

Kent's European Relationship Select Committee – 8th January, 10.00 a.m.

Biographical Information for panel:

Keith Harrison - Keith is the Chief Executive of Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK), and has worked in rural and/or community development since 1995 for both non-profit and public sector organisations in Gloucestershire, Kent, London and Somerset.

ACRK, created as a charity called the Kent Rural Community Council in 1923, works primarily to alleviate disadvantage in rural areas (i.e. 85% of Kent, serving 29% of the population.) Since 2008 ACRK has operated seven EU-financed projects – on social entrepreneurship, sustainable communities, older person's social care, healthcare and volunteering, young people's careers in the non-profit sector and energy use in community-owned buildings – with funding under the Grundtvig, Leonardo and PROGRESS programmes. These projects have involved partners from Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden. In addition, ACRK has operated the ESF (European Social Fund) Community Grants programme across Kent and Medway – providing investment in charities and social enterprises helping people into employment and training. This scheme runs until July 2015. ACRK's European work has brought just over £1.4 million for community-led regeneration into Kent.

Keith is Chair of the Kent Downs & Marshes LEADER Local Action Group (which has Kent County Council as its accountable body.) From 2002 until 2006 Keith was the Programme Manager for the Somerset Levels & Moors LEADER Local Action Group, facilitating investment in almost 90 land management, food and tourism pilot projects – including co-operation activity with LEADER Local Action Groups in France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden.

ACRK is part of a national network of Rural Community Councils (the ACRE Network comprising 39 organisations, c.700 staff and around £35 million annual turnover); Keith represents these bodies on the Defra-convened Rural Development Programme for England Monitoring Committee (providing scrutiny on £3.9billion EU co-financed investment in the rural economy across England) and its 'External Working Group' helping to design the successor programme for 2014-20.

Huw Jarvis – Huw is the Kent Downs and Marshes Leader Programme Manager, Kent County Council. He took on this role in June 2009 and since then has been working on a number of diverse projects across the region to develop the programme and assist the Local Action Group to deliver the objectives of the Local Development Strategy. By adopting a hands on and can do approach with applicants and by trying to remove bureaucracy from the application process, Huw and project officer Richard Hall, have brought the programme up to speed from what was a late and difficult start. Either working with a forester in a wood yard in the depth of winter or with a farm business in the middle of a perfect Kentish spring day, Huw insists that he has more material, anecdotes and characters to draw from for a book than James Herriot ever had!

A graduate of both London and Strathclyde, Huw has worked in the public sector for twenty five years in Kent and Devon. Huw started his public sector career with Rochester City Council after moving from the private sector and became the council's first Head of Tourism and Marketing, before taking an Assistant Director's role at Shepway District Council. After seven years at Shepway, Huw joined the South West of England Regional Development Agency in Exeter and coordinated the RDA's national lead role with DCMS, as well as dealing with regional issues. Huw originally hails from South Wales, is a keen rugby and cricket enthusiast, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and a Kent Common Purpose Graduate.

Nick Johannsen - Nick is the AONB Director and works with partners to develop and promote the vision and strategic direction for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. He liaises at a local, regional and national level to secure commitment, policy, resources and action which will conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. He leads on the Management Plan review, oversees the work of the Unit and its delivery of the policies and actions of the plan. Nick also supports many partnership projects. Amongst other work he is Chairman of the Board of the 'Up on the Downs' Landscape Partnership scheme operating around Dover and Folkestone. He also chairs the steering group of the Our Land sustainable rural tourism project, the Kent Landscape Group, and the Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership. He sits on the Kent Countryside Access Forum, the North Downs Way Steering Group, is an advisor to the Board of Stour Valley Arts and is a trustee of the Kent Woodland Employment Scheme.

Suggested themes for Members' questions (the panel will make presentations which may cover these themes, followed by Q&A)

1. National and local priorities for rural development – issues for Kent and for KCC.
2. The EU funding programmes at different levels for rural development
 - How rural Kent has benefitted from various funding streams (some with KCC involvement)?
 - What have been the challenges in doing so?
 - What are the risks and opportunities for the future?
3. The National Leader Programme and The Kent Downs & Marshes Leader
 - Governance arrangements – implications for KCC as accountable body - options and opportunities?
 - Support for Kent's rural businesses – outcomes from the programme (benefits and any drawbacks (area size?))
 - Maximising benefits in the future
4. Future funding: The ESIF Draft Strategy for the South East and rural priorities for Kent – issues, challenges and opportunities to maximize benefits to KCC/Kent?