

Regional Cities East

Six urban centres team up to work for jobs, homes and sustainable growth

Summary

EEDA-funded Regional Cities East (RCE) is an alliance comprising Colchester, Ipswich, Luton, Norwich, Peterborough and Southend-on-Sea. Formed with the aim of creating jobs and affordable homes, and generating sustainable growth in the East of England, RCE now has official ministerial backing.

Counties:	Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk
EEDA programme:	Regional Infrastructure
Author:	East of England Development Agency (EEDA)

Main messages

- EEDA-funded RCE helps alliance members pool their resources
- Planning for jobs, homes and sustainable growth
- Giving members a higher profile in the region and nationally
- Making member cities more attractive to investors.

Case study

Art means business

Rachel Drury, head of resource development at Arts Council England, East, (ACEE) believes her organisation's relationship with RCE is an extension of its long-standing partnership with EEDA. "We already make a lot of investment in these individual cities," said Rachel, "so having a body that can represent them collectively is enormously beneficial to our work. The arts and culture have an important part to play in the successful economic development of cities, something that EEDA already recognises and RCE is now endorsing."

One of the many partnerships involving both ACEE and RCE members centres on the development of firstsite:newsite. This flagship visual arts facility will make a significant impact on the regeneration of Colchester through:

- £16.5 million partnership investment from ACEE, EEDA, Colchester Borough Council, Essex County Council and the University of Essex
- A 10 per cent increase in the value of tourism annually (worth £18 million)
- The creation of 288 jobs in the tourist sector
- Attracting 500,000 more visitors to Colchester every year
- The development of 33 new jobs related directly to firstsite
- A further £2 million direct spending in the local economy every year.

Rachel Drury said: “The benefits of this project stretch further than Colchester, bringing visitors and investment to Essex and the wider region. It will create a new model for the role of the arts in improving people’s lives.

“RCE provides us with an improved means to raise the cultural profile of each of its members across the East of England. We can promote what is already there and work towards arts and culture making an even stronger contribution to our region’s communities.”

Progressing in step

According to Mike Crouch, director of RCE, the alliance owes its existence to EEDA’s determination that the East of England should not suffer through the lack of a single big city. “If EEDA chief executive David Marlow hadn’t spotted the opportunity about two-and-a-half years ago, then RCE might never have happened,” said Mike, who is also an executive director of Colchester Borough Council. “David realised that without a core city the region was potentially going to lose out to other regions dominated by major urban centres. But he understood that a group of medium-sized cities getting together could generate a lot of lobbying power, and also perform more strongly as an economic collective.”

RCE grew out of an initial meeting suggested by David Marlow. “RCE has undoubtedly given the region more of a profile than we’ve had before,” said Mike. “For the first time it is starting to find its urban voice. Traditionally, for understandable reasons, we’ve been strongly associated with our environmental and rural assets, and this is the image of us held previously by central government and other important bodies. However, acceptance is now taking root that the region actually has a very strong urban base.”

Local government minister Phil Woolas officially backed RCE's ambitious business plan: "I have been particularly impressed with the vision of the Regional Cities East partnership. The RCE business case sets out an exciting future for the region and an innovative governance arrangement to ensure its delivery. I am particularly encouraged that the partnership has achieved cross party political consensus on urban growth. Building a partnership of the six RCE cities and towns offers the potential for small and medium cities working together to drive economic development and promote more employment and housing growth in the region in a sustainable manner."

An engine of growth

Half of RCE's current annual budget of around £250,000 comes from EEDA, and the six members provide the rest. EEDA is also at the forefront of RCE's sub-regional Integrated Development Programme (IDP). This aims to promote growth in ways that take into account the special characteristics of each RCE member and its surrounding area.

Jamie Merrick, head of strategy at EEDA, said: "Increasingly, academic and policy studies are showing that cities – and their relationships with the areas around them – are vital engines of economic growth. With a world city like London on our doorstep it's imperative we understand and harness the cities' potential to be the future driving force of the region's economy. Business-to-business relationships with the capital are getting far stronger, which means part of EEDA's job is helping RCE members and others clarify what they have to offer London."

Conclusion

By funding RCE, EEDA is helping ensure that key urban centres in the region can make the most of their combined capacity to achieve sustainable growth. The economic gains achieved by each individual RCE member will also have a positive and long-term effect in their neighbouring areas.

Financial facts and figures

- Half of RCE's current annual budget of around £250,000 comes from EEDA.

Extra quotes

David Marlow, chief executive, EEDA

"Our hope is that Regional Cities East can be a pathfinder for medium-sized cities working together to deliver sustainable growth – a national exemplar to show how medium-sized cities have as much to offer the UK economy as their larger neighbours."

Laura Church, head of regeneration, Luton Borough Council

“Working with RCE has been good for the council. We have shared experience and knowledge of working in some of the key towns and cities in the East of England. The role of small and medium-sized cities in the growth agenda has been raised regionally and nationally and this has also raised the profile of the towns. Some of the work coming out of RCE – like their skills agenda and integrated development plans – will help develop Luton’s working agenda locally.”

Additional information

RCE aims to add £10 billion to the UK economy by 2021. This would be achieved through the creation of at least 160,000 new homes – mostly on brownfield sites – and at least 140,000 new jobs. It also aims for a three per cent cut in carbon emissions.

For more information about RCE, please visit www.rce.org.uk

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