds. The appointment of the Animateur has made a positive and distinctive contribution to the achievement of this social return.

The funding has helped with a wide range of projects to support the fishing industry, which has seen small port and cove infrastructure improvements that allow fishermen to be more self-sufficient, the modernisation

of the fleet vessels, by improving fishing vessel efficiency, crew comfort and safety and replacement of engines to improve reliability and bids with fishing businesses to diversify and engage with the tourist industry.

A 'Get in to Commercial Fishing' course with the Prince's Trust has attracted many new entrants into the industry. All these activities have, in some way, enhanced a selection of Cornwall's small fishing ports and harbours.

Although the number of people directly employed in fishing in Cornwall is around 1,000, the history and geography of Cornwall means that one in three of the inhabitants of the county are touched by the industry.

## CUMBRIA Emergency Planning

Communities in Cumbria came together to share their approach to emergency planning in a conference organised by ACTion with communities in Cumbria (ACT) and Cumbria Council for Voluntary Service.

The event for the Cumbria Community Resilience Network - made up of agencies, councils and voluntary organisations working with communities on community resilience - was held at Stoneybeck, near Penrith.

The aim was to validate, celebrate, share and develop Community Emergency Planning across the county. More than half the conference delegates were representing communities who have developed or want to develop a community emergency plan.

The Network is a working group of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), the partnership of agencies who manage emergency responses across Cumbria.

The conference brought together 16 local communities who have been working on a Flood or Community Emergency Plan and offered an opportunity to liaise with statutory partners on next steps. The Environment Agency assisted Stockdalewath community to film their activities and this was premiered at the conference.

The Network informs the LRF about community activity and reflects on community preparedness for emergencies such as severe weather, loss of power or other major incidents. The plans are predominantly community led and communities are assisted in their activities by all the partners from the network at various stages of their development.

### What was achieved?

- 100 Cumbrian residents came together to consider community responses and preparedness to emergencies.
- The Conference celebrated the involvement of 33 communities in emergency planning.
- Six Community Emergency Plans were peer-reviewed against a scenario and validated.
- Eight Police Community Support Officers learned more about how they can support Community Emergency planning.
- New Guidance has been developed for smaller communities wanting to write their own plan, together with a 10-step Community Emergency Planning toolkit.
- The LRF Chair praised the commitment of communities involved in Emergency Planning and strongly recommended all agencies to be aware of their work.

## OUR NETWORK

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## DEVON Community Right to Bid

Devon Communities Together has been supporting the people of Harpford to return their village hall to community use.

The Diocese of Exeter, owners of the building, took back control four years ago and following protracted discussions with the Parish Council decided to sell the hall on the open market.

The Harpford community started a strong campaign against the sale and contacted Devon Communities Together for support.

### This support included:

- Establishing a formal organisational / governance structure for the group.
- Accessing specialist advice from ACRE's legal adviser.
- Registering the hall as an 'Asset of Community Value' under the provisions of the Localism Act.
- Linking Harpford to other communities that had property dealings with the Diocese of Exeter.
- Supporting the group in their negotiations with the Diocese

- Fundraising to purchase the building.

As a result, the hall was taken off the market and a meeting was secured with the Diocese and their advisers.

The Diocese agreed to sell the hall to the community group at a mutually agreeable price and the villagers are now planning to relaunch the hall as a hub for activities and services in their community.

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## DURHAM Food Partnership

Durham Community Action provides leadership and development for the Durham Local Food Partnership, a countywide, multi-sector partnership which has been developing over two years.

It covers interests ranging from community/grassroots to strategic, with the aim to promote "healthier, greener, fairer food".

Activity so far has concentrated on policy development, action, influencing, networking and collaboration. The Partnership has also researched a model for developing efficiencies in the local food supply chain (business to business) and potential for new social enterprises. Its key achievements to date include:

- The production of a Local Food Strategy for County Durham and the launch of the Food Partnership.
- Feasibility study into the development of a local food hub (single point of distribution, training facility and business support) as a social enterprise.
- Public sector and university catering procurement, collaborating and working with local farmers to contract for local food in sustainable quantity and quality.
- Growing Durham: helping communities to set up new growing projects. This has multiple benefits including mental and physical health, community cohesion and learning new skills, and the potential to provide a supply of affordable, free, fresh food in disadvantaged communities.

The partnership board draws in Public Health, economic development, Visit County Durham, Durham University, the voluntary sector, farming interests and community growing activists.





## ESSEX LAG

A major priority for the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) in 2014/15 was to secure greater coverage of EU LEADER funding in rural Essex.

Previously, only a small part of north west Essex had been able to access this funding. Through its management of the Essex Rural Partnership, RCCE was instrumental in bringing partners together to encourage the creation of a number of new Local Action Groups (LAGs), either wholly or partly in Essex.

RCCE was appointed lead partner for the Essex Rivers Local Action Group, which is exclusively based in the county, and covers an area stretching from the River Colne in the north to the Thames Estuary in the south.

It embraces a significant portion of Essex's 350 miles of coastline. The Essex Rivers bid was successful in securing £1.8 million of LEADER funding, which will be used to support the development and diversification of rural small businesses.

Three other LAGs covering parts of the county – Eastern Plateau, Heritage Coast and Wool Towns – were also successful. RCCE continues to promote collaboration between all of these LAGs, in order to maximise opportunities for the rural economy.

## HERTFORDSHIRE Scoots

The Scoots Wheels to Work project, managed by Community Development Action Hertfordshire, helps young people to travel to work, college or training.

Funded by Hertfordshire County Council under the Big Herts Big Ideas programme, it provides clients with a new scooter or motorcycle, 12 months insurance, tax, servicing, breakdown recovery and CBT training.

The package, which starts from only £35 per week, also includes a helmet, gloves, jacket, lock and waterproof trousers.

Client Nathan Pinder explained how Scoots has helped him. "I first heard about the project in my village news magazine and was impressed with the affordability of the project," he said.

Nathan is able to pay for the project as he is currently employed as a sports apprentice at a local school, teaching a varied range of sports. "I really love my job as I feel I am making a real difference to the children I work with. One little girl told me that she never enjoyed PE lessons until I started teaching her, which makes me feel really good," he said.

Nathan explained how his love for motorcycles came from his



father who sadly passed away in 2011. "My dad was always riding and working on bikes, which is where my passion came from," he said.

Scoots has been really impressed by Nathan's maturity and work ethic and is pleased to support him in his early career development as a teacher.

## KENT Social Enterprise

A social enterprise that helps long-term unemployed people to develop new skills has been created with the assistance of Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK).

Growth Rings Community interest Company (CiC), based on the Romney Marsh, is a timber products enterprise, building furniture, planters, staircases and even flooring for yachts - including work at a dry-dock in Pisa, Italy. Waste wood is processed by the workers in to barbeque briquettes.

ARCK is funded one-day per-week, by the Department for Work &

Pensions, to help develop new skills for long-term unemployed people, including ex-offenders; this augments the charity's existing role around governance and networking for the CiC.

In 2014/15, more than 80 people were trained in new skills through Growth Rings CiC, while eight progressed in to new employment.



# NORFOLK

Community Action Norfolk has engaged for a number of years with Norfolk County Council around rural proofing budget cuts.

Importantly, over the years, this process has improved from no rural proofing to Norfolk County Council this year using a Community Action Norfolk model to co-produce a rural impact assessment.

This is a significant example of long-term strategic engagement helping to shift partner thinking.

Community Action Norfolk's model focuses on identifying whether any cuts are likely to have a disproportionate effect on rural areas and whether that effect is significantly negative.

**Feedback has been very positive with the county council looking to repeat the exercise and the process has been followed up with learning sessions with commissioning groups**



In the first stage, Community Action Norfolk identified proposals that may have a disproportionate impact on rural areas. Follow-up work was then undertaken by Norfolk County Council to gather key evidence.

Based on this, a rural impact assessment document was produced including a set of mitigating actions. This document was agreed between Community Action Norfolk and the county council. This was then submitted alongside other impact assessments as part of the elected members' decision-making process.

Feedback has been very positive with the county council looking to repeat the exercise and the process has been followed up with learning sessions with commissioning groups.

# NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Northamptonshire ACRE is running a four-year Rural Wellbeing Service, thanks to a successful bid to the Big Lottery Fund.

The project tackles issues of social isolation and loneliness in older people across the county, while fostering community spirit to provide this support. As a result, residents feel more secure and cared for, and remain independent in their own homes for longer.

The service sees a mobile unit visiting villages two days per week, 40 weeks per year, to provide an advice and signposting service assisting local older people and their carers to manage their health, finances and home, while also helping with issues such as loneliness and isolation.

Alongside this a network of volunteer 'Good Neighbours' are being recruited. They will be responsible for a cluster of villages and will continue the delivery of advice and support to older people within their community. They will make visits, help develop new clubs and activities where a need is identified



and liaise with appropriate agencies for referrals.

Support for this project has been incredibly high from all parts of the county and a number of partnerships have been developed, including with Clinical Commissioning Groups. Villages are working with Northamptonshire ACRE to recruit Good Neighbours and plan for visits by the unit.

# NORTHUMBERLAND

The Warm Hub scheme is a new initiative to be run by the community for the community and is supported by Community Action Northumberland (CAN).

It aims to provide vulnerable people living in rural areas with a safe, warm place in their community where they can regularly receive a hot meal, a social activity and access services normally limited due to the isolation of their location.



CAN worked with Crookham Village Hall volunteers on a one-off Warm Hub event as part of a feasibility study funded by Northern Gas Networks. Crookham has an ageing population, is located in the north of the county and has limited transport links and no services.

Twenty-four residents from the local parish were invited to take part in a lunch provided by local volunteers. The event was also attended by 20 service providers including NCC, Healthwatch, Age UK and CAB. Residents and service providers completed feedback forms which will be used as evidence of need when CAN makes an application for funding in the next few months. The event was a huge success and CAN hopes to roll out the Warm Hub scheme later this year across the whole of rural Northumberland.

# SHROPSHIRE The Pheasant at Neenton

As well as rescuing their local pub, a group of South Shropshire villagers have put their community on the map as a thriving visitor destination and brought economic regeneration to the area.

Staff from two ACRE members, Community First Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire Rural Community Council supported the group with market research, their legal model, community share ownership, identifying funding for refurbishment, and developing ideas for diversifying income.

The Pheasant at Neenton, near Bridgnorth, reopened in November 2014 as a community-owned social hub and stylish country inn serving good food, and providing tourist accommodation and local employment.

After The Pheasant Inn closed following

**As well as a bar, restaurant and guest bedrooms the pub has built an extension that serves as a community room for village meetings and group activities**

flood damage, the pub was bought in 2012, by Neenton Community Society. The village of 150 people had no other public meeting place – no school, village hall or shop – and villagers were determined to save it by taking it on themselves and turning it into a community-owned asset. As well as a bar, restaurant and guest bedrooms, the pub has built an extension that serves as a community room for village meetings and group activities.



Two-thirds of the £750,000 refurbishment costs were paid for by a small housing development in collaboration with South Shropshire Housing Association, supplemented with grants and business loans. The society sought advice from consultants specialising in how to make pubs profitable and has appointed managers to run the business.

The group was also able to access a loan from the ACRE-managed Defra Rural Community Buildings Loan Fund, with the support of Community First, Herefordshire & Worcestershire.

# SUSSEX community buildings

Action in Rural Sussex (AirS) developed and delivered ten free training sessions for volunteer trustees running community buildings across the two counties of East and West Sussex in 2014, thanks to a grant from Awards for All.

The need for this training was apparent from enquiries to AirS Community Buildings Service, which revealed that local, affordable events were required to reach volunteers and halls that most needed help.

Four different themes were covered by the training, which attracted 111 people from 77 halls and parish councils who booked 207 places; some booked a course of two, three or four different events:

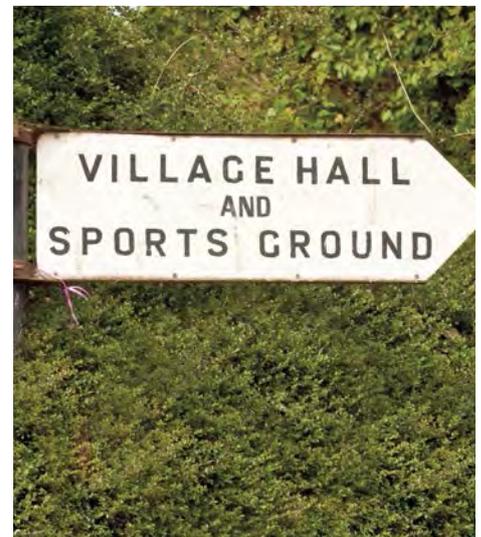
Topics covered included financial management, legislation, governance (including relationships with parish councils) and a networking event for employed managers of larger halls.

The benefits will be long term: these trustees are better able to manage their

halls in rapidly changing times, better able to maintain financial sustainability, have better understanding of their legal responsibilities, are better able to recruit trustees and engage others to tackle local problems. Key ACRE and AirS Village Hall publications were distributed.

More halls now subscribe to AirS Community Buildings Service and are aware of the support available. There was a realisation that practices have to change: “Discussions fired me to get things moving – the budget in particular,” said one attendee.

With strong demand for further events, 40 volunteers were subsequently enthused by workshops about marketing and social media, sponsored by Hallmaster and Norris and Fisher insurers.



## OUR NETWORK



## WILTSHIRE minibus help

Ten community minibus groups in Wiltshire and Swindon are each getting a brand new minibus thanks to the Department for Transport and Community First.

The Community Transport Minibus Fund was set up to help rural community minibus groups provide essential transport services for older people, those with disabilities and for those without access to public transport.

The successful groups were supported in their applications by Community First's community transport team, who compiled written guidance on applying for the fund and provided a sample application form with notes on completing each section.

James Scott Clarke, Chair of Tisbus, said their new bus would be a real boost for people in the Tisbury area. "Our charitable work provides a door-to-door service to shops, hospitals, community activities and GP surgeries for people who might otherwise be isolated or trapped in their own homes due to lack of public transport or mobility issues.

"A brand new bus will allow us to increase our capacity on the days when we need more places or when our other buses need repairs. The new bus will also give us increased flexibility and will be more wheelchair-friendly, making journeys more pleasurable and accessible for some of our members.

"We are very grateful to Community First for their support with this – they have been very helpful in interpreting Department for Transport regulations and have done a good job for us."

***Our charitable work provides a door-to-door service to shops, hospitals, community activities and GP surgeries for people who might otherwise be isolated or trapped in their own homes due to lack of public transport or mobility issues***

## YORKSHIRE community friendly buildings

Village halls in Yorkshire are becoming community hubs to help combat loneliness and isolation for older people.

Rural Action Yorkshire, which provides specialist support to community buildings, ran a trial with seven halls to help them become community hubs, providing early social care interventions.

Activities were designed to help older residents stay fit and healthy, such as new exercise classes, ping pong club, digital inclusion training, luncheon clubs and book swaps. Almost 300 people benefited from the project, supported by 82 volunteers.

RAY Chief Officer Leah Swain said: "Local community halls are often the only venue for activities in villages, often run by a committee of volunteers who work tirelessly to maintain and to keep them open.

"When providing specialist support to such facilities, we became increasingly aware of the mismatch between the committees' focus and the needs of older and vulnerable residents.

"Understandably, committees concentrated on paying bills and maintaining buildings, but in so doing, often missed opportunities to develop appropriate activities to best meet the needs of older and vulnerable residents. This meant they were potentially missing out on income-generating activities to ensure the sustainability of community halls."

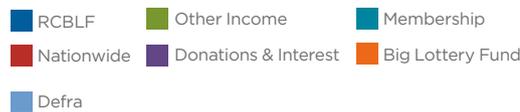
Following the success of the trial, the project is now supporting a further 30 hubs to develop new services for older people, which also includes support to make community buildings dementia friendly.



# Our finances

The charts on this page show ACRE's income and expenditure for the year ending March 31, 2015, and the corresponding five-year trends. Our full statement of accounts can be found at [www.acre.org.uk](http://www.acre.org.uk)

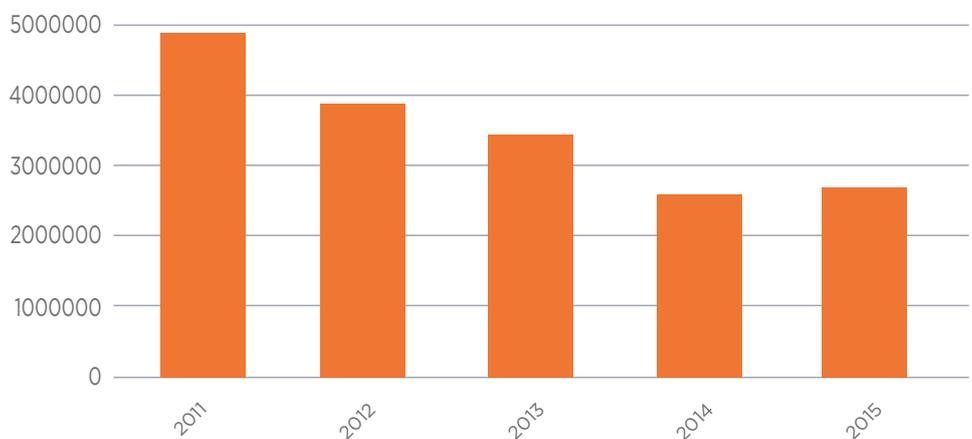
## Source of income



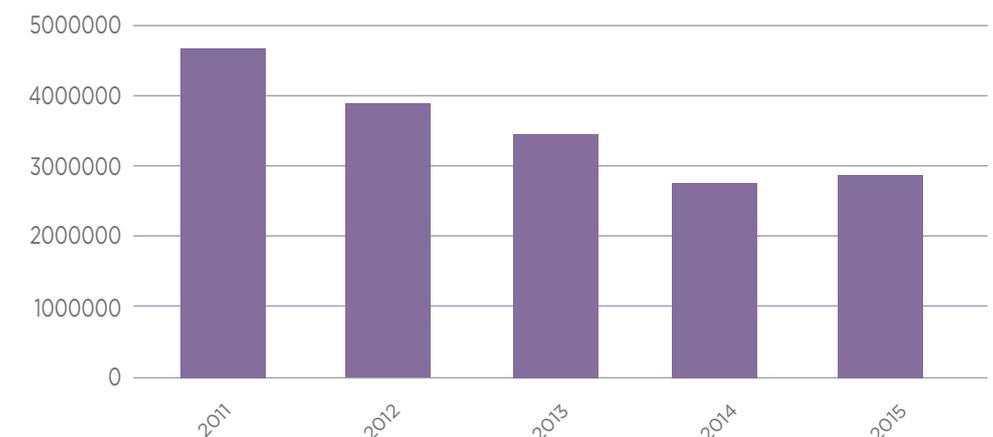
## Analysis of expenditure



## Five-Year trend



## Expenditure



# Our members

- Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
- Community Council for Berkshire
- Community Impact Bucks
- Cambridgeshire ACRE
- Cheshire Community Action
- Cornwall Rural Community Charity
- Action with Communities in Cumbria
- Rural Action Derbyshire
- Devon Communities Together
- Dorset Community Action
- Durham Community Action
- Rural Community Council of Essex
- Gloucestershire Rural Community Council
- Community Action Hampshire
- Community First in Herefordshire & Worcestershire
- Community Development Action Hertfordshire
- Humber & Wolds Rural Community Council
- Community Action Isle of Wight
- Action with Communities in Rural Kent
- Community Futures, Lancashire
- Rural Community Council (Leicestershire & Rutland)
- Community Lincs
- Community Action Norfolk
- Northamptonshire ACRE
- Community Action Northumberland
- Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire
- Oxfordshire Rural Community Council
- Shropshire Rural Community Council
- Community Council for Somerset
- Community Council of Staffordshire
- Community Action Suffolk
- Surrey Community Action
- Action in rural Sussex
- Tees Valley Rural Community Council
- Warwickshire Rural Community Council
- West of England Rural Network
- Community First, Wiltshire
- Rural Action Yorkshire

## With thanks to our sponsors and funders





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