

## **LGA Annual Rural Commission and Conference 2013**

The annual two day meeting of the LGA Rural Commission and Conference took place in Warwick in September. It was attended by Cllr Andrew Bowles, who has recently been voted Commission Chairman, by the delegates, and Cllr David Simmons, Swale Cabinet Member for the Environment and Rural Affairs.

The six monthly meeting of the Rural Commission was held on the first day. The morning Plenary session was about "Rewiring Public Services", this was followed by workshops, which were repeated in the afternoon. Did you know that 25% of the population live in rural areas? By 2019 funding to local councils will have come down by £19 billion, giving a reduction in services and rural areas will be worse off. The workshops were on Infrastructure Planning and Delivery, Growth Deals and Fuel Poverty. The afternoon plenary session was on Welfare Reform.

The Annual Rural Conference was held on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> September. The Keynote speech was given by Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Minister's four main priorities are:-

- 1 To boost the rural economy.
- 2 To improve environmental protection.
- 3 To protect plant health.
- 4 To protect animal health.

The address was followed by wide ranging questions and the Minister stayed longer than he intended!

The morning finished with a Plenary Session lead by Lord Robin Teverson addressing issues relating to Green Growth.

The afternoon had two sessions, the first Measuring the Health of your Community and the Conference closed with a session on growth and skills which centred on economic development and tourism policy. Further details of the papers presented and minutes are available via the LGA Member website.

On a personal note I thought that both days were very good and that it was better not to have workshops on the second day, which allowed more time for questions to be put to the main speakers and led to some lively debates which were well encouraged by the Chairman.

**Cllr David Simmons**  
**Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs**