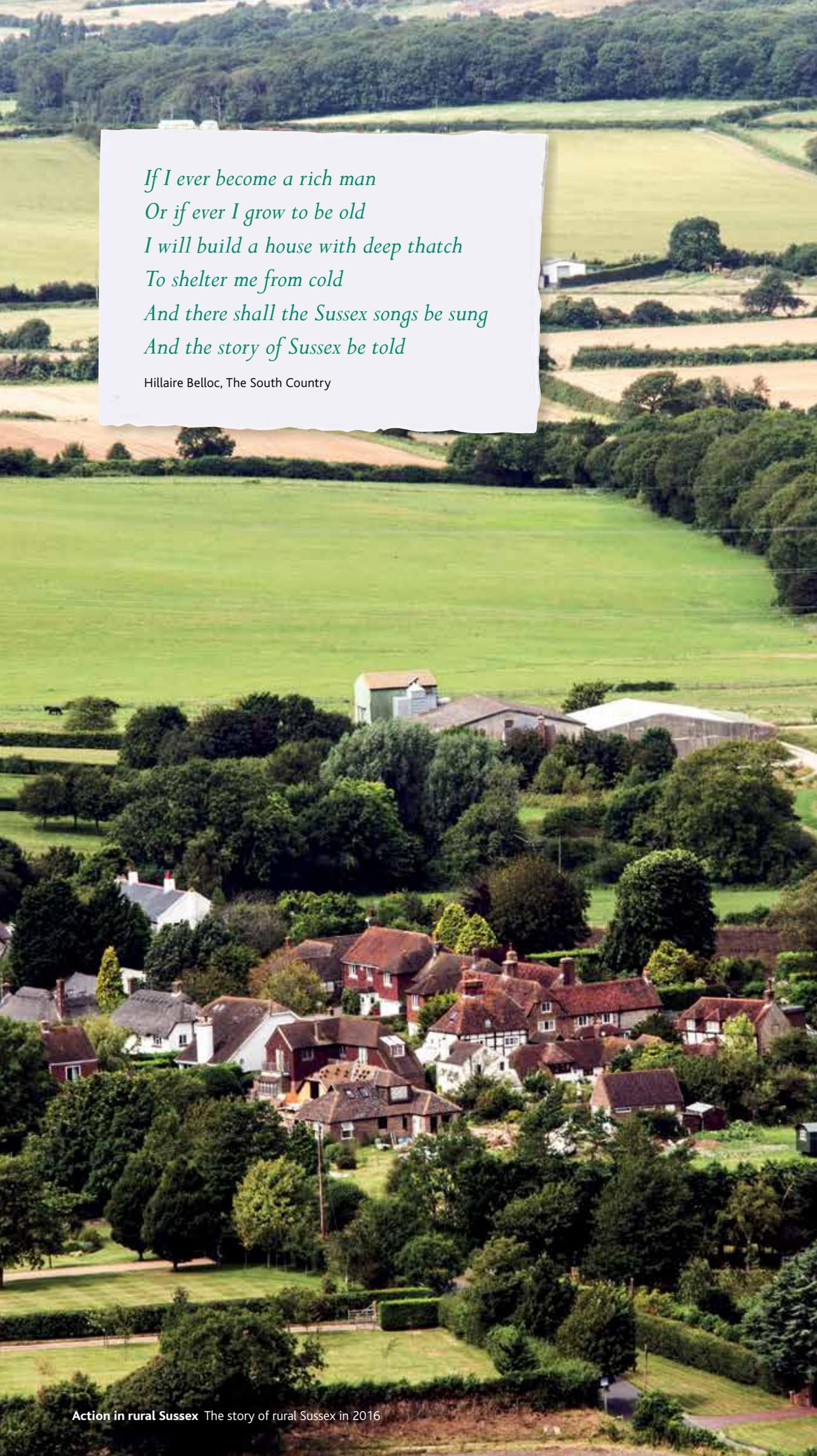


The logo consists of five stylized human figures in purple, blue, orange, yellow, and teal, arranged in a circle with their arms raised and hands touching.

Action in rural Sussex

The story of rural Sussex in 2016



An aerial photograph of a rural village in Sussex, England. The village is characterized by numerous houses with traditional thatched roofs, interspersed with lush green trees and fields. In the background, there are rolling hills and more open fields under a clear sky. A white text box is overlaid on the upper portion of the image, containing a poem and its author's name.

*If I ever become a rich man
Or if ever I grow to be old
I will build a house with deep thatch
To shelter me from cold
And there shall the Sussex songs be sung
And the story of Sussex be told*

Hillaire Belloc, The South Country



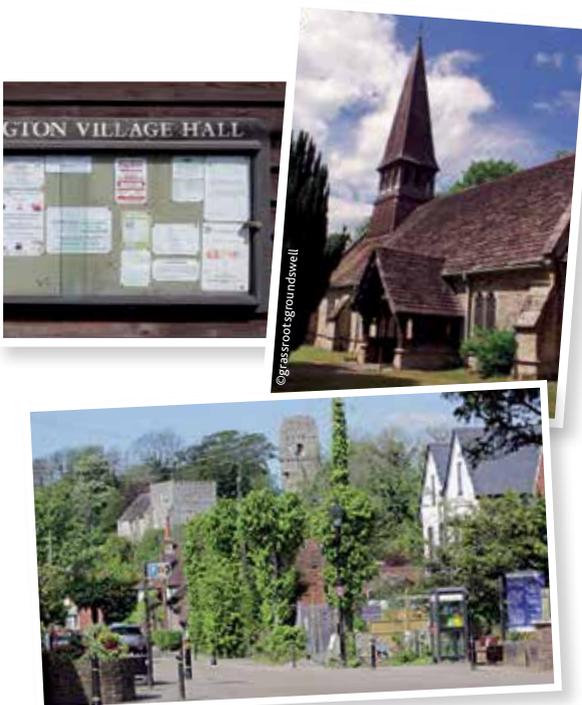
Annual Review 2015–2016

A hundred years ago the picture of a place could be painted in words, as Hillaire Belloc painted a picture of yearning for Sussex in his celebrated poem 'The South Country'. Today, beyond its extraordinary natural and man-made beauty, what do we see in rural Sussex; and is it true today that only people who are 'rich men' or 'grow(n) to be old' can live in Sussex?

Action in rural Sussex has a unique perspective on our rural communities. We have been their champion since 1931; and have, in essence, been Sussex's Rural Community Charity for all of that time. Now, in 2016, we are even more focused on finding ways to make life better for people who live in rural areas, and especially those for whom our beautiful countryside can be a mixed blessing. This is our portrait of rural Sussex and describes our contribution to making it a great place to live for all who live there, not just for those with the means to make doing so an easy choice.

How the population of rural Sussex is changing

Population structure of rural Sussex in 2001 and 2011



Disadvantage is concentrated in Sussex's urban areas, isn't it?



IN FACT: There are 12,670 financially disadvantaged people living in Hastings and Bognor Regis combined. There are 12,550 living in rural Sussex



Village Agents

Rural Sussex is getting older, but this is not just a consequence of us all living longer. In rural areas it is also a result of when people leave rural Sussex to find education or affordable housing and when they, like Belloc, move back. People leave our rural areas in their late teens or early twenties and others migrate into the county in their late forties. Of course this is not true of everyone who lives here, but the choice to stay and pursue both work and family life in rural Sussex becomes harder each year. The services that people need have tended, over many years, to become centralised in the larger towns.



Communities are finding many ways to fight back against the loss of services, and this often takes one of two forms. Rural communities protest when the railway station loses its manned ticket office, the pub closes (or becomes an expensive, out-of-reach, restaurant), the post office is downgraded, broadband stops before it gets halfway across the parish or the bus service is cut. Often they protest very effectively. However, they seldom challenge the assumption that their village's specific service must return an individual profit, rather than being part of a whole system that supports the wider community, urban and rural. After the protest has died down, Sussex's communities step up to the plate! A new village shop is started by a community group and a 'hidden subsidy' provided by voluntary time; the boarded-up pub is taken into community ownership; the post office re-opens in the Village Hall or in the pub. **It is not just that Sussex "will not be druv", it is also that Sussex will push back when someone tries.**



In an ageing community there are many challenges especially when public funding of social and health care is under pressure. One of the most important things to many of our Sussex villages is to ensure that a supportive and informal social fabric of life is retained and strengthened. This is probably the most effective way of ensuring that everyone has a good quality of life and that their health and general sense of wellbeing is maintained. Communities themselves are doing an enormous amount to help defer ill-health by keeping older people active and engaged.

Our Village Agents network

We have worked with villages over the last year to help consolidate and strengthen informal community life. We have very successfully piloted the introduction of Village Agents into clusters of villages in East Sussex. We have helped develop new solutions alongside these communities whilst also creating a link to the more formal caring services whose resources are becoming stretched. The initiatives that have been developed in this way range from community food projects to good neighbour schemes; from local volunteer hubs in larger villages to very informal village care schemes in smaller ones. **When the statutory sector cannot afford to deliver its own services in its own way in every village it can, at least, work through the Village Agents to stimulate the creation of local initiatives in each community in their own way.**



CASE STUDY

Danehill Village Hall

With a population of just under 2000, and a steady reduction in local services and increasing social isolation especially for older residents and young parents, the Danehill community, following a public meeting, decided that a new Café style coffee morning in the village hall was needed. AirS' Village Agent worked with a small group to help establish the cafe, providing practical advice on marketing, insurance, sharing the learning from other similar community ventures.

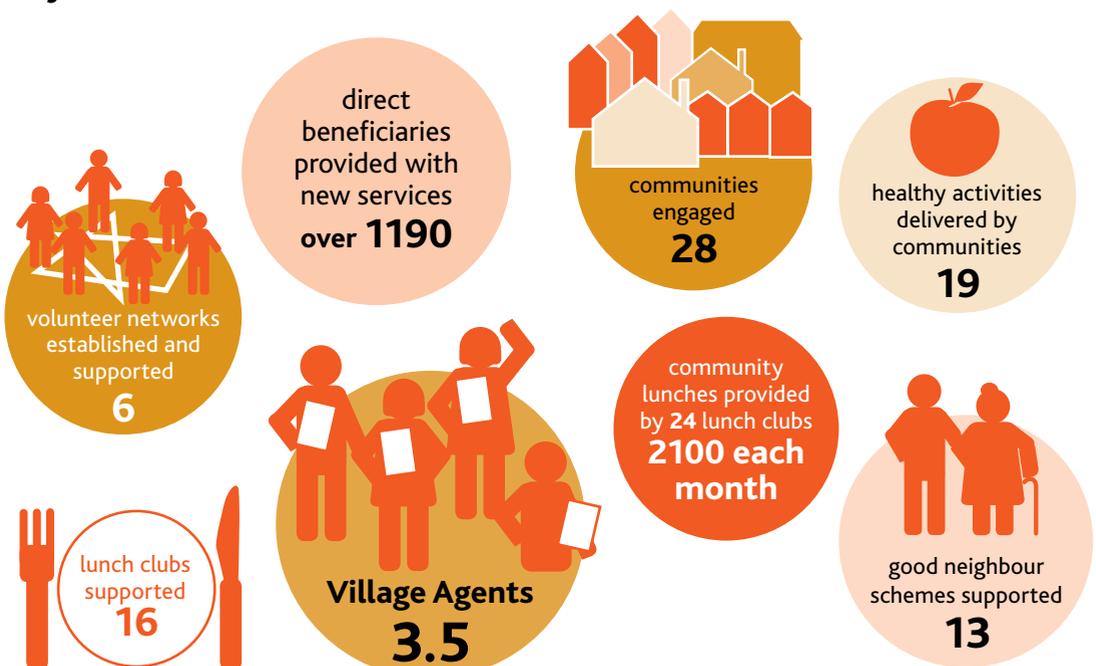
The Ashdown Café was opened in August 2015, run by six volunteers and with the Village Hall decked out with tables, chairs, coffee, home-made cakes, bunting, a children's play area for toddlers and with a warm welcome awaiting all.

It now has over 60 attendees each month and provides a unique opportunity for people of all ages to mix and engage with each other. There are some calls for it to be held weekly. The café is making good use of the village hall, increasing its income and use, and is making a difference to peoples' lives. Now new ideas, such as a befriending services, are being talked about as a direct result of the community café opening.



Thank you so much for coming this morning & for your invaluable input into our discussion. You were wonderful.

A year in numbers for our team:





Housing and the local economy

Much of rural Sussex has an outward air of great prosperity. Often this is prosperity that is derived from being close to London. The fact that wealth is coming into the county is good for our economy and brings opportunity for many, but it can also create serious economic pressure for others. Many people in essential local occupations cannot compete in a housing market that is strongly influenced by London and, as a result, find themselves torn away from places that they, and their families, would once have been a part.

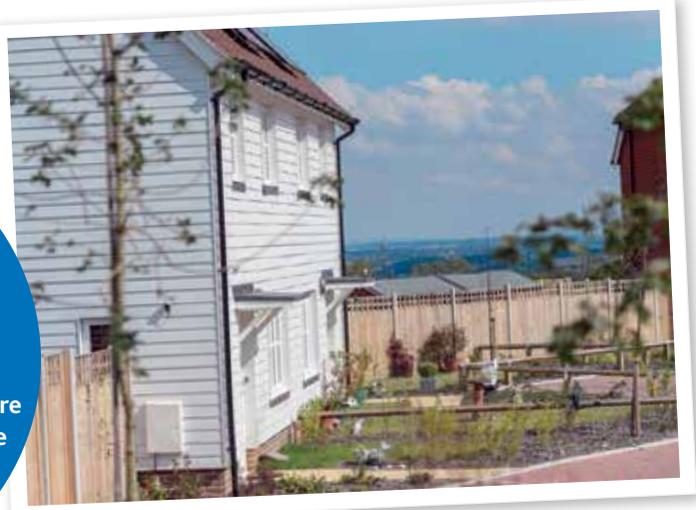
Greater prosperity also means that more people are able to use their car to get what they need without using local businesses. Those that need nearby services have seen them melt away from our rural villages and, now, even our small towns.

People who have come to Sussex later in life, rightly valuing our wonderful countryside and communities, now find that living in a village whose local services are disappearing is a cause of anxiety and isolation. Achieving a balance in the age range, background and involvement in the local economy is an important reason why we help communities to build affordable housing for local people.



Who can afford to live in rural Sussex?

In all of rural Sussex the least expensive 25% of housing costs more than 10 x the annual income of the lowest paid 25% of households. This compares to an England average of 7.5 x



Stunning views from these homes across the High Weald

Affordable housing and neighbourhood planning

We have found an increasing number of small rural communities, villages and even rural towns keen to take the initiative to build housing that can be afforded by the very people that need it if the local community is to thrive. Sussex has become a national 'hot-spot' for communities creating their own Neighbourhood Plan in order to ensure that the houses they need can be built. This is not without cost. The people in our village communities who take on this challenge should be congratulated as the work is intense and often attracts only criticism from a minority in their community. We have worked alongside many of these Neighbourhood Planning groups throughout Sussex, supported them along the way and helped them through very detailed engagement with their public. Once the plan is completed we are there, by their side, using mechanisms such as Community Land Trusts to help them achieve the affordable housing that they want. **The energy and enthusiasm to find the right solution for their communities gives grounds for great optimism for the future of many of our communities.**



CASE STUDY

Staplecross (Ewhurst Parish)

The Airs Rural Housing Enabling service works in partnership with Rother District Council and Hastoe housing association to provide local needs housing in the rural parts of the district. This Rural Homes for Rother Project has enabled the delivery of three new local needs housing schemes in the past couple of years which have proven to be a real success; enabling local people to remain in their communities and helping to keep them as well balanced and thriving places.

Eight homes for rent and shared ownership were completed in summer 2014.

The scheme opening was attended by a number of other Rother Parish Councils including Marion Roberts of Guestling who said:

"Residents of the scheme seemed very pleased with their new homes in such fantastic location. The Parish Council have also been very pleased with the outcome."

All in all the Parish Council got an awful lot of work undertaken by AirS and RDC for the benefit of Ewhurst residents.

David Young, Chairman of Ewhurst PC.

I found the whole thing very enlightening and was impressed by the designs of the houses, all being different, the spacious gardens and the incredible sustainability being built to Level 4 (Code for Sustainable homes)





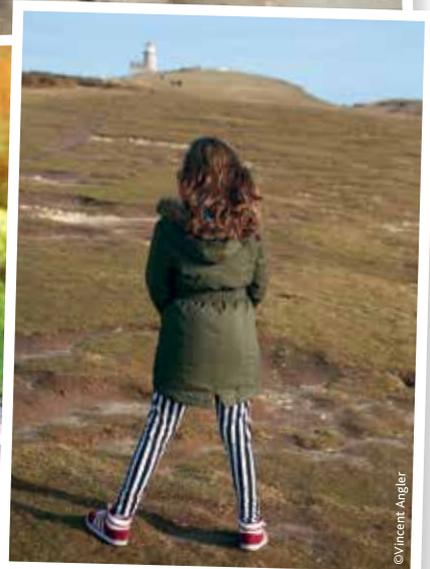
Young people and families

Young people growing up in our rural areas will not be able to reach many of the things that are taken for granted by urban young people. They are either much harder to access or not there at all. Rural young people cannot attend the after-school club if they have to be on the school bus at 3.30; they cannot use the internet for their homework if there is none; their parents may not afford an up to date computer and there will not be a local alternative for them. Young people must rely heavily on their family to get around. Perhaps most importantly, rural young people often make their 'post-16 educational decisions' based on where they can get to on limited public transport, not on the opportunities they are capable of pursuing.

Despite all of this the aspiration for many families is to bring up their children in a Sussex village and enjoy all the benefits of a small, close-knit, rural school. Whilst this is the ideal, there are still considerable pressures on families in rural Sussex and these can be as great and as complex as anywhere in the country. Rural families, however, do not have access to the help that might be at hand in a large town or city. The divorce rate is as great as anywhere else in the UK, but Sussex's rural children can become isolated and short of options that would help them to cope if their parents split up.

Supporting rural families

We have found small rural schools are alive to the needs of their young people and keen to make use of services that can support them. Many in East Sussex have bought into our COPES service that provides active, family based, support to rural families and helps them to find a way through difficult times. **There is an immense hidden need in rural Sussex for support to aid the emotional well-being of young people.** But there are limits to what schools are able to cover from their budgets and other services often only kick-in when problems have become very severe and also very intractable.



© Vincent Angler

CASE STUDY

COPES

Selena is 10 years old. She was referred to COPES by her school due to hearing a malevolent voice criticizing and swearing at her, telling her to harm and kill herself and that bad things would happen to her family. She was becoming increasingly reluctant to go to school in the mornings and was having difficulty separating from mum. She was not enjoying school, was unhappy and withdrawn, and was not engaging in class or with family life. She was suffering with disturbed sleep and poor self-esteem and did not meet the criteria for intervention from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Our family outreach worker agreed with the family and the school that we would: explore the voice and find ways to handle anxiety, increase Selena's self esteem and help equip Selena with relaxation techniques.

1. The COPES worker used a range of creative therapeutic techniques such as sand play, potion making, therapeutic board games and stories. Each session began with solution-focussed scaling questions to pinpoint any change, and ended with 5 minute guided relaxations.
2. Mum was supported to introduce this practice at home as part of the bedtime routine.
3. Selena used clay to make a physical model of 'the voice' and was able to challenge it verbally before re-modelling the image, transforming it then destroying it.

As a result Selena's confidence improved and her own voice became louder and clearer and she reported that she was no longer hearing the voice daily and the visual hallucination was shrinking. Selena felt good about her achievements and her family noticed a change in her behaviour: she was smiling and chatting more and engaging in family life. She was sleeping better – mostly in her own bed – and getting in to school improved considerably.

An extra outcome: during the sessions it became apparent that Selena had been struggling to keep up with school work. She had been assessed as *mildly* dyslexic in year 3 and found extended writing challenging. Selena's mother and the COPES worker raised the issues with the school SENCO and Selena was retested for dyslexia in year 6. She was assessed as being in the severely dyslexic range, leading to additional learning support in school.

Selena is looking forward to starting secondary school in the autumn but is feeling anxious nonetheless. Although she has made great progress, the voice can get louder at times of stress. COPES helped Selena to develop a more assertive relationship with her critical inner voice and gave her and her family some strategies to challenge it.





Neighbourhood Plans

CASE STUDY

Nuthurst Neighbourhood Plan

The Parish Council appointed Action in Rural Sussex as consultants to assist and advise. AirS supervised governance of steering and focus groups, managed surveys (general and housing needs), drafted a state of the parish report and ran stakeholder consultations.

Preparing the plan brought the community together and engendered a community spirit to protect the rural parish from undesirable speculative development. This was achieved by involving the community throughout the process. The result was a large turn-out for the referendum and a massive 'Yes' vote with 86.6% in favour with a nearly 50% turn out.

The modest amount of development, eight small sites spread throughout the parish, will help to rejuvenate the individual settlements in the parish and maintain and protect services.

The plan has created eight local green spaces on which development is not permitted. The conditions attached to the development proposals seek to protect the environment by maintaining and enhancing screens of trees and bushes and requiring mitigation of flooding. At two of the development sites, ponds and surrounding areas are accorded protection by making them nature reserves for the benefit of the local community.



We supported **23** Neighbourhood Plans during the year and have helped take **10** through to referendum ready for adoption.



Getting involved

Overall, community life in rural Sussex is still very much in evidence but the demands being placed upon it are considerable!

Communities are already taking the initiative with Neighbourhood Planning, emergency preparations to protect the most vulnerable, running and maintaining the village's own assets such as its Village Hall, setting up car schemes, building affordable housing or running community shops.

Probably the greatest challenge of all is to widen the number of willing hands within each village and to ensure that the whole community is involved, including those who often do not engage or are hardest to reach. Our job is to provide help, advice and practical assistance that will make Sussex's rural communities more resilient and better able to support their own.

Trustees

Chantal Wilson (Chair)
Roger Paterson (Vice Chairman)
Andrew Colquhoun (Honorary Treasurer)
Alex Ingham Clark
Graham Peters
Rupert Simmons

List of funders in 2015/16

Arun District Council
Coast to Capital LEP
DEFRA
East Sussex Community Voice (Healthwatch)
East Sussex County Council
East Sussex Energy Partnership
Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council
Horsham District Council
Lewes District Council
Nesta
Parish and Town Councils
Rother District Council
South Downs National Park
Tudor Trust / National Community Land Trust Network
UK Power Networks
Wealden District Council
West Sussex County Council
Public Health

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Action in rural Sussex

Our aim is a rural Sussex that is thriving, economically active and full of choice and opportunities for everyone, regardless of their circumstances

We support and empower people in rural Sussex to maintain vibrant and diverse communities through advice, services and practical support, we champion their interests at a local, regional and national level, and we help those most disadvantaged by their rurality.

Or, put another way, Action in rural Sussex:

- Provides advice and practical support to help people overcome the challenges caused by their rural location
- Empowers communities across rural Sussex to address the issues that are vital to them, making them more resilient
- Champions the interests and needs of rural communities at a local, national and regional level

We are experts in rural issues, understanding the challenges and providing innovative solutions and practical support to address them.

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Chief Executive: J J Leggett

Action in rural Sussex is a member of the Rural Community Action Network

