

Essex Vital Signs

Vital Signs is a community philanthropy guide produced by Essex Community Foundation that measures the vitality of our community and identifies trends in a range of areas critical to quality of life. Vital Signs is supported by UK Community Foundations and the trademark is used with permission from Community Foundations of Canada, our partner and supporter in Vital Signs.



ESSEX

Vital Signs 2015

Rural Essex

Essex Community Foundation's Vital Signs 2015 takes the pulse of local communities and asks questions about how we can work together to help improve the lives of people in Essex.

Launched in October 2013, the first Vital Signs report shared statistical data and results from a community survey to provide a 360 degree view of what life is like measured against 12 key themes, including transport, work and safety. We aim to produce this comprehensive report every three years and, in the intervening years, focus on one or two issues in greater detail.

This, our 2015 report, focuses on one issue that is particularly relevant to our county: rural communities and the issues that affect the people who live in them.

In Essex, 72% of land is devoted to agriculture but only 25% of the total population lives within rural communities. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) rates seven of the 12 districts and two unitary

authorities that constitute greater Essex as predominantly or significantly rural. These are areas that consist of settlements below 10,000 people or are open countryside.¹

Geographically, Essex is the 11th largest county in England and has the seventh largest population at 1.7 million.² Essex is a great place to live and work, but where you live can have a big impact on your opportunities and quality of life. Vital Signs challenges perceptions of what life is like for the 25% of people living in rural areas, and explores how we can, together, respond to the most pressing rural needs.

To inform Vital Signs 2015, we conducted a community survey with Essex residents, asking them for their views on issues facing our county. This year we received 701 responses, 56% of which were from people who reported that they lived in a rural area.

We use Vital Signs to inform our grantmaking and help develop effective local philanthropy across Essex. We hope that this report will encourage conversation and debate about what can be done to address inequalities across the county.

¹ The 2011 Rural-Urban Classification for Output Areas in England.

² Census 2011 data.

Rural areas and an ageing population

According to the 2011 Census, there are 218,200 people aged 65 and over living in Essex, Southend and Thurrock. By 2031, the number of people aged over 85 who are living in Essex will more than double, from about 31,000 to 77,000,³ while nationally, over 50% of the rural population is aged 45 and above. These indicators demonstrate a real need for rural Essex to prepare for the growth of its ageing population.⁴

With age comes increasing health and social care needs. In Essex it is estimated that 90,500 people over 65 have social care needs. This is set to increase by a further 23% over the next five years, higher than the anticipated 19% increase for England as a whole.⁵

In 2013 Essex County Council established the *Who Will Care Commission*, which explored how health and social care could be provided in the future. The commission recommended five high impact solutions, one of which was to mobilise community resources, acknowledging that there will be “instances where a local approach and local understanding of grassroots needs can deliver best care, best support, best value, and greater independence for each of us.”⁶

Critical to meeting grassroots needs in rural areas are transport and access to services; factors confirmed by Essex residents in our Vital Signs community survey, where the top two rural priorities were improvements in the availability of transport and access to medical services.

Rural transport

Although public transport services run across Essex, 29% of our survey respondents expressed concern that the district in which they lived was not doing well with regard to ‘getting around’. Those most concerned are in the largely rural districts of Colchester, Braintree, Tendring, Uttlesford and Chelmsford.

Essex County Council is responsible for 5,100 miles of road and 3,688 miles of footpaths but residents do not rely on Government supported transport alone.

Around 85% of Essex bus services are provided through commercial operators.⁷ Of concern is that satisfaction rates for Essex bus users are just 83%, placing our county last when compared to authorities surveyed in the 2011 Census.⁸

“Our village has the ability and will to drive the solutions to local problems.”

Local resident



Uttlesford Community Travel



218,200 people aged 65 and over live in Essex, Southend and Thurrock

By 2031 the number of people aged over 85 years will double to **77,000**

How does Essex Community Foundation help?

Community transport systems run by voluntary sector organisations play an important role in rural areas. Examples include Dial a Ride, Social Car Schemes, Minibus services and Community Bus services. Together, they perform in excess of 600,000 passenger journeys each year, offering a lifeline to many elderly and disadvantaged people in Essex.

Uttlesford Community Travel is a lifeline for many elderly and vulnerable people, providing much needed transport to hospital, doctors, shops and social groups. A grant from ECF is helping to update their IT system so that they can improve and increase their services.

“Transport will suffer from current funding cuts and affordability.”

Local resident

3 Countywide Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, November 2013.

4 Statistical Digest of Rural England 2015, June edition, v2.

5 Countywide Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, November 2013.

6 Who Will Care? Five high-impact solutions to prevent a future crisis in health and social care in Essex. September 2013.

7 Essex County Council, 2015, *Getting Around in Essex: A bus and passenger transport strategy*.

8 Ibid.

Access to services

ECF awarded grants totalling £162,000 to rural village halls in 2015



Access to services is generally measured by distance between home and shops, chemist, library, petrol station or Post Office. Essex scores poorly in this area when compared to both the regional and national averages. The worst access to services is seen in the mainly rural districts of Braintree, Maldon, Tendring and Uttlesford.⁹

Lack of access affects all age groups. For younger people, research by the National Foundation for Educational Research shows, "the cost and availability of transport to access post-16 education, training and employment is a significant barrier for many young people in rural areas."¹⁰ For older people, lack of access to services can increase social isolation.

In September 2012 the Commission for Rural Communities published a report on social isolation¹¹ in which they forecast reductions in service delivery for rural areas, noting that in the future many communities will depend on the energy, enthusiasm and leadership qualities of local people. The report encouraged greater involvement with the voluntary and community sector to inspire volunteering and leadership.

This sentiment was echoed in our 2015 Vital Signs community survey, where the majority of respondents were upbeat about rural issues now, but 42% of respondents felt that rural issues were going to get worse.



Toppesfield Community Shop

Our survey says...

In our survey, we asked Essex residents to:

Rate their district in terms of their ability to get around – considering things like public transport, taxi services, community transport and footpaths.

71% felt their district was making progress, whilst
29% were concerned.

Rate their district in terms of accessing key services – like cash, food, health, education, fuel, social activities and clubs.

78% felt their district was making progress, whilst
22% were concerned.

How does Essex Community Foundation help?

Residents in Toppesfield near Braintree have proved that people power can be very successful in making the wheels of the community go round. They not only built a new shop, after the last privately-owned one closed, saving their Post Office in the process, but they also bought the village pub to prevent it from shutting down. The most recent community enterprise is a micro-brewery next to the pub.

Grants from Essex Community Foundation have helped the villagers turn their vision into a reality and Toppesfield has become a shining example of what can be achieved in keeping the heart of a community beating.

"There is a trend for city people to move into rural properties and commute long distances, which pushes up prices of properties but they tend not to use village facilities, e.g. shops and pubs."

Local resident

⁹ Grant Thornton Place Analytics.

¹⁰ National Foundation for Educational Research, August 2011: *Young people's aspiration in rural areas*.

¹¹ Commission for Rural Communities, 2012: *Social isolation experienced by older people in rural communities*.

In summary

Since 1996 ECF has awarded grants totalling £26 million



Rural issues in Essex are important. With an ageing population, rural transport and access to services, especially in health and social care, are important factors in determining people's quality of life.

The role of the voluntary sector in mobilising communities to help provide these services is increasingly cited in reports and by residents as a critical element in meeting people's needs.

We want to use Vital Signs 2015 to help raise questions and initiate conversations about what we can do together to support people living in rural communities.

Questions such as:

How can we effectively respond to key issues now whilst planning for future needs?

How can we work together to inspire community philanthropy for the benefit of local people?

How can we target support to the local voluntary sector to help provide a greater range of services to rural communities?

Vital Signs is the starting point for a conversation with local communities and key stakeholders. In combining existing data with local opinion we have created a powerful platform from which we can use community knowledge to take action and discuss the issues and opportunities facing rural communities. There are real needs within Essex communities but also real opportunities. Vital Signs helps us to inspire community philanthropy and to match people, resources and needs to make a lasting difference.

If you would like to have a conversation about these or similar issues, please contact us; we would love to hear from you.

Our full report *Vital Issues* is available on our website.

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Survey methodology

ECF distributed an online survey in July 2015 to 2,459 local people who were encouraged to distribute it through their own networks. The survey was also sent to infrastructure organisations such as the Council for Voluntary Services, Rural Community Council of Essex and Essex Boys' and Girls' Clubs as well as the Diocese of Chelmsford. ECF made it available on our website and promoted it through social media. 701 responses were received. The method of distribution makes it difficult to determine an accurate response rate, but based on 2,459 original emails, 701 respondents would equate to a 28% response rate. Of the respondents, 56% reported that they lived in a rural area.



Rural village of Tillingham



Essex Community Foundation (ECF) is an independent charitable trust improving the quality of life of people in our community by investing and distributing funds on behalf of a wide range of donors. Created in 1996, ECF has distributed £26 million in grants and has built a pooled endowment fund valued at £32 million.



ECF is a member of UK Community Foundations which exists to promote, develop and support community foundations throughout the United Kingdom.

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