

## Vital Issues 2015

### Rural Essex:

### A community of two halves?



**Matching people,  
ideas, resources  
and needs**



## Executive Summary

Essex is a rural county with 72% of its land devoted to agricultural, and yet only 25.5% of the total population lives within these rural communities. Rural life is an idyll that many aspire too however, for some, behind the relative peace and tranquillity rural life can seem more like a form of social isolation. Access to, and availability of, transport, employment, affordable housing, and facilities can have a profound impact on the quality of life of local residents. This presents particular challenges for community planning. For example, how to provide cost effect transport systems across the county; how to organise public, private and community services so all residents have satisfactory levels of access; and how to ensure that the needs of the rural population receive sufficient attention from local public agencies when 75% of the county's population lives in urban areas.

There are also some clear challenges that need to be addressed within the rural areas themselves. The data summarised in this report shows that although Essex is generally an affluent county, where you live, whether or not you own a vehicle and your employment status can have a significant impact on your quality of life. At first glance this isn't very surprising and we would expect to find a similar set of circumstances in many other counties in England as well. What is surprising however is that in many ways rural Essex appears to becoming a community of two halves. Those that are employed with good income and access to their own transport and those who may be older, with health and social care needs and limited access to local services.

This report explores the demographics of rural communities and shows that income levels and educational levels can be higher in rural communities but also that lack of services and migration of younger people are having an impact. Much of the research that was reviewed in compiling Vital Signs 2015 held the common concern that housing, connectivity both virtual and physical; transport and changing demographics are the key issues facing rural communities. In Essex there are a growing number of older people living in rural communities and a 'net drain' of young, skilled, people who choose to leave the county. Yet there is evidence to suggest that if more local opportunities existed for school leavers and graduates then they would welcome the chance to stay, develop careers and raise families in rural Essex.

In our Vital Signs Community Survey we asked Essex residents for their top three priority areas, which were access to transport and medical services, affordable housing and improvements to broadband. There are clear efforts to address some of these issues. For example, The Superfast Essex Broadband Strategy<sup>1</sup> is part of the national Superfast Britain programme commissioned by the Government, which sees investment of £51 million to improve broadband coverage so that 95% of Essex has access to fibre broadband by 2019.

A distinctive nature of rural communities which is often not highlighted in national studies is the reliance on volunteers to sustain local community life and services, some of which may be routinely provided by statutory agencies in urban areas. Essex Community Foundation will use Vital Signs 2015 as a platform to launch a programme of grant funding to support rural communities over the coming year. We will work in partnership to support and empower local people who want to take action that best meets the needs of their community.

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1 Essex County Council [www.superfastessex.org/en-us/home.aspx](http://www.superfastessex.org/en-us/home.aspx)

## About this Report

### About Essex Community Foundation

Essex Community Foundation (ECF) is an independent charitable trust connecting community philanthropy with communities needs by investing and distributing funds on behalf of a wide range of donors to improve the quality of life for Essex people. Our mission is to inspire philanthropy and charitable giving – matching people, ideas, resources and needs, to make a lasting difference. Since inception in 1996 our donors have invested over £26 million of charitable funding in local voluntary and community organisations that are working across Essex, Southend and Thurrock making it a great place to live, work, learn and grow.

As one of the UK's leading, accredited community foundations we have the expertise and local knowledge to help individuals, families, companies and public agencies to support the local causes and charities they care about and make an impact through their giving. This places ECF in a distinctive position where we can act as a catalyst for change – able to facilitate and connect organisations and individuals across the county to tackle pressing needs with innovative and lasting solutions.

In 2013 Essex Community Foundation was one of the first UK community foundations to launch Vital Signs as an annual initiative that would underpin and develop our grantmaking and community philanthropy.

### About Vital Signs

Vital Signs is an international initiative originally conceived by The Toronto Community Foundation, Canada in 2001, “After a group of civic leaders came up with a new way to engage their community in understanding and monitoring the health and vitality of Toronto on an ongoing basis”<sup>2</sup>. Vital Signs is a community philanthropy tool, conducted by community foundations, that measures the vitality and aspirations of local communities, identifies significant trends and social priorities critical to quality of life. Vital Signs is designed to inform current and future community philanthropy.

There are 49 community foundations in Canada participating in Vital Signs and their activities are co-ordinated by Community Foundations of Canada. Internationally reports are published in Australia, Bosnia, Brazil, Ireland, New Zealand and the USA, which all follow the original Canadian model. In the UK the initiative has now been taken up by an increasing number of community foundations that appreciate the enormous value it offers to our work; 25% of foundations will publish 15 Vital Signs reports in the UK in 2015.

### What is Essex Vital Signs?

Essex Vital Signs brings together existing research from a variety of sources with the opinion and experience of people who live and work in the county.

Each year ECF publishes two reports. *Vital Issues* – this report – a substantive document which presents existing research and follows a more academic format. *Vital Issues* provides a sound basis from which to produce the easy to read, higher level, second report - *Vital Signs*.

In bringing together government statistics and the experience of local people *Vital Signs* attempts to act as a snapshot on life in Essex and as a discussion point and guide for ECF's key stakeholders by challenging myth and perception. The 2013 and 2014 Reports can be downloaded from the link below:

<http://www.essexcommunityfoundation.org.uk/impact/impact/vital-signs>

*Vital Signs* works on a three year cycle as follows: 2013 (year 1) a full report is produced including analysis and commentary on the 10 core and 2 additional themes (listed on page six). In the following two years, 2014 and 2015 (years 2 and 3), a 'mini report' is produced on one or two themes so that we can drill down and focus on particular areas. The full report will be produced again in 2016.

### **Essex Vital Signs 2015**

For 2015 the Foundation decided to focus on the issues and opportunities affecting rural communities. With 72% of land area in Essex devoted to agriculture<sup>3</sup> Essex is significantly rural in character. Often people refer to the one-dimensional and generally negative reputation the county has which is fuelled by the various tabloid stories of the 'Essex Girl' and 'Essex Man'. But those of us who live and work in Essex know that it is a richly diverse county of contrast - with urban and rural areas, and both great wealth and significant poverty. Essex has a population of 1.7 million across three authorities: Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock. Individuals from Essex are frequently included in the annual Sunday Times Rich List and yet the county also has the most deprived community in England and Wales: Jaywick in the Golf Green Ward, Tendring.

By focusing this report on rural Essex we are able to shine a spotlight on and challenge perceptions which affect 25.5% of the Essex population living in rural communities. In doing so, we are able to raise questions about how we can, together, respond to and prioritise the most pressing rural issues.

*Vital Signs* not only explores key issues and challenges, it also celebrates Essex's successes and achievements. It aims to provide a platform for building on the county's strengths as well as identifying areas for improvement. Essex is a great place to live and work, but as stated at the beginning of this report, where you reside and your social status can have a big impact on your opportunities and quality of life. Only by working together can we really make a difference to those people and groups in Essex where help is needed.

We are grateful to the support of the Rural Community Council of Essex for their help in developing this report.

## Methodology

This report is not based on new, primary research. Rather it brings together key statistics from existing data and other information that is publicly available about life in Essex and offers some interpretation of this information. We then combine this with the views and perspectives of local people. This approach is the internationally recognised model for producing Vital Signs.

Evidence from a variety of sources, investigations and reports has been used although we recognise our limitations in conducting an exhaustive literature review. References are provided throughout either as footnotes or endnotes and a full bibliography is included.

The core data currently used to produce Vital Signs by UK community foundations is generated through *Grant Thornton Place Analytics*. In Essex we have produced our report in accordance with the national *Vital Signs How to Guide* which was developed by a Steering Group of UK community foundations, of which ECF's deputy chief executive and author of this report is the co-chair.

From the Grant Thornton report, all participating UK community foundations use a set of nationally agreed indicators across 10 core themes thus providing a consistent approach across the UK. In addition each community foundation is able to select up to three extra themes which are relevant to their area. In Essex we have, since 2013, reported on rural and transport as additional themes.

To supplement the Grant Thornton Report, ECF conducted a literature review of existing data that was both relevant (looking at issues through a rural lens), and current (avoiding wherever possible data produced before 2011 as this would precede the most recent census data which was conducted in that year).

National Vital Signs Core Themes		Additional Themes for Essex
1. Arts, Culture & Heritage	6. Learning	11. Rural
2. Environment	7. Local Economy	12. Transport
3. Fairness	8. Safety	
4. Healthy Living	9. Strong Communities	
5. Housing & Homelessness	10. Work	

For each theme, up to three key indicators have been selected with each awarded a performance grade, based on the latest data sets available for the key indicators.

## What the Grades Mean

The grades reflect how Essex as a whole is doing relative to the rest of the UK. Based on quintiles, Grade A means Essex is in the top 20 per cent of the data set, Grade E in the bottom 20 per cent of the data set. The grades for Essex in 2015 are as follows:

Theme	Grade	Theme	Grade
Arts, Culture & Heritage	C	Learning	D
Environment	C	Local Economy	B
Fairness	C	Safety	C
Healthy Living	C	Strong communities	B
Housing & Homelessness	C	Work	D

Source: *Grant Thornton Place Analytics*.

## Community Survey

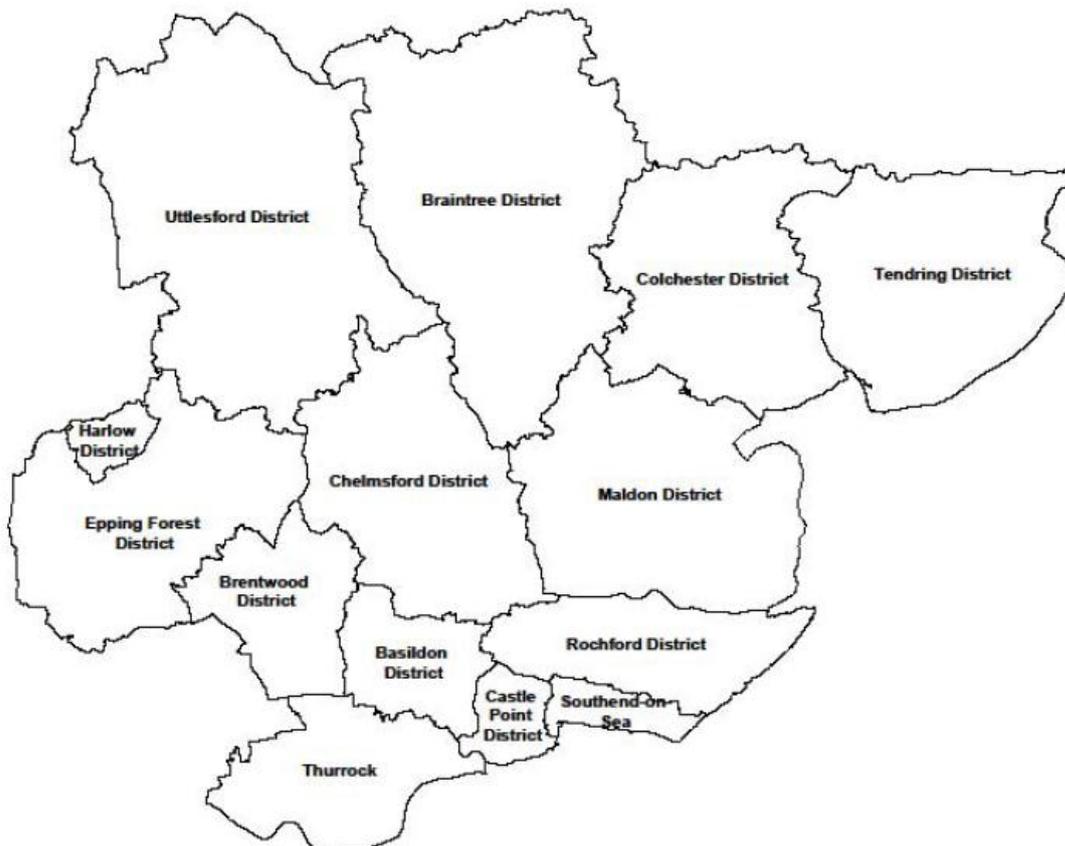
A key aspect distinguishing Vital Signs from other reports is the inclusion of the perspectives of the local people who live and work in Essex. ECF conducted an online survey using a mixture of closed ended and multiple choice questions and a limited number of open ended questions. The survey also sought demographic information, although this was not mandatory. Respondents were asked to grade aspects of their community using the following definitions.

Grade	Descriptor
A	Excellent. Our district is doing great.
B	Our district is doing well and headed in the right direction.
C	Our district is making progress.
D	Of concern. Our district needs to focus on this.
E	This is in dire need of corrective action.

The survey took place in July 2015. An email, which included the link to the online survey, was sent to 2,459 individuals who were also encouraged to distribute it through their own networks. The individuals were selected from ECF's database and were a mixture of grant applicants and donors. 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 their website and promoted it through social media. Seven hundred and one 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.

**Figure 1 - Districts in Essex<sup>4</sup>**



The administrative county of Essex - the area for which Essex County Council has responsibility - has 12 districts. In addition Essex has two unitary authorities, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock, all of which are shown above.

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4 <http://www.essexpartnershipportal.org/pages/uploads/JSNA/Full%20Essex%20Trends%202011.pdf>

## SECTION ONE - INTRODUCTION TO ESSEX

In 2013 the population of England was 53.9 million, of which 9.2 million (17.1%) lived in rural areas and 44.7 million (82.9%) lived in urban areas.<sup>5</sup> Rural areas make up 85% of the land area in England.<sup>6</sup>

As one of the UK's largest non-metropolitan counties<sup>7</sup> Essex has, including the unitary authorities of Southend and Thurrock a population of 1,724,800<sup>8</sup> with Colchester Town and Chelmsford City being the largest urban areas.<sup>9</sup> There are five substantial estuaries resulting in a coastline of 350 miles, the longest in England.<sup>10</sup> There is one county council, 11 district and borough councils, one city council, and two unitary authorities. There are also 282 parish and town councils predominantly although no longer exclusively serving the rural areas. As mentioned earlier, 72% of land in Essex is devoted to agriculture.<sup>11</sup>

In Essex, the proportion of people living in rural communities is 25.5%, higher than the national average of 17.1%. As the population continues to grow, the county will experience an increased strain on communities as they struggle to cope with a range of social issues but there will also be new opportunities.

Our Vital Signs survey shows that residents have concerns that access to services including transport is a key issue for local communities. The older population is growing at a faster rate than the rest of the population and future social and health care needs could be impacted by living in a rural community. Life in rural Essex for some could become increasingly difficult, isolating and untenable.

In this section we share information on population and demographic indicators and in Section Two and Three we address the key areas of employment, skills and qualifications followed by access to services.

### RURAL ESSEX

DEFRA, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, in its Classification of Local Authority Districts and Unitary Authorities in England, rates seven Essex districts - Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Colchester, Maldon, Tendring and Uttlesford - as predominantly or significantly rural.<sup>12</sup> DEFRA uses the Rural-Urban Classification for Output Areas which states that urban areas are the connected built up areas identified by Ordnance Survey mapping that have resident populations

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5 [DEFRA Statistical Digest of Rural England 2015](#)

6 [The 2011 Rural-Urban Classification for Output Areas in England](#)

7 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_two-tier\\_counties\\_of\\_England](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_two-tier_counties_of_England)

8 [Census 2011](#)

9 [Essex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment - Countywide Report 2013](#)

10 [Essex Rural Partnership 2020 Vision for Rural Essex](#)

11 [Essex Rural Partnership 2020 Vision for Rural Essex](#)

12 [Essex Rural Partnership 2020 Vision for Rural Essex](#)

above 10,000 people (2011 Census). Rural areas are those areas that are not urban and consist of settlements below 10,000 people or are open countryside.<sup>13</sup>

## POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Relative to other counties, Essex has the seventh largest population<sup>14</sup> including an above average percentage of older people.

In accordance with the above DEFRA classification Southend and Thurrock authorities are not classified as predominantly or significantly rural. When these areas are removed from the population figures the number of residents in the administrative county of Essex reduces to just less than 1.4 million.<sup>15</sup>

Population by District	2011 Total Population
Basildon	174,500
Braintree	147,100
Brentwood	73,600
Castle Point	88,000
Chelmsford	168,300
Colchester	173,100
Epping Forest	124,700
Harlow	81,900
Maldon	61,600
Rochford	83,300
Tendring	138,000
Uttlesford	79,400
<b>ESSEX TOTAL</b>	<b>1,393,500</b>
Southend-on-Sea	173,600
Thurrock	157,700
<b>Essex, Southend &amp; Thurrock</b>	<b>1,724,800</b>

*Source: Census 2011*

Basildon and Colchester districts have the largest population and Brentwood and Maldon districts the smallest. Chelmsford city and Colchester town are the biggest urban areas in Essex.<sup>16</sup>

## DEMOGRAPHICS

In comparison with the population of England, Essex has a similar proportion of children aged 0 to 15 year olds at 19%; but a higher ratio of people aged over 65 at 19%, compared to the national average of 17%. Harlow (2,707 people per km<sup>2</sup>), Castle Point (1,957) and Basildon (1,604) are the

13 [The 2011 Rural-Urban Classification for Output Areas in England](#)

14 [Office of National Statistics, mid-year estimate 2014](#)

15 [ACRE, OCSI, RCCE The Rural Economy in Essex 2013](#)

16 [Countywide Joint Strategic Needs Assessment November 2013](#)

most densely populated districts. Conversely, Braintree (243), Maldon (173) and Uttlesford (127), all classified as rural districts, are the least densely populated. High population density has often been cited as an indicator of pockets of high deprivation and poor housing,<sup>17</sup> but it is also the case that rural areas experience their own challenges.

The *2020 Vision for Rural Essex* produced by the Rural Essex Partnership suggests that, “Rural communities throughout Essex exude an air of prosperity even in difficult economic times but behind the façade there is evidence of deprivation which because it is widely spread can be hard to identify. The Index of Deprivation shows much of rural Essex within the most deprived 10% category with regard to access to services and housing”.<sup>18</sup>

One aspect of this deprivation concerns the older population. There are 218,200 people aged 65 and older living in Essex, Southend and Thurrock and 164,800 in the administrative county of Essex alone.<sup>19</sup> Across England there are proportionately more older people living in rural areas - over 50% of the population in rural areas aged 45 and above, compared with around 40% in urban areas.<sup>20</sup> As a nation, we are increasingly concerned about the future social and economic needs of older people, and with at least half of older people living in rural areas, this will affect rural planning for years to come.

The 2011 Census states that Essex is home to 181,300 residents from Black Minority Ethnic (BME) groups including Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller and other white. There are 116,600 residents from ethnic groups other than white and 64,700 from white minority groups. The BME groups make up 11% of Essex residents (9% in the Essex administrative area), which is a smaller percentage than the England average of 20%.<sup>21</sup>

## POPULATION GROWTH

According to the Office for National Statistics *Population and Estimates 2001 – 2037* report<sup>22</sup> the population of Essex is forecast to grow by 111,000 or 7.9% in the period between 2012 and 2022. Brentwood, Colchester, Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford districts are all projected to grow at a faster rate than the rest of Essex. Uttlesford, a rural district, is projected to grow at the fastest rate of 14.7% over the 10 year period to 2022 followed by Colchester, another rural district, at 11%. The retired population (women aged 60+ and men 65+) is projected to increase by 16,000 or 45% by 2022 in administrative Essex<sup>23</sup>.

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17 [Countywide Joint Strategic Needs Assessment November 2013](#)

18 [Essex Rural Partnership 2020 Vision for Rural Essex](#)

19 [Census 2011](#)

20 [Statistical Digest of Rural England 2015 June edition v2](#)

21 [Countywide Joint Strategic Needs Assessment November 2013](#)

22 [ONS 2014 Population Forecasts 2001-2037](#)

23 [ONS 2014 Population Forecasts 2001-2037](#)

By 2031, the numbers of people over 85 years in Essex will more than double, from about 31,000 to 77,000<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, our population is getting older, larger in number, and will be characterised by having more complex care needs.<sup>25</sup> The 2013 Who Will Care Commission explored this issue in great detail and identified five high impact solutions to the...“single largest challenge faced by the people of Essex since the 1960s – how will we care for ourselves and our communities right now and in the future?”<sup>26</sup> The Commission concluded that although Essex has some great examples of good health and social care practice with innovative solutions and joint working, communities are demanding earlier identification of need, seamless care and support, greater individual ownership of health and care and programmes of support that provide good value for money. Greater partnership between public sector agencies is becoming more evident through the work of the Essex Partnership Board, which oversees the county’s Public Service Reform programme<sup>27</sup> as well as through the work of Healthwatch Essex,<sup>28</sup> an independent charity that gathers and represents views about health and care services in the county.

Caring for a partner, family member or friend is becoming increasingly common with almost 10% of Essex residents providing informal care to relatives, friends or neighbours. Research suggests that the economic value of the contribution made by carers in Essex is £2.4 billion per year which is £45.4 million per week. Over half of the people providing unpaid care are aged over 50 and it is estimated that 90,500 people over 65 have social care needs in Essex, or 35% of that age group. 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.<sup>29</sup>

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24 [Countywide Joint Strategic Needs Assessment November 2013](#)

25&26 An independent Commission led by Sir Thomas Hughes-Hallett with Dr Paul Probert

[‘Who will care? Five high-impact solutions to prevent a future crisis in health and social care in Essex](#)

27 [www.essexpartnershipportal.org/content/about](http://www.essexpartnershipportal.org/content/about)

28 [www.healthwatchessex.org.uk](http://www.healthwatchessex.org.uk)

29 [Countywide Joint Strategic Needs Assessment November 2013](#)

## SECTION TWO - EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS

The current data on employment, skills and qualifications in Essex indicates there is no obvious disadvantage to living in rural as compared to urban areas. However, we suggest that underneath the data may be the emerging story of a rural community of two halves.

In this section we show that Essex rural communities' employment, qualification levels and income figures compare favourably with its urban centres. However, at the same time the rural areas have a much smaller absolute number of workers and several rural residents earn their income by commuting to work in the urban areas. Equally, the ratio of degree level qualifications in rural Essex is lower than that seen in the East of England region and across England as a whole.

The emerging story of a community of two halves refers to one section of rural Essex being well paid and highly qualified, compared to another section experiencing complex health and social care needs and difficulty in accessing local services. DEFRA highlighted this as a potential issue and asked whether there is, "a trend towards a concentration of highly skilled, highly paid jobs in cities, meaning that a great number of rural inhabitants commute to cities for these jobs but locally-earned income may be lower."<sup>30</sup> The DEFRA report suggests that more could be done to encourage small businesses to base themselves in rural areas to boost rural economies.

In this section we look specifically at how employment, skills and qualifications affects the rural community and in Section Three we turn to the role access to services plays in people's lives.

### EMPLOYMENT

In Essex, the percentage of people working in rural areas is consistent with that found in the region and across England as a whole. However, rural Essex has a higher self-employment rate and higher incomes than found in the county's urban areas.



Figure 2 source: *Essex Rural Economy 2013*

The employment rate showing the proportion of the population aged 16-74 who are economically active and in employment (based on Census 2011) in rural Essex is 67.1%, similar to rural areas across the East of England region at 67.7%, and England at 67.1%.<sup>31</sup>

Twenty-six percent of all employed people in Essex live in the rural communities, with the remaining 74% living in urban areas.<sup>32</sup> Full-time employment as a percentage of total employment in rural Essex is 69.5%. Part-time employment is defined as the proportion of the employed population who are

30 [DEFRA What Will Rural Communities Look Like in the Future 2015](#)

31 [Essex Rural Economy 2013](#)

32 [Essex Rural Economy 2013](#)

active in the labour force for less than 30 hours per week. Locally, of the total working population, the percentage of people working part-time is higher in rural areas than urban areas at 30.5% compared to 28.5% in urban areas.<sup>33</sup>

Considering 72% of land in Essex is devoted to agriculture, it may come as a surprise that only 2.4% of employed people in rural Essex work in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing. A report published by DEFRA in August 2015 suggests that:

“Whilst agriculture is not the largest sector in rural areas...it continues to be strategically important especially as agriculture is becoming more mechanised and efficient thanks to innovative technologies. Whilst advances in technology would likely increase productivity and food security, it could reduce people employed in this sector. It was noted that despite this, there are encouraging signs of spin-off companies capturing more of the value chain in rural areas.”<sup>34</sup>

The largest industry of employment in rural and urban areas in Essex is retail at 20.2% and 21.8% respectively, followed by Health and Social Work at 13.8% in rural areas and 15.9% in urban areas.<sup>35</sup> The largest occupational group in rural areas are Professionals.

Essex rural communities tend to fair slightly better when it comes to its income. Locally, the average weekly household income is higher in rural areas at £491 than in urban areas at £443. The county wide average weekly income is £456. Equally, average weekly income in rural Essex is higher than found in the region (£477) and rural England as a whole (£455).

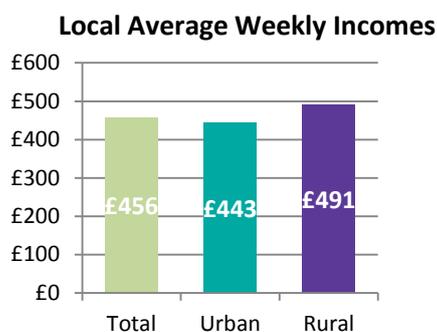


Figure 3 source: *Essex Rural Economy 2013*

### SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND WORKING FROM HOME

Turning to the area of self-employment, which in 2014 saw higher numbers than at any point over the past 40 years<sup>36</sup>, rates in Essex are slightly higher in rural areas at 14.3%, than that found in the East of England (13.3%) and across England (13.8%). Thirty-three percent of self-employed people in

33 [Essex Rural Economy 2013](#)

34 [DEFRA Aug 2015 What will rural communities look like in the future?](#)

35 Essex Rural Economy 2013

36 ONS Self Employed workers UK 2014

Essex live in rural areas, a higher ratio than the percentage of the total population living in rural areas, which is 25.5%.<sup>37</sup>

An important factor in enabling people to become self-employed and/or work at home is broadband connectivity. The need for improved broadband services was an issue highlighted by 34% of our survey respondents. The Superfast Essex Broadband Strategy<sup>38</sup> is part of the national Superfast Britain programme commissioned by the Government. In Essex, £51 million is being invested to improve broadband coverage so that 95% of Essex has access to fibre broadband by 2019. However, increasing broadband coverage to 95% will still leave around 86,240 people<sup>39</sup> with no or slow connection, which is more than the entire population of Uttlesford district at 79,400.

The percentage of people working from home is similar across rural areas in Essex at 5.5% and across the East of England at 5.6%. However, both ratios are lower than the England average at 6.3%.

Thirty-nine percent of people working from home in Essex live in rural areas and 61% in urban areas.<sup>40</sup> It will be of interest to note how these figures may change following the completion of the Superfast Essex Broadband Strategy.

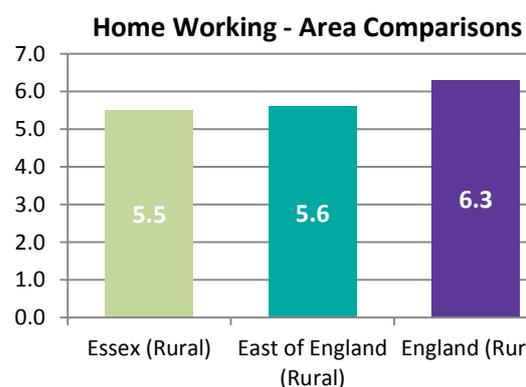


Figure 4 source: *Essex Rural Economy 2013*

## QUALIFICATIONS

Similar to average weekly income figures, qualification levels in rural Essex outperform the urban areas. However both underperform against the regional and national figures. This is worrying, as a highly skilled workforce is seen as one of the key drivers to a thriving economy. Matthew Hancock was the Minister for Enterprise and Skills in 2014 and said, "If this country is to have a vibrant and growing economy, it is vital that our education and skills system helps and encourages people to acquire new competences and abilities and to develop further those they have."<sup>41</sup>

Essex Vital Signs 2014 showed that Essex scored only 44 out of 100 based on three Vital Signs learning indicators, putting the county in the lower middle 20% of sub regions across England and Wales. In 2015, Essex fell slightly further to 39 out of 100 which, when applying the Vital Signs

37 Essex Rural Economy 2013

38 Essex County Council [www.superfastessex.org/en-us/home.aspx](http://www.superfastessex.org/en-us/home.aspx)

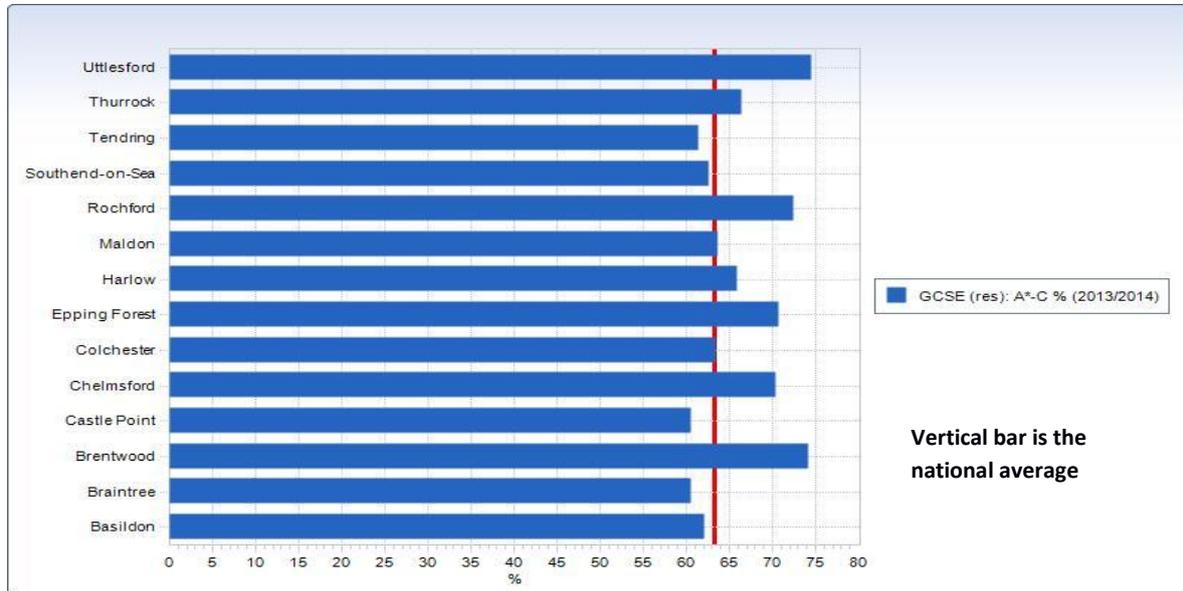
39 5% of total Essex population of 1,724,800

40 [Essex Rural Economy 2013](#)

41 Dept for Business Innovation & Skills (March 2014)

grading system means the county has moved from a C to a D. At district level, Braintree and Castle Point have the lowest percentage of students gaining 5+ GCSEs (A\*- C) at 60.6% and Uttlesford and Brentwood have the highest percentages at 74.4% and 74.2% respectively as shown below.

Figure 5: Essex GCSE Results by District: 2013/14



Source: Grant Thornton Place Analytics

Figures 6 and 7 show that the population of rural Essex has a higher percentage of qualifications than that found in urban areas in almost every category of qualifications. They have a higher percentage of people with professional qualifications at 16% than in the urban areas at 12.8%.<sup>42</sup> The percentage of people with degree level qualifications (levels 4 and 5) is also higher in rural areas at 26.3% than found in urban areas at 21.9%. Equally, there is a higher percentage of people in rural areas with apprenticeship qualifications at 7.1% compared with people in urban areas 6.3%.

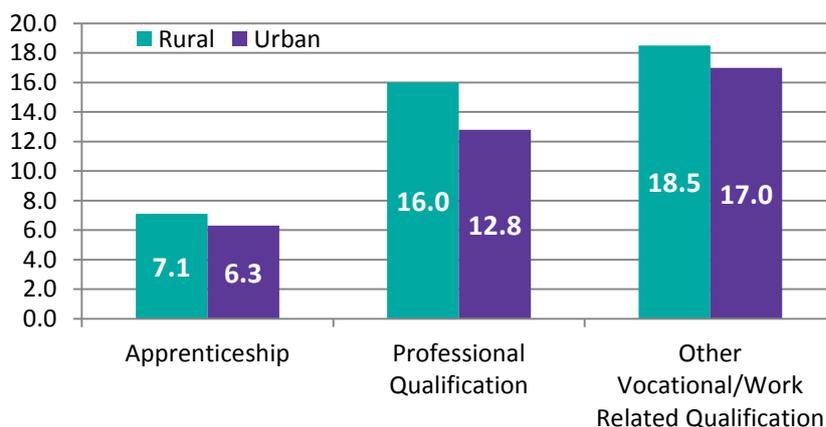
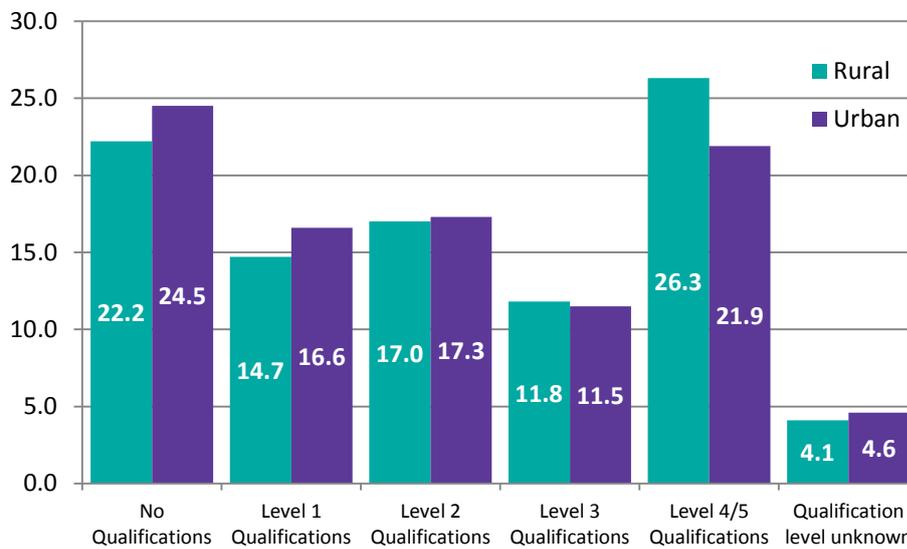


Figure 6: Percentage of qualifications by rural or urban category

Source: Essex Rural Economy 2013

At the other side of the spectrum, the percentage of people in Essex with no qualifications is higher in urban areas at 24.5% than rural areas at 22.2%. The rural figure is similar to what is found in the region (22%) but slightly higher than the average found across rural England at 21%.<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 7: Qualification levels in rural and urban Essex**

Source: Essex Rural Economy 2013

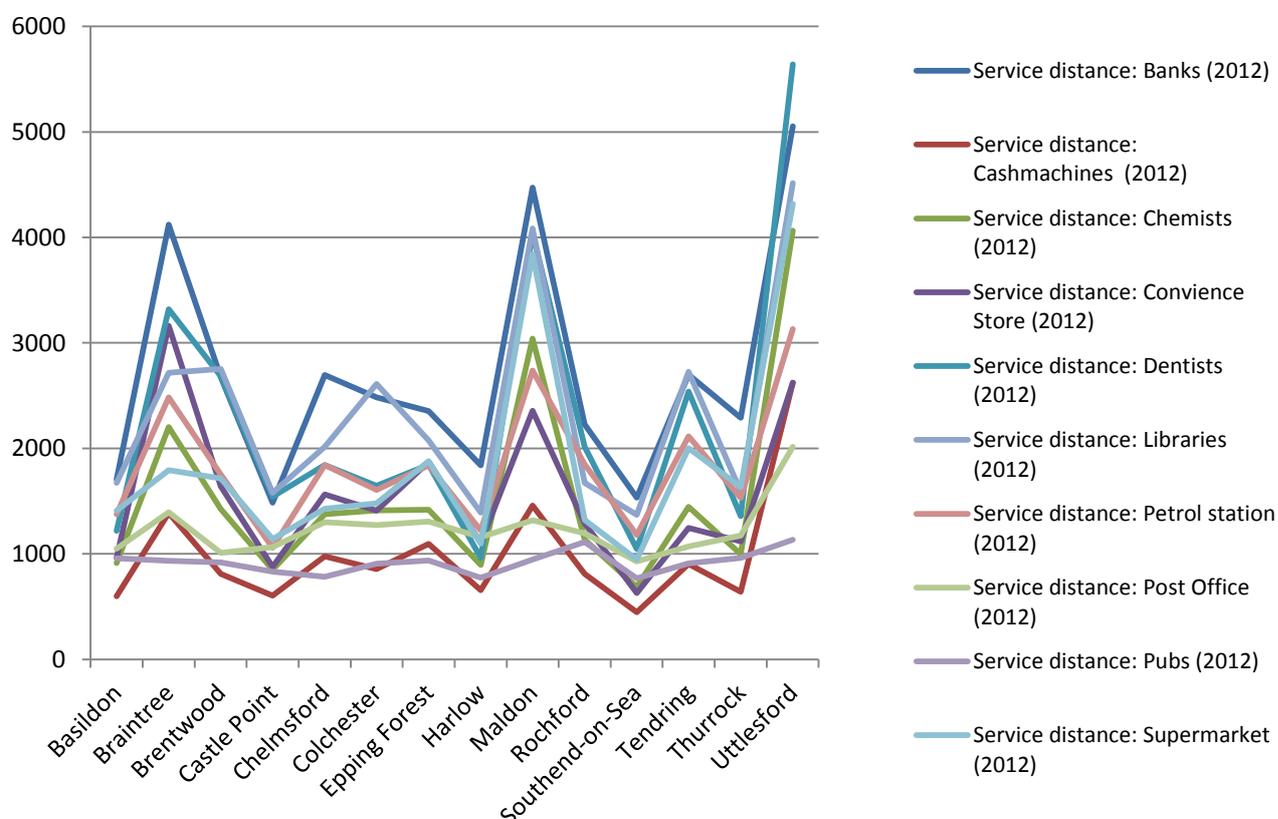
### SECTION THREE - ACCESS TO SERVICES

In our community survey the highest priority areas selected by respondents were access to transport and medical services, affordable housing and improvements to broadband access. Overall the majority of respondents were upbeat about their quality of life at the moment but are generally more pessimistic about the future.

Access to services is generally measured by the distance to shops, chemists, libraries, petrol station and Post Offices. Data from Grant Thornton Place Analytics shows that in Essex the mainly rural districts of Uttlesford, Maldon, Braintree and Tendring were the worst performing for access to services. In general, Essex underperforms compared to both the regional and England-wide averages.

The *2020 Vision for Rural Essex* states that 'people living in rural areas should have affordable and readily available access to essential services, transport and infrastructure'.

Figure 8 below shows that the rural districts of Braintree, Maldon and Uttlesford are most disadvantaged for access to services and in particular dentists, banks, libraries and convenience store. The vertical axis shows the average distance, in metres, along the road network from the centre of each Census Output Area to the nearest named service. Braintree and Maldon are furthest from banks and dentists, and each of these three districts suffers from poorer access to either a convenience store or supermarket.



**Figure 8: Access to Services by District**

Source: Grant Thornton Place Analytics – Service Distance Data 2012

For young and old people alike, rural life can at times be both limiting and isolating. In relation to older people, in September 2012 the Commission for Rural Communities published a report on social isolation experienced by the elderly in rural communities<sup>44</sup>. The report set out to, “assess the impact that Government policy is having on three key areas of policy and public services: social care, transport and housing and the extent to which they address social isolation for older people”. It states that, “for some people, the effects of not having family close to home, perhaps as a consequence of re-location or bereavement, can leave them in a position where they do not have day-to-day contact with others. This can be compounded by physical difficulties leaving the home, to a point where there is very little contact with other people.”

The report made a number of recommendations which could help in reducing isolation. These included amongst others a review of the funding formula which is used to distribute funding for social care to Local Authorities. It suggests that Government take into account whether the needs of rural communities are treated similarly to those in urban areas, and promotes a greater involvement with the voluntary and community sector to inspire volunteering and leadership within local communities.

Younger people can also face a range of issues due to rural isolation. Research undertaken by National Foundation for Educational Research in 2011 explored the influence and impact of low aspirations of young people in rural areas in Suffolk, Lincolnshire and Cumbria.<sup>45</sup> Interviews with parents, employers and stakeholders suggested that ‘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. Indeed, those pupils living in the more rural parts of the three areas are more likely to indicate that transport to post-16 options is not very good’. The Report concluded that overall only a minority of young people appeared to have lower aspirations than expected, however significant influences on aspirations included the cost and availability of transport, employment opportunities and positive role models.

## TRANSPORT

Looking specifically at the cost and availability of transport, we have found that this has been raised as a common concern in much of the Vital Signs research over the past three years. Essex is a large county and the County Council is responsible for 5,100 miles of roads and 3,688 miles of footpaths.<sup>46</sup> At this scale, getting around Essex can be challenging. ECF's 2013 Vital Signs report showed that travelling between major towns in the county is complicated and even involves going into London and out again. Whilst there are a variety of public transport methods available in Essex, 29% of our survey respondents said they were concerned that the district within which they lived was not *doing well* with regard to getting around. The areas expressing the greatest concern were residents living in the districts of Colchester, Braintree, Tendring, Uttlesford and Chelmsford. Conversely, Colchester

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44 [http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw\\_111815-1.pdf](http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_111815-1.pdf)

45 [www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LYPA01/LYPA01\\_home.cfm](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LYPA01/LYPA01_home.cfm)

46 [ECC Equality and Diversity A JSNA topic report July 2015](#)

and Braintree also received many positive responses about transport, with 47% of respondents grading their areas as *excellent* and *performing well*<sup>47</sup>.

This once again appears to support the notion of a rural community of two halves. Residents in rural Colchester and Braintree, some most likely living in close proximity to each other, have very different perceptions on access to and the quality of local transport. As stated above, those residents who have their own vehicle and are in full-time employment are more likely to have access to improved services. It raises the question of how best to support the other section of the population reliant on or who wish to use public transportation. In fact, improvements to the availability of transport was the top priority for our survey respondents this year, which is consistent with previous surveys.

Over 90% (92.5%) of our survey respondents indicated they had access to a vehicle. However, there is a network of community transport schemes operating across the county. Essex County Council currently provides grants totalling £1,272,873 to 12 community transport schemes which are run by not for profit, third sector transport providers. Services include Dial a Ride, Social Car Schemes, Minibus services and Community Bus Services. Together these services carry in excess of 600,000 passenger journeys each year, offering a lifeline to many of the most disadvantaged people in Essex.<sup>48</sup>

The private sector is also providing critical transport services. A recently published strategy *Getting around in Essex: A bus and passenger transport strategy* states that around 85% of bus services in Essex are provided through commercial operators that set their own bus routes and run their services as their commercial interests dictate.<sup>49</sup> The remaining 15% is supported by Essex County Council through a tender process including home to school services and concessionary fares. Other services are discretionary such as those where a commercial service isn't currently viable including services run in the evening, on Sundays or in rural areas. Forty-two percent of bus users are travelling to or from work or education; 29% are shopping; 13% are visiting friends or relatives, with the remaining 15% on leisure trips or doing something else.<sup>50</sup> Overall satisfaction rates for those who travel on Essex buses at 83%, puts Essex at the bottom compared to the other authorities surveyed in the 2011 Census. Although the 'very dissatisfied' rating appears small at 4%, it is double that of some other authorities.<sup>51</sup>

## HOUSING

Whilst the overall that impact that housing has goes beyond the scope of this report it is important to highlight some of the key issues. For many rural communities, access to affordable, local housing

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47 ECF Vital Signs Community Survey, 2015.

48 [ECC - Continued Provision of Essex Community Transport Grants for Financial Year 2015/16](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/452058/rural_communities.pdf)  
[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/452058/rural\\_communities.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/452058/rural_communities.pdf)

49 [Essex County Council 2015 Getting around in Essex A bus and passenger transport strategy](#)

50 [Essex County Council 2015 Getting around in Essex A bus and passenger transport strategy](#)

51 [Essex County Council 2015 Getting around in Essex A bus and passenger transport strategy](#)

within their community remains a priority. In rural areas average house prices have risen 82% in the past 10 years from £118,747 to £215,824,<sup>52</sup> with homes costing over eight times the average salary in 90% of rural local authority areas.<sup>53</sup> The Affordable Rural Housing Commission reported in 2006 that 11,000 new homes were needed each and every year throughout rural England in settlements below 10,000 people to satisfy local needs.

The Essex Rural Strategy 2020 states that provision of affordable housing gives young people and families the choice of continuing to live in villages rather than being compelled to migrate to urban areas. It claims that there is a net drain of young, skilled, people who choose to leave the county and yet there is evidence to suggest that were opportunities to exist, school leavers and graduates would welcome the chance to stay, develop careers and raise families in rural Essex. Mixed communities are often seen as key to thriving rural life. Low numbers of families with school aged children results in lower enrolment at local schools. The Census 2011 shows that the number of children under 10 years old in rural areas rose five times slower than in urban areas with an increase of 1% in rural areas and 5% in urban areas.<sup>54</sup> Equally, the number of people aged 30-44 years has dropped 5% in the rural east of England over the last decade several times more than in urban areas, where the 30-44 year old population only dropped 0.1%. Conversely, the over 65 age population represents 16.6% of the total population, but 20.8% of the rural population.<sup>55</sup>

In the Affordable Rural Housing Guide for Parish Councils published in 2014 it states that tackling the national housing problem requires strong community support and, at the centre of this, is the role parish or town councils should play in coordinating action. There is no simple solution and each community will need to consider the range of options that are available and which one of these best meets their needs.<sup>56</sup>

## COMMUNITY BASED SHOPS

At the end of 2014 the Plunkett Foundation reported that there were 325 community-owned shops and 33 community-owned pubs across the UK open and trading<sup>57</sup>

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52 <http://www.acre.org.uk/rural-issues/housing>

53 [http://www.englishrural.org.uk/uploads/publications\\_pdfs/ruralhousing-guideforPCs2014.pdf](http://www.englishrural.org.uk/uploads/publications_pdfs/ruralhousing-guideforPCs2014.pdf)

54 <http://www.acre.org.uk/rural-issues/housing>

55 <http://www.acre.org.uk/rural-issues/housing>

56 [www.englishrural.org.uk/uploads/publications\\_pdfs/ruralhousing-guideforPCs2014.pdf](http://www.englishrural.org.uk/uploads/publications_pdfs/ruralhousing-guideforPCs2014.pdf)

57 [Plunkett Foundation: Our impact in 2014](#)

Shops in local communities have been on the decline in recent years and the Rural Community Council of Essex's Services in Rural Essex 2011 report states that a total of 78 parishes have a general store within their boundary, compared with 93 in 2008. Uttlesford and Tendring districts have suffered significant decreases since 2008, dropping from 13 parishes with a store in 2008 to only six remaining currently. Interestingly the report suggests that although the data indicates a decline in the number of parishes with general stores, an increase in public transport may help compensate for this.

### **GENERAL PRACTICIONER (GP) SURGERYS**

There are 282 parish and town councils in Essex. The number of parishes with a permanent GP surgery appears to have increased in the last 3 years according to the *Services in Rural Essex 2011* report. In 2011, 53 parishes had a GP surgery compared with 45 in 2008. About 75% of parishes have access to a GP: 31% have a surgery in the parish, 5% have a visiting GP and, where either is not available, 39% can access a GP via public transport. This however means that 61% of those without access to a GP locally cannot reach one by public transport. The report goes on to state that 11 parishes are over 20 miles away from an A&E hospital and 88 parishes are between 10 and 20 miles from an A&E hospital.

### **SUMMARY**

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 an increasingly 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.

If you would like to have a conversation about these or similar issues, please contact us at

Essex Community Foundation  
121 New London Road  
Chelmsford  
Essex CM2 0QT  
01245 355947  
[www.essexcommunityfoundation.org.uk](http://www.essexcommunityfoundation.org.uk)

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