



Action in rural Sussex

Newsletter October 2026

Welcome to our autumnal AirS Newsletter, in which we celebrate some great events held over the past few weeks including the annual Village Halls Conference, the Lost Woods Project's Annual Community Get Together, a Film Festival and the opening of a dedicated community facility for our Villagers Connect Project.

These events take a good deal of time and effort to organise, so hats off to all the community volunteers, participants and staff for making them such a success. It is always worth it in the end as they offer a chance to reflect and celebrate on all the activity that has taken place and bring people together to inspire and galvanise further community led action.

Looking ahead, we have our fingers crossed for Arundel CLT and their shortlisted scheme as described:

Sussex Community Housing Hub

Arundel community-led housing project shortlisted for national award - Best Housing Solution



Above: Henry Arundel, Norfolk Estate, James Stuart, Arundel CLT Board Member, Hilary Knight, Secretary of Arundel CLT,

Arundel Community Land Trust's (CLT) scheme has been shortlisted for under the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)'s centenary award for Best Housing Solution.

The Arundel Gate development, delivered through partnership working between Arundel CLT, Aster Housing Association, Arun District Council and the Norfolk Estate has provided 90 new homes, including 27 affordable homes alongside a host of other community assets and green spaces to enhance the public realm.



"This is a great achievement for Arundel CLT who have worked hard to ensure great community benefits arising from this project; not least the genuinely affordable Social Rented homes and a Local Lettings Plan to make them available to local people in perpetuity."

Tom Warder, CEO, Action in Rural Sussex (AirS)

Biodiversity was at the forefront of the planning process, with over half the 10 acre plot to be given priority for sustainable drainage features, creating habitats and open space. A new bridleway now connects the South Downs National Park with the River Arun, while land has been gifted to the Town Council for community woodland projects, including a 'Food Forest' and a 'Children's Forest'.



The project builds on years of community planning and enabling - supported by AirS from the outset - and highlights the role community-led housing can play in delivering affordable homes as part of a sustainable development which serves its community well. Winners will be announced on 29th October.

Community Buildings Service

AirS Annual Village Halls Conference 2026

On Saturday 10th October, over 60 attendees from 36 halls filled Crowborough Community Centre for a day of learning and networking. Our annual Sussex Community Buildings Conference brings together hall trustees and managers from across East and West Sussex. It was wonderful to see so many at the conference, both familiar faces and new.



Above: Angela Milligan, Senior Community Buildings Adviser at the Village Halls Conference.

Councillor Gareth Owen-Williams from Wealden District Council formally opened the conference, and then we were straight into an introduction to the Village Hall Podcast, which has been specifically created for those running the UK's 10,000 plus village, church and community halls.

Richard Hudson (below) of Counter-Terrorism Policing South East and our own Angela Milligan then briefed us on community and hall security, including the upcoming Martyn's Law relating to protection of premises from terrorism attacks, and what it means for community buildings.



Finding funding for hall refurbishments and upgrades to facilities is always challenging so the funding tips from Chris Rush (below right) of TJB Fundraising, based on his experience of writing 100s of applications, was essential listening.



Alan West, Chair of the Sussex Community Buildings Advisory Group, tackled the question of keeping halls cool after this summer's heat. In the afternoon, four breakouts covered managing refurbishments, marketing your hall, finding volunteers, and a treasurers' forum.

The conference received overwhelmingly positive feedback with 100% saying they would recommend the conference to other hall trustees and managers. Attendees valued making new contacts, networking and discovering that many halls face the same challenges.



Above: Tom Warder, AirS CEO, and Alan West, SCBAG Chair, close the Conference.

The Community Buildings team would like to give a huge thanks to all our speakers, to our lead sponsor Allied Westminster, along with TJB Fundraising and Sound Reduction Systems, and to Wealden District Council for its generous funding.

Thanks also to the Crowborough Community Centre team who hosted us so warmly, other staff from AirS who gave up their Saturday to lend a hand, and finally to our invaluable Sussex Community Buildings Advisory Group volunteers

Upcoming Community Buildings Events

The conference built on our growing training and networking programme. Sessions so far, including Trustee Roles and Responsibilities, Health and

Safety and Social Media, have been well attended, and we will continue to add more options in response to demand.

Next up, on the 10th November, are PAT testing and risk assessments training sessions, both important elements of running a safe, compliant hall. [For our full Autumn – Winter Training Programme, please click here](#)

Villagers Connect Project

Community, Connection and Hope

Hope Keith room opens in Rusper Hall

September 26th was the opportunity for the AirS Villagers Connect Team and the community they support, to shine. It was the much anticipated opening of the Hope Keith Room at Rusper village hall.

Villagers Connect is a community development project which is working to sustain a strong and vibrant community in the villages of Colgate, Faygate and Rusper in the Horsham district. It aims to build connections and relationships which increase confidence, independence and empowerment, particularly for the over 65's

Hope Keith was a resident of Rusper who left her estate in trust for the benefit of older people in the village. The trust funds the Villagers Connect team at AirS.



Over 100 people came to the opening. The day included the cutting of a ribbon, lovely food, information stalls and workshops largely lead by the community we support. These included a quiz (led by John, see above), in the loop hearing support, and chair based yoga.

John, a member of the Villagers Connect Community, said [about the AirS team]:

"They don't treat me as if I'm old, they see me for what I can offer, not just what I can receive".

One of the Hope Keith trustees stated that seeing how much John's confidence had grown as a result of attending VC activities, was his highlight of the day.

The Lost Woods Project

The Lost Woods Community Get Together

Action in rural Sussex (AirS) staff and Lost Woods partners recently came together for a brilliant day of learning, sharing and connecting with nature.



Blessed with excellent weather, the event featured a wide range of activities and workshops designed to celebrate the natural environment and encourage community participation. A particular highlight was a performance by students from Woodlands Meed School, who shared a song about their love of the woodland.

Throughout the day, participants were able to take part in workshops covering a variety of topics, including dormouse and lichen conservation, folklore, basket weaving, nature mandalas and woodland management in a changing climate. The team also ran sessions on using iRecord to record wildlife sightings, micro-volunteering opportunities, building sustainable community groups and simple woodland activities that can be enjoyed in just ten minutes.

Here's a few words that people used to describe Lost Woods in their feedback



This community gathering demonstrated the strength of local engagement and the positive impact that shared outdoor experiences can have on both people and nature.

Lost Woods Film Festival

AirS Lost Woods team recently hosted the launch of the Lost Woods Film Festival at Depot Cinema in Lewes, bringing together filmmakers, woodland communities and project partners for an evening celebrating the stories emerging from the ancient woodlands of the Low Weald.

The event featured a diverse programme of films created by both professional filmmakers and volunteer groups who had taken part in Lost Woods media training. The films explored a wide range of themes, including hazel dormice, woodland restoration, community connections and the work of those helping to care for and protect local woodlands.



A recurring theme throughout the evening was the strong connection filmmakers had developed with both the natural environment and the communities they were documenting. This personal relationship with the woodlands and the people involved was reflected in the warmth and authenticity of the films on show.

See the film makers below.



As the Lost Woods project enters its final year, the festival marks an important opportunity to share these stories more widely, inspiring greater appreciation of local woodlands and encouraging more people to become involved in their protection and care.

The evening was a fitting celebration of the people, places and partnerships that have helped make the Lost Woods project such a success.

Ancient Woodland Shield Award

We're now award-winning! 🏆

The Lost Woods project has been awarded the inaugural Ancient Woodland Shield by the Countryside Management Association (CMA), recognising its outstanding contribution to the conservation, management, interpretation and educational use of ancient woodland.



The award acknowledges the significant impact of the project and the collective efforts being made to understand, protect and celebrate Sussex's woodland heritage. It comes at a time when the Lost Woods team and its volunteers have reached an important milestone, recording more than 5,500 ancient, veteran and notable trees across the Lost Woods landscape.

The Ancient Woodland Shield was presented at the CMA's 60th Anniversary Conference, where Lost Woods Outreach Adviser Bob Epsom accepted the award on behalf of the project.

This recognition reflects the dedication and commitment of the many volunteers, community groups, conservation organisations, landowners and project partners who have contributed to the success of Lost Woods.

The award highlights the collaboration that lies at the heart of the project, and the importance of safeguarding ancient woodland for future generations.

[See our blog here](#)

Mapping over 5500 Ancient and Veteran Trees across Sussex's Lost Woods

The Lost Woods team and its volunteers have reached a major milestone, recording more than 5,500 ancient, veteran and notable trees across Sussex as part of the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year.

The records are helping to build a clearer picture of Sussex's unique natural and cultural heritage.



Ancient and veteran trees provide vital habitats for wildlife, including fungi, insects, birds and bats, while also offering a living connection to the county's history. Recording and mapping these trees is an important step in ensuring they can be better understood and protected for future generations.

The Lost Woods team is working with volunteers to identify and record every ancient and veteran tree across the project area by 2027, with new discoveries continuing to be added to the national inventory.

"Every ancient tree has a story, but many of these remarkable trees are still unknown and unrecorded. Reaching more than 5,500 records in the Lost Woods is an important milestone, helping us understand the incredible living heritage right on our doorstep."

Bob Epsom, Outreach Adviser for Lost Woods

What can ABCD (asset based community development) do for your group?

For anyone working or volunteering with a community group or organisation in East Sussex, especially Wealden.

Curious about asset-based community development (ABCD)? Learn the basics, explore how it could help your group grow, and meet others using a similar approach at our event in November.

Action in rural Sussex has created a short interactive tool that introduces some of the principles of ABCD and helps you think about how you already use them, or could. [Find the tool HERE](#).



What is Asset Based Community Development?

Anyone, anywhere, can take an ABCD approach, and you're probably doing some of it already. It starts with recognising what you already have, then listening, sharing, connecting and growing ideas. It's a great way to develop ideas and groups, uncover the skills and interests of everyone involved, and make the most of what's already in place.

Have a go with the tool, and please think about joining us at our event:

When: Tues 3rd November 2026 11am to 1.45pm

Where: Uckfield Civic Centre, Ashdown Room

Book here: contact Jo Email: Jo.Peters@ruralsussex.org.uk or go to the booking page on [Eventbrite](#)

AirS supports local NHS flu and Covid Vaccination Campaign

Pass on the news, not the germs: get your flu and COVID-19 jabs this winter



When it comes to encouraging people to get vaccinated, trusted local voices can make all the difference. While posters and publicity help raise awareness, a conversation with a neighbour, friend or volunteer is often what encourages someone to take action.

Posters and publicity help raise awareness, but a conversation with a neighbour, friend or volunteer is often what gets someone to book an appointment. That's why we're helping the NHS share clear, trusted information through the people and places communities already rely on.

Village halls, parish councils, community buildings and groups are well placed to do this. You know your residents, and they know you.

How you can help

- Display our flyers and posters in your venue
- Mention the clinics at events, meetings and group sessions
- Pass the information on to anyone who might not see it otherwise

We've produced a series of flyers showing where vaccination clinics are taking place across Sussex this winter. Printed copies are free for community organisations and village halls. To request a poster and flyers, email info@ruralsussex.org.uk.

For the latest information on vaccination eligibility, clinic locations and booking appointments, please [visit the NHS and Surrey & Sussex Integrated Care Board seasonal vaccination webpages](#).



You are receiving this email because you work for another community based organisation working in rural Sussex or have engaged with one of our services such as the Community Buildings Service, Community Led Housing, the Lost Woods Project or another of our rural community based projects.

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