Regional Rural White Paper (RWP) for the East of England - Draft

Making it Happen

Unlocking the Potential of the East of England's Rural Areas

Contents

Executive summary (2 pages)

To be added at final draft stage once main content is agreed

Introduction

The East of England Rural Forum (EERF) is pleased to present this first East of England Rural White Paper. It comes at a time of unprecedented change for rural areas. The East of England is subject to as much change as any region with pressures as diverse as economic, climatic, demographic and social change creating multiple challenges for rural areas and communities.

The EERF is an independent body which draws its membership from local and regional bodies and which provides a forum for debate. It is mirrored by similar groups in other regions and meets regularly with Ministers and the other regional forums to promote the case for rural areas.

This Rural White Paper builds upon a series of position papers that the Forum has developed, and unites them into a comprehensive statement of how the rural East of England needs to develop over the next 10 years and beyond.

In developing the Rural White Paper, the Forum has been determined to challenge some of the long held misconceptions about rural areas, and to demonstrate that rural areas have a distinct, but vital role to play in the future health and success of the region. It is our belief that by stimulating dynamic and innovative rural solutions that rural areas can play an increased role in the region, and help everyone to enjoy sustainable prosperity whilst promoting community health and vitality.

The East of England has no major cities, and even in its largest urban areas the countryside is never far away. This brings major benefits to the East of England by creating a green infrastructure and diversity of landscape and culture which creates a unique and attractive setting for people to live and work, and for business to invest in or tourists to visit.

The region has nearly a quarter of England's market towns and numerous villages all linked economically and socially to larger towns and small cities. This settlement structure presents particular issues due to the dispersed nature of the population which is not helped by the Region's weak infrastructure. In a region which is ageing rapidly, and where large scale growth is foreseen the interaction between larger towns and their rural hinterland will remain a source of debate.

As described below the rural economy has changed rapidly and in many senses is now similar to that found in urban areas. Looking forward, however, whilst developments such as the internet has enabled rural economic diversity to increase the continual 'arms race' for higher internet speeds risks marginalising many rural communities unless we find a rapid solution for rural areas.

Rural areas are attractive places to live and research shows a continued trend for affluent families and retirees to move to rural areas. Coupled to an influx of migrants this increased population has put pressure on rural services, but we argue that they should be welcomed for the new growth and ideas they bring. Clearly we cannot allow their arrival to deprive local people of services or housing, and so we set out some innovative ways in which seemingly intractable problems could be solved.

The low lying topography and dry climate in the region makes the region particularly susceptible to climate change with rural areas in many cases being even more exposed than urban areas. Positive

action on this and many other environmental issues including landscape quality, bio-diversity, flooding and carbon emissions will be needed. Rural areas are in the frontline of many of these issues and can provide innovative solutions which benefit the whole region.

The vision for rural areas set out within this Rural White Paper is challenging and dynamic. It builds on the unique nature and traditions of rural areas, but argues strongly that rural areas must embrace change. Rural areas themselves must take the lead in delivering this change, and there are no quick fixes for many of the issues we face. We believe that if we work together we can promote diverse and progressive rural communities to meet the needs of those of who live there, whilst bringing wider benefits to the whole region.

The purpose of this White Paper is to focus on the priorities for rural communities in the East of England against a changing backdrop of national, regional and local policy and organisational structures.

The Forum itself has only very limited resources, all of which are focused on engagement and consultation, and it is therefore has to rely on working through communities, businesses, the third sector and public bodies to take the ideas within this paper forward. The Forum is keen to engage with everyone with an interest in rural areas to ensure that the ideas set out within this paper are delivered to benefit the whole region.

Pat Holtom - Chair of the East of England Rural Forum

Background

The Rural White Paper is intended to be a living document, and therefore whilst many of the ideas it sets out below are looking forward 10 years or more, it is recognised that solutions will evolve and change due to new technology or changes in economic and social conditions.

In some areas this need to recognise that change will happen is essential given the pace of change, and throughout this paper we argue that policy making and delivery must respect the changes we are seeing in the way people want to live. Two notable examples relate to economic policy and digital policy.

In relation to economic policy most government plans, whether at the national, regional or local level propose that most economic growth should be concentrated in urban areas despite that fact that new ways of working, new technology, the faster rise in the rural as opposed to the urban population, and the gridlock which is increasingly common in our urban areas makes this untenable. It is essential that economic policy is re-examined to re-balance the drive for economic growth across the whole of the region's geography.

On broadband, as reported below not only are rural areas likely to be dis-advantaged by a focus only on fibre based systems, but the focus on fibre also ignores the fact that 1 in 5 (and growing) of the population no longer uses fixed line communications.

The paper therefore identifies the most important issues facing rural areas, and suggests areas in which policy needs to change. In all areas the chapters seek to identify what needs to change and what the objectives of this change should be. In many areas suggestions for how the benefits of change can be used to increase economic output, or to reduce costs are made in recognition of the squeeze on expenditure which is widely foreseen in the next few years.

The Rural East of England

The rural East of England is a diverse and complex area from the expanses of salt flats in North Norfolk with its low population density and small coastal villages, to the rich pastures and agricultural lands of 'Constable Country' or rapidly expanding villages in the commuter belts of Essex and Hertfordshire. None of these areas are typical, all are unique in their mix of issues and challenges, but collectively they illustrate the enormous diversity to be found in the rural East of England.

This introductory section sets out some of the key features of the rural East of England and outlines the ways in which it is changing as well as some of the key challenges it faces in the future.

Rural areas are often seen as being old fashioned and slow to change, but this is dispelled by the finding as reported in the Taylor Review (2008) that knowledge intensive businesses only increased by 21% in urban areas between 1998-'05, but by 46% in rural areas. In a similar way official data tends to hide rural deprivation by working at ward level or above without recognising that in rural

areas each ward contains both the more affluent as well as the deprived, unlike the position in most urban areas. Rural areas have significant numbers of deprived residents but few specific programmes to address the issues created. Rural areas are also seen as attractive places to live because of the pleasant and green landscape, but this hides the fact that rural residents on average walk less than urban residents and that the very landscape which makes them so visually attractive also presents problems for accessing services.

The stereotypes of rural areas are therefore largely untrue, and the reality is far more complex with rural areas containing high numbers of knowledge intensive businesses, significant deprivation (alongside wealthier residents) and real problems with access to the modern services and facilities which most urban residents take for granted.

Population

The East of England is one of the fastest growing regions in the country. The region's population is currently 5.7 million and expected to rise to 6.2 million by 2021[i], and approximately 40% of the population live in rural areas and market towns. Three of the four Growth Areas in the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan are wholly or partially within the region and three further areas have recently applied for Growth Point designation. The region is experiencing rapid change and significant development pressures are affecting many of its rural areas. The provision of suitable and affordable housing for those working in rural areas is a key issue facing the region.

The region is characterised by a growing rural population which is increasingly deriving its income from employment outside the traditional rural economy, either by working in growing sectors of the economy such as financial services, through commuting to major urban areas or by working remotely using ICT. This is particularly significant in the south and west of the region where the majority of rural inhabitants work outside their immediate community.

The region has also experienced a net inward migration of migrant workers from the most recent accession countries, with all areas of the region experiencing significant in-migration particularly since about 2004 when movements from the Accession States became possible.

The region's rural areas also suffer a high percentage of out migration from those who are moving to access further education outside of the region and not returning, with rural England having 400,000 fewer young people aged 15-29 than 20 years ago (State of the Countryside 2007). Conversely rural areas have seen a 200% increase in migrant arrivals since 2004 and ongoing in-migration by middle aged residents and those at retirement age.

There are particular hot spot areas where there has been an increase in the older population as a consequence of people moving to the countryside to retire – particularly along the North Norfolk and East Suffolk Coast.

[Maps of young and older population change to be added in final version]

All these issues have led to skewed demographics in many rural areas in the East of England with a lower than expected number of young families and an over-representation of retired people. The

issues surrounding the long term sustainability of some rural communities are therefore very real ones.

Employment and incomes

The East of England rural population is relatively affluent on average but this masks very large variations in income. The large number of professionals (many of whom work in cities and major towns) and wealthy pensioners (many of whom move into rural areas at retirement) living in rural areas mask the real economic problems facing many locals, especially young families. Average wages in rural areas are over £4,600 per annum below the urban average (Taylor 2008).

Low incomes translate into major challenges relating to the affordability of housing, with parts of the North Norfolk coast now having average prices which are nearly ten times average local incomes[ii]. These problems are exacerbated by the high levels of seasonal employment in these areas.

Rural household incomes are variable depending on how sparse or remote they are from large urban areas. In the East of England this is particularly noticeable when comparing areas in the Norfolk and Cambridge Fens to areas around major cities such as Cambridge, Ely and Norwich[iii]. The Fens is one of the worst areas for rural deprivation in the UK despite its relative closeness to rapidly growing urban areas such as Cambridge and Peterborough. The rural parts of the commuter belt in the South of the region are more affluent although even here there are hidden pockets of deprivation.

Being adjacent to London provides both a very large potential market for employment, goods and services, but also imposes significant development pressures on the region's rural areas. Whereas until recently this effect was only significant in the South of the region, improved rail links and problems with housing affordability has led to a big increase in commuting from areas such as Ely, Littleport and Downham Market which are 70- 90 miles from London.

London is though also likely to deliver significant growth potential for the East of England's rural economy in many sectors. From high technology and businesses services companies to tourism and the food and drink sector London's proximity is likely to be a major factor in future growth. For example the demand for 'local' food with clear provenance has been growing strongly, and with London accounting for nearly 20% of the UK's food consumption, and 40% of the UK's restaurant trade the London market is a major opportunity for this sector. However –particularly in the north and east of the region – there are concerns about continuing economic underperformance and an over-reliance on traditional employment sectors such as food processing and farming.[iv]

The tourism sector is growing strongly with the East of England outperforming most other areas, and in a predominantly rural region, most of the region's tourism is rural in nature. With short breaks growing faster than longer holidays the accessibility of the East of England to major urban centres in London and the Midlands suggests the prospects for future growth are strong.

The region has 120 market towns which is nearly a quarter of the total across England[v]. Most market towns are adapting to economic change, however, the more remote rural market towns have made less progress and have a higher level of poverty than other rural areas.

Land use and the environment

A significant percentage, just over 80%, of the East of England land area is in agricultural use. Compared to other regions, the farming and food sectors are characterised by larger businesses, with considerable consolidation having occurred in recent years. These businesses are primarily based on arable, intensive horticulture, pigs and poultry. The agri-food sector is a significant employer of people who live in the region, especially in the northern part of the region.

The East of England is a low-lying region, with a rich diversity of rural and coastal landscapes, communities and economies. It is the driest region in England, but even so 25% of its land area is at risk from river valley or coastal flooding. Climate change presents challenges from both changing rainfall patterns and rising sea levels. As a result there are particular issues around water security, flood management and coastal realignment.

The East of England region has a rich and diverse natural environment that supports many of the UK's rarest and best loved habitats and species. It is a region of dramatic and often sharp contrasts with landscapes ranging from a long, low-lying coastline (featuring windswept beaches, dunes and marshes), to large scale arable farmland, extensive lowland heathland, and a more intimate mosaic of mixed woodlands and hedgerows. The topography and geography of the region alongside a long standing commitment to new energy sources has enabled the East of England to be the leading English region for renewable electricity.

 The historic environment of the region is rich and varied and important both for its own sake and because it is a significant driver of economic and social objectives. It contributes to the quality of life of all, whether local residents, visitors from the wider region or tourists. It also cuts across and unites environmental, social and economic issues through its role in tourism and education; the re-use of historic farm buildings for new businesses; and training in historic building repair methods which both develops skills and contributes to the conservation of important buildings.
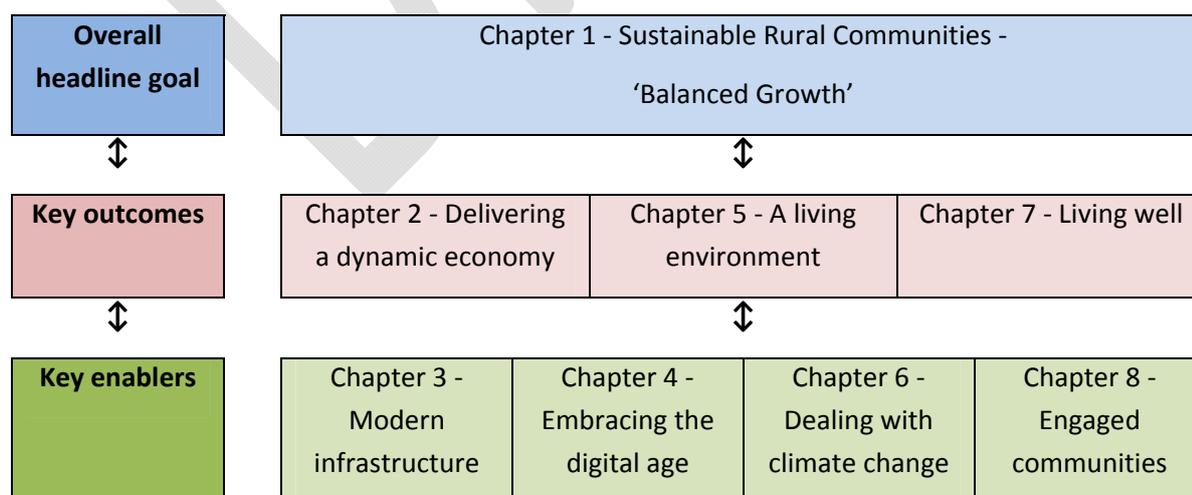
Rural White Paper structure

The Rural White Paper has been structured into eight main chapters, but where appropriate links between the chapters have been identified. The main chapters are:

- Chapter 1 - Sustainable Rural Communities - planning for balanced rural growth, role of villages, Market Towns and urban centres (including land use)

- Chapter 2 - Delivering A Dynamic Economy - employment, new markets and businesses, education and skills, supportive business environment

- Chapter 3 - Modern infrastructure - transport, housing, workspace

- Chapter 4 - Embracing the Digital Age - broadband, mobile phones and digitally enabled communities and businesses

- Chapter 5 - A Living Environment - bio-diversity, landscape, heritage and built environment / distinctiveness, access to the environment, water resources

- Chapter 6 - Dealing with Climate Change - mitigation, resilience and business continuity(adaptation), energy

- Chapter 7 - Living well - Access to services - role of community buildings, health and wellbeing, community safety

- Chapter 8 - Engaged Communities - empowerment, councils and local structures to deliver chapters 1-7 through engaged people and communities who champion and drive change

The relationship between the chapters can be seen in table 1 below which explains how the different areas fit together to present an overall set of actions for rural communities.

Table 1 - Rural White Paper structure

Overall headline goal	Chapter 1 - Sustainable Rural Communities - 'Balanced Growth'			
↕	↕			
Key outcomes	Chapter 2 - Delivering a dynamic economy	Chapter 5 - A living environment	Chapter 7 - Living well	
↕	↕			
Key enablers	Chapter 3 - Modern infrastructure	Chapter 4 - Embracing the digital age	Chapter 6 - Dealing with climate change	Chapter 8 - Engaged communities

Process

The process to develop the East of England Rural White Paper included a series of consultations to ensure the final paper represented the views of the rural constituency in the East of England. This process included:

- Development of the proposed focus for the Rural White Paper which was developed by the EERF steering group and approved by a meeting of the full Forum in 2009;

- A draft issues paper which was discussed with the EERF Rural White Paper steering group on 20th January 2010;

- An issues paper which was circulated to all EERF members and other invitees to the consultation event;

- A formal consultation event held at Shuttleworth College on 3rd March 2010 and attended by EERF members and guests;

- A draft Rural White Paper circulated for comments and feedback on 17th March 2010;

- A final discussion with the EERF Rural White Paper steering group on 25th March 2010.

The output of all of these consultations has been used to guide the focus and issues which this paper have sought to address.

At the consultation event participants were asked to rank 30 potential issues in relation to the development of the East of England's rural areas. For each issue participants were asked to allocate a score using a 1-5 scale, and all the scores were averaged to identify the most important issues. The results of this ranking process are presented in full in appendix 1, but the top issues identified by this process were:

1st
- Recognising broadband as an essential utility for rural areas

2[nd] =
- Providing affordable housing in rural areas
- Promoting sustainable water resource management

3[rd] =
- Ensuring the planning system promotes rural economic growth
- Promoting policies to drive rural employment growth
- Providing more rural workspace & technology to support rural industries & jobs including home working
- Engaging young people in local community activities
- Improving links between Councils, local democracy structures & community action

Chapter 1 - Delivering Sustainable Rural Communities

Summary

- Rural communities need to embrace the growth needed to allow them to sustain healthy and vibrant communities in the long term

- Planning policy must support the growth of villages and Market Towns so that they are sustainable economically and socially in the long term

- Regional and local economic policy must recognise how the growth of the rural economy can help to deliver local and regional economic goals

Challenges

The need to plan for balanced rural growth is the fundamental cross cutting issue which underpins all other areas of the RWP. Without a balanced planning and development agenda the rural areas of the East of England risk being marginalised, with an unbalanced population of the rich and retired whilst younger families and those in lower paid employment are driven out. Unless rural areas are allowed to grow and provide economic and residential opportunities for a diverse population, it will be impossible to sustain the services which are needed.

The East of England is projected to be the fastest growing region in England to 2030 with the Regional Spatial Strategy[vi] foreseeing the population reaching 6 million by 2021[vii]. Whilst much of the growth is proposed in major urban 'growth areas', housing projections and job creation targets foresee more general growth across the region, and in the growth areas the scale of development will have major impacts on their rural hinterlands.

Work by Birkbeck College (2008)[viii] for EEDA looked at the linkages between urban and rural areas and found multiple links in terms of the economy, travel to work, access to services and social reasons with major cities and market towns having significant impacts on their hinterland.

The Rural Forum's own papers on planning[ix] and growth have called for changes in the planning system to support more balanced rural growth, where economic growth is aligned with housing growth.

The Taylor Review (2008) [x] stated that 'a fundamental shake up of planning & affordable housing policy is vital to breathe new life & prosperity into rural communities' and said that 'if we fail to build affordable homes to enable people who work in the countryside to live there we risk turning our villages into gated communities of wealthy commuters & the retired' and that we need a 'more flexible approach to work-based extensions to homes'.

On market towns Taylor proposed a change 'from endless bland housing estates to create new neighbourhood extensions with shops & community facilities, workplaces & open spaces'. This concept may seem simple and sensible, but unfortunately the evidence of recent decades from many market towns is that they have expanded through edge of settlement housing estates with no

services, and an expectation that the inhabitants will commute to employment in major urban areas. Clearly this is not conducive to the creation of sustainable communities and instead creates dormitory towns.

National data shows the rural population is growing by 70,000 people per year (CRC 2007), with projections by ONS suggesting the rural population will increase by 16% in the next 20 years but only 9% in urban areas.

To drive forward rural communities an educated and aspirational local population is essential. As explained in more detail in Chapter 2, remote rural areas tend to suffer from lower levels of educational attainment in the workforce than that found in urban areas. Lower educational attainment levels impact on not only the potential for employment, but also have impacts on health, wellbeing and the ability for rural communities to fulfil their potential.

More balanced rural growth with more people working locally in a wider range of employment, would allow young people to understand the importance of education and increase aspirations. This in turn would lead to more potential growth in the local economy.

In a crowded region decisions on land use are central to the debate on balanced growth. Since 2000 the rural counties of Norfolk and Suffolk have seen the most dramatic increase in their urban areas[xi].

Agriculture and Forestry are the two main land users covering 88% of the region, but there has been a 6% drop in agricultural land since 1998[xii]. The area of woodland is increasing but some is being lost to development, habitat restoration, deer browsing and climate change[xiii]. The Read Report (2009)[xiv] has also recommended increasing woodland by 10,000 hectares per annum to aid emissions reduction, and renewable energy is also a land user of increasing importance. With the forthcoming feed in tariffs and a proposed renewable heat incentive from 2011 the pressure to divert land to energy generation will increase. These issues form the central argument of the CLA Food and Environmental Security policy[xv] and the concept of eco-system services which both propose the need for multi-functional land use to be recognised.

Tourism, leisure and heritage are regional key economic sectors and the Spatial Strategy[xvi] has identified specific, often rural, local features or assets as being key drivers of tourism. However, there is a desire to develop new sustainable tourism away from "honey pot areas" to both spread the economic benefits and to lessen the impact of environmental damage on fragile sites.

EERF has previously recognised that positive planning policy which is applied consistently is essential, and that the content of regional and local development plans will have major impacts on how rural areas develop.

Key objectives

Balanced growth in this context could be defined as the need to:

a)   Balance the economic growth of rural and urban areas so that they are mutually supportive;

b) Match increases in rural population with growth in rural employment to avoid rural dormitories;

c) Ensure rural areas provide the modern infrastructure, community facilities, services and housing to support a growing, vibrant and diverse population;

d) Recognise the impact of increasing population in the region on the countryside and biodiversity, and planning positively to ensure responsibility for the environment is not compromised by growth;

e) Recognise the need to maintain most rural land so that it can be used for agricultural purposes to deliver food, fuel & environmental security[xvii] whilst supporting the aspirations to increase the woodland area to meet Read's planting target.

The delivery of ***Balanced Rural Growth*** is therefore the overarching objective for the RWP.

What Needs to Happen?

Delivering balanced growth is not easy, as it requires many, sometimes conflicting pressures on land use to be balanced. However the achievement of balanced growth is central to ensuring that rural areas are sustainable economically, environmentally and socially. It is therefore vital that both rural communities and planners embrace the concept of balanced growth and work together to achieve this.

Rural areas have always changed, and whilst the picture postcard image of slow paced, traditional rural communities is attractive to some, in practice if we wish to see vibrant and inclusive rural communities which are able to sustain a range of services and facilities they have to change, but this can and should be accomplished whilst retaining the distinctive character of the area. All rural communities must embrace an appropriate scale of growth which will allow them to meet the needs of all members of their community.

The delivery of sustainable rural communities requires a proactive planning system which promotes a balance between rural and urban, economic and housing growth, all underpinned by appropriate growth in infrastructure and positive action on the environment.

To achieve this action is needed at the local, sub regional, regional and national level:

- **At the local level -** the implementation of planning policy must ensure that rural community sustainability is promoted by balancing housing, infrastructure and economic growth ***and*** rural communities must embrace change and growth to ensure they remain sustainable;

- **At the Unitary, County or Regional level** - councils and other statutory bodies must ensure that structure plans promote the long term sustainability of rural communities;

- **At the national level** - planning and economic policy must support balanced economic and physical development which recognises that both rural and urban areas need to play a full part in economic, community and environmental development.

Recommendation number 1

National, Regional and Local development policy and the planning system must place more emphasis on achieving sustainable rural communities, and should facilitate the growth of rural villages and Market Towns so that their communities can fulfil their potential and be sustained in the long term.

Recommendation number 2

More resources need to be provided to promote the skills and aspirations of the indigenous rural community so that they can fully engage in the growth agenda for rural areas.

Chapter 2 - Delivering a Dynamic Economy

Summary

- The rural economy needs to continue to diversify and actively embrace all types of potential business

- Investment should be focused on growth sectors, whether these be established industries such as food or tourism, or newer sectors such as knowledge based service or IT businesses

- Skills policy must support an increase in the rural take up of skills provision to close the under-performance in qualification levels which is most marked in more remote rural areas

- Support for the rural economy has to recognise the economic contribution of small businesses, and ensure that regulatory, planning and fiscal policies support their needs and growth

Challenges

The employment mix of rural areas has been changing and is now close to that found in urban areas with employment spread across the commercial, public and third sectors. The Taylor Review (2008) reported that the sectoral mix was very similar (e.g. 15% of businesses in both urban and rural areas in the manufacturing sector).

The Taylor Review also reported that home-based working is under 10% in urban areas, 17% in rural areas and 31% in the most rural areas, and this represents the most significant difference between urban and rural Britain for employment patterns.

Self employment is higher in rural areas, and it is imperative to ensure the regulatory and fiscal framework supports smaller businesses. In its New Approach to the Rural Economy[xviii] the FSB has argued strongly for rate relief, empty buildings rate relief and more positive support for economic diversification to enhance the sustainability of rural communities.

National policies such as community infrastructure levies have a disproportionate impact in rural areas where developments are smaller, and even where a levy is raised there is a danger it would be spent outside the community which hosted the development.

Despite these issues, recent national reports have proposed that rural areas have the capacity to develop their employment levels through diversification (EFRA 2008[xix], CRC 2008) and by supporting more work live units (Taylor 2008). These reviews have also argued that rural areas are suitable locations for nearly all types of businesses and have called on planning policy to support this.

Another area needing consideration is the role of rural areas in accommodating public sector employment. Whilst provision of remote services (on line, phone etc.) and centralisation of services has tended to reduce rural public sector jobs, other initiatives such as relocation of government departments and agencies to rural areas (e.g. CRC) is moving the other way.

The Taylor Review (2008) found that knowledge intensive businesses only increased by 21% in urban areas between 1998-'05, but by 46% in rural areas, dispelling the myth that rural areas lack a focus on high tech enterprise, but reinforcing the need for technology e.g. broadband.

The CRC (2008)[xx] have produced a report on releasing the economic potential of rural areas which proposed a possibility to double the economic output of rural areas. The UK Renewable Energy Strategy (2009)[xxi] and New Industry New Jobs (2009)[xxii] have both pointed to a need to develop new high value high growth markets. Given the increase in high technology businesses in rural areas (Taylor 2008) and potential for sustainable products from land, rural areas have a large role to play.

Despite the recession research continues to show an increased demand for sustainable products (DEFRA 2009)[xxiii], with 47% of consumers willing to do more to help the environment and a jump from 31% ('07) to 51% ('09) in the % of consumers who believe a green lifestyle is normal.

In addition to the role which the rural East of England can play in the broader economy, there are a number of growing sectors which are over-represented in rural areas, e.g. food and tourism.

 The agriculture and food sector has continued to grow during the recession and has been a major influence on the East of England rural economy and landscape over many years but is undergoing radical change. The food chain represents 1 in 7 jobs in the regional economy and produces over 7% of the region's Gross Value Added (GVA). The region has set out a 2020 Vision for the Food and Farming sector[xxiv] which identifies three major areas of activity which will shape the future of the sector in the region, the need to: increase production; manage the environmental impact of the sector; and address the problems created by poor dietary choices. The short term areas proposed for action are spelt out in more detail in the East of England Sustainable Farming and Food Action Plan 2009-2013[xxv], and focus on: research and development and technology transfer; skills; increased investment by businesses and the public sector.

The East of England has a growing tourism industry which has benefitted from the recession. Unlike many regions, however, the East of England has very few large cities and therefore its tourism sector is predominantly focused on the countryside and coast. East of England Tourism estimated that in 2008[xxvi] 131million tourist visits were made to the region, spending £5.15billion in a sector which employs 180,000 people. To recognise the potential of rural tourism East of England tourism has focused recent campaigns on sustainable tourism, local food and drink and encouraging visitors to visit the countryside. Looking forward it is the region's countryside and the numerous market towns, historic houses and coastal communities which will underpin this important sector.

The EERF produced a position paper on skills in 2007[xxvii]. Whilst regional and national research shows that rural areas do well for learning attainment until about the age of 14-15, after this attainment particularly amongst the adult workforce falls behind urban areas. There are big differences between the more accessible and remote rural areas, with remote areas fairing badly on attainment and access, and even more badly in the smallest market towns (State of the Countryside 2007)[xxviii].

Rural areas in the East of England have 35% of their adult population with no qualifications against 28% in urban areas (EESCP 2007). The figures for rural workforce qualification are believed to be

adversely affected by the loss of highly skilled young people who move to urban areas to study or for jobs. Whilst rural specific funds such as RDPE support specialist rural skills provision, the major focus must be on flexing mainstream skills funding to meet rural needs.

Case study: Innovative transport solutions to increase access to skills provision

Norfolk is a large and sparsely populated County with many of the more remote rural locations having poor public transport links. Easton College[xxix], a specialist land based and sports college located just to the West of Norwich, has therefore created a series of direct bus services to move students from outlying locations to the College. With each year seeing more routes being added to the network, the College has been able to open up its courses to many more students and this has helped to address low takeup in the more remote parts of the county.

A more recent scheme[xxx] announced by Norfolk County Council has increased rural sparsity funding from £120 to £200 per student for those studying the new 14-19 diploma to specifically support the access needs of those living in rural locations. The county council is also looking at whether in some circumstance it is more cost effective to move tutors around to service the diplomas.

[Maps of qualification levels to be added in final version]

All reports predict a continued increase in the demand for higher level skills, with rural areas lagging even further behind urban areas in this regard e.g. in Breckland only 16% of the workforce is qualified to Level 4 against nearly 50% in South Cambridgeshire (EESCP 2007). New Industries, New Jobs (BIS 2009) predicts that in developed countries demand for unskilled workers will have fallen 16% but increased 19% for skilled workers over the period 2001-30, and rural skills policy must therefore focus on increasing the proportion of the workforce with higher level qualifications.

Key objectives

To deliver a dynamic rural economy action needs to be taken to increase the growth of existing rural business and to encourage more new businesses in rural areas.

The key objectives for delivering a dynamic rural economy in the East of England are to:

a) Increase rural jobs at a faster rate than the increase in the rural working age population;

b) Invest in sectors which are knowledge intensive where an attractive rural business environment and rural quality of life can be used to attract high calibre employees and inward investment;

c) Build on the opportunity created by new technology to reduce the need for businesses to be based in urban areas (see also Chapter 4 on Embracing the Digital Age);

d) Increase the production of sustainable materials, food and renewable energy to meet growing market demand, and build on the trend towards sustainable tourism;

e) Increase the skills of the rural workforce to the average of the whole economy;

f) Ensure national policies do not hamper rural economic growth.

What Needs to Happen?

Delivering a dynamic economy will ultimately depend on the ambition, entrepreneurialism and innovation of rural people and businesses. There are, however, many areas in which targeted and appropriate interventions by the public sector locally, regionally or nationally which can help to foster a culture of economic growth.

The main areas which action is needed are:

- **In relation to planning and spatial development policy** - to ensure that planning policy supports the creation of more rural employment land to match the increase in rural housing stock, and supports home working to reduce the need for commuting;

- **In relation to economic development policy** - to ensure that policy supports a more dispersed economic development model which assists new businesses, champions diversification and allows existing businesses to grow within their host community, thus reducing the need for commuting and promoting the creation of new high value jobs in the rural economy;

- **In relation to skills policy** - to ensure education funding recognises the specific issues inherent in delivering education and learning provision in sparsely populated areas, increases its focus on adult, continuing and bite size courses through flexible local provision and makes investment in learning and skills less bureaucratic and more attractive to rural employers;

- **Young people and the long term unemployed** - to address the specific needs of young people not in education or employment (NEETs) and older long term unemployed who are particularly disadvantaged by the lack of access to job centres and skills provision in remote rural areas;

- **In relation to regulation and fiscal policy** - to ensure that business policy is supportive of rural business, in particular smaller enterprises by ensuring that new regulatory or fiscal burdens are proportionate and targeted, and that support services recognise the special needs of smaller rural businesses.

Recommendation number 3

Economic development policy must focus on creating rural jobs at a faster rate than the increase in the resident rural population of working age, and a target of growing the East of England rural economy at 3% per annum compared to the RES target of 2.3% per annum for the whole economy should be adopted

Recommendation number 4

Funding allocations for skills provision must recognise the need to increase flexible skills provision in rural areas and to close the gap in skills performance in more remote rural areas

Chapter 3 - Modern infrastructure

Summary

- Rural areas need new housing to be provided in all settlements to allow them to be sustainable

- Rural workspace should be expanded to facilitate local economic growth, and planners need to support requests for home based workspace

- Buildings in rural areas need to be refurbished to ensure they meet modern standards, and to ensure that the large number of currently redundant buildings in rural areas are re-used

- Government needs to ensure that there are adequate incentives to encourage private sector investment in modern infrastructure in rural areas

Challenges

Modern physical infrastructure is essential to the success of any area. It is, however, not only the numbers of houses and buildings to accommodate everything from schools to offices which is important, but also how these buildings are connected, serviced and used which matters. Rural buildings have to be fit for purpose, and in an environment which is changing quickly due to new technology, needs, family structures or pressures to make buildings more sustainable, it is vital that rural buildings can accommodate a changing set of needs.

Most of the buildings which will meet rural needs in the next 20 years already exist, and it is important to recognise that existing rural buildings will have to be refurbished to meet changed needs and planning policy should support this natural evolution in building use to continue.

Case study: At Ringland in Norfolk, Wherry Housing Association commissioned SEAarch Architecture[xxxi] to undertake a pilot project to look at how an existing 3 bedroom house built in the 1930s could be refurbished to deliver performance as good as a modern house built to current building standards. The project was completed in 2009 and included modifying the windows to increase those which were south facing as well as reducing those facing north to maximise solar gain. The scheme also included increasing insulation, adding solar water heating and photovoltaic cells as well as rain water harvesting and under-floor heating. The result was an old house with the same performance as modern construction with heating costs reduced by 85% and carbon emissions by over 90%, which was well in excess of the original target of a 60% reduction set for the project.

Buildings are a major source of carbon emissions, with most reports suggesting that they account for nearly half of total emissions split roughly 50/50 between domestic housing and commercial and public buildings[xxxii], with remote rural areas containing a disproportionate level of poorer housing and households in fuel poverty, with areas such as the Fens being particularly badly affected due to a reliance on older houses and a lack of gas grid connections. Renewables East have estimated that

the lack of gas grid connection applies to over 250 mainly rural communities in the East of England, and that many of the properties in these communities are also old and poorly insulated.

This presents a major challenge for refurbishment and there is a need to upgrade private and public housing stock accordingly. It is also believed that affordable housing supply could be increased rapidly through a targeted programme to reduce empty property in rural areas, but VAT rates currently act as a disincentive for refurbishment (CPRE/NHF 2008). Refurbishment is also an efficient way to address fuel poverty and achieve zero carbon homes, and research shows that refurbishment results in lower embodied carbon than new build.

Rural communities are diverse and need a range of different housing provision. Despite the recession, the population of the East of England is still expected to grow by over a million to seven million by 2031. Housing delivery is failing to meet demand, and new homes must be planned so first-time buyers, young families and others can buy or rent at an affordable price (EERA 2008).

These problems are arguably even more acute in rural areas, where severe restrictions on new housing, and the increasing attractiveness of many areas for second homes has led to local people, particularly younger families being priced out of their own communities. The Taylor Review (2008) highlighted that people who work in the countryside increasingly cannot afford to live there, while people who can afford to live there increasingly do not work there.

It is not the arrival of new residents or even second homes, however, that is most damaging and it can be argued that the incomers should be welcomed for the new wealth and ideas they bring. The real problem is the lack of new affordable housing being built in villages to accommodate the needs of local residents.

The ageing population poses one of the greatest housing challenges. By 2026 older people will account for 48% of the increase in households (Lifetime Homes/ Neighbourhoods Strategy 2008)[xxxiii]. In rural parts of the region this % will be even higher as a consequence of in-migration at retirement, with the retired over-represented in the demographic mix of the region's rural areas. The strategy talks about "Lifetime Neighbourhoods...where transport, good shops, green spaces, decent toilets and benches are consciously planned for people off all ages and conditions in mind". Without a balanced population in terms of ages and socio-economic mix lifetime neighbourhoods cannot be achieved.

Small businesses are the fastest growing sector of the economy, but in many rural areas access to small start up units at affordable rents and on flexible terms (to allow growth) is constrained. New businesses typically need workspace close to home and a number of councils are running schemes to help this process. For example Babergh Council in South Suffolk has a small grants programme to help convert existing redundant buildings into units for new businesses[xxxiv]

Across the country there is a range of work which has been conducted on developing new rural workspace. All these reports show a strong local demand for rented workspace, and in 2006, 26% of total new rural commercial lets were in the East of England[xxxv]. Work in the Haven Gateway

identified a wide range of redundant farm buildings amounting to 700ksqft, with much of this available for re-use quickly if the planning system was supportive.

In Staffordshire there is a Rural Workspace programme (partnership between the rural forum & CLA, NFU and Councils) which found that over half of the demand was from creative industries and business services, both of which are seeing continued growth. Key success factors were engaging the right partners early in the programme and funding flexibility.

Rural access to services and employment rely heavily on effective transport, both public and private, and appropriate infrastructure provision. Sadiq Khan, Transport Minister (2009) has said: "Good transport links are an essential lifeline for rural communities and it's not just a question of the number of bus services, but about going to the right places at the right times".

However, most rural journeys cannot be made using public transport and government taxation policy that seeks to encourage public transport use at the expense of private transport impacts disproportionately in rural areas. Many rural areas in the East of England lack a bus service and some areas, particularly in the North of the region, are over 20 miles from the nearest train station.

For many rural inhabitants a car is therefore essential. The FSB (2009) have also argued that in rural market towns parking charges should be set so that they encourage tourists and shoppers and not set at higher levels to maximise short term revenue generation for the Council.

Key Objectives

The delivery of modern infrastructure in rural areas requires action to be taken on housing provision, workspace and transport.

The key objectives for delivering modern infrastructure in the rural East of England are to:

a) Increase the sustainability of existing buildings, including water, waste and energy services;

b) Increase the supply of high quality, sustainable affordable housing to meet the needs of the rural population;

c) Utilise existing redundant buildings to provide workspace, community facilities or housing, sensitive to community requirements;

d) Deliver new rural transport solutions, which whilst emphasising the need to reduce carbon, include private vehicle use alongside action to increase public and community transport;

e) Take positive action to provide more rural workspace for SMEs and homeworking.

What Needs to Happen?

The challenges on physical infrastructure are large and rural areas will undoubtedly compete with urban areas for investment funds. At a time of public spending restraint it is likely that most

investment in housing and workspace will have to be made by the private sector, but continued public sector investment in strategic transport provision is essential.

To enable this to happen a number of key actions need to be taken:

- **Community sustainability** - through the physical growth of smaller rural communities through the provision of new houses and workspace to assist their sustainability, and by looking at how local needs will evolve by including businesses and young people in parish planning exercises so that their future needs are recognised.

- **Housing -** more houses are needed in rural areas to meet the needs of the existing and future rural population, and particular emphasis needs to be placed on:

  o Increasing the supply of affordable housing by both the third (e.g. Housing Associations) and private sector, but because of problems in building only affordable housing commercially planners must be more receptive to proposals for affordable housing within market housing developments;

  o Creating affordable housing by increasing the supply of land, making more use of exception sites, and through using new public and private finance including housing provision by private landowners who are prepared to commit to housing which remains affordable in perpetuity;

- **Workspace** - more rural workspace is needed to support the growth of the rural economy through meeting the needs of existing and new businesses to reduce the need for rural residents and entrepreneurs to commute or re-locate;

- **Building sustainability** - needs to be increased by providing more support for rural building owners to increase sustainability by:

  o Improving incentives for water, waste and energy improvements;

  o Addressing current disincentives such as VAT treatment which act to restrict the incentive for refurbishment;

  o Focusing on how refurbishment can help to address poor health and social conditions by creating better living conditions;

- **Transport -** national transport policy needs to recognise that rural transport is likely to remain focused on private transport given the nature of rural areas in addition to promoting new transport solutions for example through a framework to help social enterprise in the transport sector to move forward[xxxvi].

Recommendation number 5

Planning policy should support the growth of rural communities to help them become more sustainable economically and socially

Recommendation number 6

The government should review the treatment of refurbishment in relation to VAT to encourage more rural properties to be brought back into commercial, community or residential use

Recommendation number 7

In order to ensure perpetuity of affordable housing and increase supply, the Secretary of State, under the provisions of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 should designate all rural settlements as "protected", thereby enabling providers of shared ownership to limit the amount of equity that can be purchased, or require that the property is sold back to the provider if the resident purchases 100% of the equity and then wishes to move

Chapter 4 - Embracing the Digital Age

Summary

- The East of England's rural areas suffer from poorer access to broadband than urban areas and this is restricting economic and social progress whilst increasing environmental costs

- Other countries have adopted a wide range of alternative broadband technologies, with many seeing rural broadband as an essential utility

- Increasing numbers of consumers have no fixed line connection and mobile telephone and broadband coverage has to be improved to allow them to participate fully in society

- Solving rural access to digital communications would deliver substantial economic and social benefits, whilst helping the government to reduce the costs of service delivery

Challenges

Access to modern digital communications is increasingly recognised as both a key enabler of rural progress, but also one of the major constraints which many rural communities are currently experiencing. In the development of the RWP Rural Forum members themselves identified the lack of adequate broadband as the most critical issue facing rural areas.

Digital technology has the potential to bring benefits to rural areas by improving access to services, creating more flexible labour markets, helping rural residents access skills provision, whilst also helping address climate change and aiding economic recovery. As well as the internet, digital technology includes digital television, radio and mobile phones and it is important to look at all of these when considering digitally enabled communities. Consideration must be given to rural reception to ensure rural communities are not disadvantaged particularly after the switchover.

An estimated 90% of public services are now available online, with some exclusively online[xxxvii]. There are potentially reduced costs for businesses in complying with legislation, e.g. the Whole Farm Approach reduces form filling by 15% and is estimated to save the industry £16.5m per year[xxxviii].

Digital technology has an increasingly important role in learning and skills. As well as providing opportunities for distance e-learning and qualifications at all levels, there is a vast range of online resources which can be accessed anywhere with an internet connection, although the complexity of many of the learning materials means that faster speeds are increasingly needed. To enable learners of all ages to access these resources ICT skills are of growing importance.

Businesses are increasingly reliant on the internet, and most businesses have to file their returns for PAYE and VAT online from April 2010[xxxix]. The Federation of Small Business (FSB) has estimated that by 2012, £1 in every £5 will come from online commerce and stated that most small businesses want a minimum speed of 8Mbps[xl]. With 72% of small businesses operating a website, there is a need to make sure they have access to effective broadband to meet the demands of customers and clients[xli].

In early 2009, 65% of UK households had a fixed broadband connection, compared to just 4% of UK households in 2002.[xlii] However, rural broadband speed is not keeping pace with urban provision and the current 2017 80% target for high speed broadband is seen by many as too little too late[xliii]. An FSB report[xliv] concluded that the key reason for the lack of take-up of new internet tools could be the lack of high-speed broadband, as only 37% of businesses had access to broadband over 4Mbps.

The FSB also found that there were strong links between educational level, owner's age and internet adoption with some companies relocating to urban areas to remain competitive. Lack of broadband speed hinders home workers[xlv], to whom upload speeds are critical as they enable the exchange of data with remote networks, but most ISP's prioritise download speeds[xlvi].

Advertised download speeds are expected to rise quickly in a few years to 100Mbps – 200Mbps, to allow rapid file downloading, video and improved uploading[xlvii]. The Government is committed to ensuring that every household will have access to 2Mbps by 2012, but clearly if content develops which needs speeds in excess of this (as most video already does), this will still not be fast enough for many applications. At the present time over 42% of rural households don't reach 2Mbps[xlviii], 160,000households cannot access broadband services at all, and another 1.5 million cannot download at more than ½Mb.[xlix].

Case Study: Broadband in rural Sweden

Sweden is a world leader in broadband – always appearing near the top of any OECD tables despite its sparse population. Some 85% of the broadband projects are owned by regional utility companies and the municipalities. The 2009 Broadband Quality Study[l], found that Sweden had the highest quality broadband in Europe and is also closing the broadband quality gap within its own country: with residents outside the most populated cities enjoying better quality than those in the cities.

Rural areas such as those of the Nordic countries are often targets for fibre roll outs as traditional broadband cannot reach these areas and provide an acceptable level of service.[li] Åsa Torstensson, Sweden's Infrastructure Minister, has pledged that by 2020, 90% of Swedish households will have access to broadband at speeds of at least 100Mbps, with at least 40% achieving this by 2015[lii].

Skellefteå is a community of around 70,000 people in the rural north of Sweden. With just 10 people per square kilometre, the area is more sparsely populated than England's most sparsely populated areas, yet 80% of the households are connected to a fibre–based service. The project is a partnership between the community and SkeKraft; one of the largest energy companies in Sweden.

One of the key factors in the success of the project is a sharing of the work between SkeKraft and the community. This structure has kept the cost of connecting a home to around £2,500 – while still more than an urban norm, is considerably less than the costs of a traditional network. Customers pay an initial installation fee of £450 and a monthly subscription of £10 per month for a 10 Mbps broadband service, and £13 for telephony and internet service. There is also a mechanism for recognising contributions both in kind and financially. Members of the community that are in a position to, for example, dig the trenches for their neighbours, are rewarded, encouraging active community engagement in the project with a safeguard against volunteer fatigue. [liii]

The current proposed "broadband tax" on landlines to fund next generation access broadband by 2017 may not deliver in rural areas because the £1-1.5bn that this levy is likely to raise is thought to be insufficient to upgrade all the copper network to fibre optic in rural areas [liv]. The costs of installing fibre optic cable to remote rural areas means that other options to provide broadband in rural "not spots" need to be considered in the short term:

- Satellite broadband could be a viable option in rural areas, e.g. Eutelsat already offers speeds of 3.6Mbps with 10Mbps available later in 2010, and the Irish Government is already using this technology to provide broadband in rural areas[lv] whilst the Scottish Executive have used a range of solutions;

- Mobile broadband is viable in some areas, however, 3G coverage varies across the country and according to provider, and current maps indicate that coverage is far from guaranteed[lvi];

- BT Openreach's Broadband Enabling Technology is capable of turning "Not Spots" into "Yes Spots", is being trialled in 9 UK exchanges including rural areas[lvii] but only delivers upto 2Mbps.

Case study: Digiweb, Ireland[lviii]

Digiweb the national telecommunications and managed services provider in Ireland undertook a comprehensive nationwide survey of Irish businesses which identified more than 8,000 businesses and organisations that are located in broadband 'black spot' areas.

The 8,169 organisations highlighted by the research are mainly small businesses in rural areas. Many of those identified are involved in the retail, tourism and agribusiness sectors. Satellite broadband technology is now seen as an integral part of the overall digital strategy as it potentially allows 100% coverage of even very remote rural areas.

In May 2009, Digiweb launched a satellite broadband service 'Digiweb Tooway', which offers download speeds of up to 3.6Mbps to all customers, and after a satellite infrastructure upgrade program, Digiweb will increase the speeds to 10Mbps throughout all areas of Ireland later in 2010.

The business has reported that 'demand for satellite broadband has been phenomenal so far, particularly from organisations and residents in rural areas with restricted or no internet access. With our research showing that more than 8,000 small businesses are currently under served, we expect the market for satellite technology to continue its high growth rate'

Key Objectives

The delivery of digital inclusion in rural areas would bring economic and social benefits whilst also ensuring that the cost of providing public services in these areas could be reduced.

The key objectives which a digital rural programme In the East of England needs to include are:

a) The need for all rural areas to have access to affordable next generation digital technology by 2013 (in line with EU Commission proposals), and to achieve an immediate move to universal 2Mbps or faster by using all available technologies;

b) To ensure that next generation access (super-fast) broadband is seen as an essential utility[lix];

c) To ensure access to mobile broadband is improved so that the 20% (mainly young people) who now have no fixed line can access broadband services[lx];

d) The stimulation of broadband demand in rural "not spots" to create commercially viable demand by pooling the purchasing power of public sector, domestic and business users[lxi];

e) Ensure that there is a willingness amongst all sectors of the rural population and workforce to adopt new technology matched with appropriate training provision.

What Needs to Happen?

Delivering effective broadband to rural areas in the East of England is not easy given the diversity of areas which need to be served, the growth in people without a fixed line connection and significant cost issues associated with whichever technology is adopted. However, other countries have made more progress, and in many cases already have access speeds in excess of UK targets for 2012. Unless this area is addressed as a matter of urgency rural areas will lag behind economically and socially whilst imposing higher environmental costs than are desirable.

The main areas where action is needed are:

- **Fixed line/fixed point connection** - all available technologies: fibre; wireless and satellite, need to used as appropriate so that rural areas are not left dis-advantaged by a slow roll out of fibre cwhich will leave many rural areas lagging significantly for at least the next 10 years, with a target to deliver next generation access to all areas by 2013 by using all available technologies;

- **Mobile broadband and telephony** - work is needed to close the gaps in mobile coverage through greater co-operation between service providers and to meet the needs of the growing percentage of the population who have no fixed line connection - this would deliver benefits for rural residents but also allow government and other businesses to move faster in delivering services online thus reducing costs and improving efficiency;

- **Co-ordinating demand** - work to demonstrate demand in "not spots" for commercially viable broadband solutions is needed, and public sector bodies could pool purchasing power and work together to aggregate demand for broadband and then take a realistic commercial case to the private sector [lxii] through ensuring that the needs of individuals, households, businesses and the public sector are coordinated;

- **Training and uptake** - there needs to be a willingness amongst all sectors of the rural population to adopt new technology, and appropriate training for all sectors of the rural population will provide the skills to make full use of available technology and stimulate demand - this includes

engaging "Hearts and Minds", and is particularly significant in relation to healthcare, the ageing workforce in the NHS and other parts of the public sector

Recommendation number 8

Effective broadband should be seen as an essential utility in rural areas in line with the EU Commission who have said that high speed broadband should be affordable and available to all EU citizens, and Government should work with rural communities to ensure all areas have access to 2Mbps by the end of 2010 and next generation broadband by 2013 through using all available technologies

Recommendation number 9

Broadband policy must be future proofed by looking at all available technologies, including mobile, so that broadband roll out recognises changing user needs (e.g. more mobile access) and new technological solutions to provide universal high speed broadband

Chapter 5 - A Living Environment

Summary

- A living environment is a key public good in its own right, but can also deliver substantive economic and community benefits

- New ideas and collaborative approaches to managing the environment which include land managers, the community and support bodies are needed

- The range of issues which need action includes land management, water resource and flooding risk, public access and heritage

- The region needs to explore new approaches to land management decisions such as ecosystem services which can help to balance conflicting pressures on the environment

Challenges

The East of England's landscape has many contrasts but there has been a steady decline in distinctiveness both within and between character areas. This is due to changes to agricultural practices, the impact of development, roads and infrastructure, recreational and tourism activity[lxiii]. 23% of the region's SSSI's were in unfavourable condition (2008) due to coastal squeeze, water pollution and abstraction. Recent changes in farming have been beneficial for the natural environment, but biodiversity in the wider countryside remains in a fragile state and appears to be in poorer condition than SSSIs. Farmland bird numbers are 52% lower than in 1966, and were adversely affected by changes in farming in the 1970s and '80s.[lxiv]

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) proposes ambitious targets to create new wildlife habitats and restore species populations with the East of England having the ability to achieve this. Opportunities for achieving the BAP targets may arise with development proposals and as a result of climate change (e.g. wetland creation, saltmarsh creation, heathland restoration). Such schemes can provide accessible and attractive green spaces for local communities and visitors[lxv]. All of these issues feed into work to develop a valuing ecosystems services approach.

The value of tourism in the protected landscapes of the East of England was over £844 million in 2006, which accounted for 16% of the total value of tourism to the region (Natural England 2009)[lxvi]. More broadly there is growing awareness of the importance of countryside and green space access to health and wellbeing, and various initiatives are attempting to get more people into the green gym on their doorstep.

The East of England has a wealth of historic buildings and distinctive landscape features, with rural and coastal areas particularly rich in these features. There are over 1500 Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the region, and the historic buildings found in the region's villages are of significant value as they add to the character, social and economic value of the area. However, significant numbers of historic buildings and sites are at risk of deterioration and English Heritage[lxvii] has

identified the need to secure the future of redundant buildings by encouraging adaptive re-use. Coastal management policies must also take account of the historic environment. There is a recognised skills shortage in the maintenance of historic buildings.

Water quality in rivers has improved considerably over the last decade due to tighter regulation and specific guidelines for land managers. However, diffuse pollution continues to be an issue due to some farming methods. In the region Defra has identified 12 Catchment Sensitive Priority Areas where farmers are eligible for support and grant aid to help mitigate this issue. [lxviii]

The two key issues in the East of England relating to water quantity are the fear of flood and drought. The East of England is the driest region in England, and one of the fastest growing. Water resources are limited and there are already supply-demand issues in the southern parts of the region. Agriculture uses a higher percentage of water than the national average (5% versus 1%) but this can rise on occasional days to over 60% (for irrigation)[lxix]. In some catchments abstraction is not reliable during dry winters and under predicted scenarios for climate change more frequent drought conditions are expected, leading to increased pressure on resources.[lxx]

The region contains many low-lying areas at risk from flooding. The coastline is also at significant risk from coastal flooding, including inland from the Wash. The region's vulnerability (due to the impact of climate change) to flooding is increasing and in parts of the region a policy of managed realignment may be both needed and beneficial to the management of flood risk by enabling development to be safeguarded and new habitats, such as saltmarsh, to be created.

Case Study: The Great Fen Project

This habitat restoration project will create a 3,700ha wetland between Huntingdon and Peterborough. It will connect two important nature reserves, Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen. It will be managed for wildlife conservation but will also create new green space that is needed as the region continues to expand in population; recreational and tourism opportunities; education for children and adults and business opportunities in the form of "organic" meat production from the animals used to graze the site and reed and sedge harvesting.

This project is a partnership of the Environment Agency, Huntingdonshire District Council, Middle Level Commissioners, Natural England and the Wildlife Trust who recognised that agriculture and urban growth have resulted in the loss of sites of conservation value across lowland Britain. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Fens where, since 1600, over 99% of traditional fen wetland has been lost. Recent research by the Open University (Great Fen 2008) has shown that the Great Fen project has the potential to reduce climate change emissions from land. It will also provide habitats for wildlife to survive as climate changes and becomes less predictable. Climate change will increase the number of storm events, increasing the risk of flooding. The project is currently identifying the best locations in the project area to store flood water, providing protection for surrounding land and property.

Valuing ecosystem services is a new methodology which is currently being developed to balance the multiple pressures which impinge on land management decisions. Whilst still in development it has the potential to help rural communities and planners with some of the more complex decisions they have to make on which land uses are most appropriate in particular locations. Given the need for rural land to provide multiple benefits e.g. food, fuel, environmental, cultural and social functions, this approach is to be welcomed.

Key Objectives

Achieving a living environment would be challenging anywhere, but as a growing region the major challenge facing the East of England's rural areas is how to manage the growth proposed without adversely impacting on the rural environment.

The key objectives for the living environment are to:

a) Increase the positive and reduce the negative impacts of agricultural systems on wildlife and the environment;

b) Deliver the Bio-diversity Action Plan (BAP) targets;

c) Increase water storage capacity to avoid future water scarcity;

d) Manage flood risk;

e) Promote the role of the landscape, heritage and the historic built environment in supporting economic and community development including health and wellbeing;

f) Engage in the process to develop the valuing ecosystem services approach.

What Needs to Happen?

To deliver a continued focus on a living environment action needs to be taken in a range of areas by communities, individuals, landowners and businesses as well as the public sector.

Many of the issues are complex and cross boundaries, both physical boundaries and in terms of the responsibilities of different groups and individuals. They therefore demand collaborative solutions. The complexity of many of the issues also demands the use of R & D to develop new approaches to land management to produce long term environmental benefits, or new models of working to overcome the constraints of current legislative or policy constraints on innovative solutions.

The main areas in which action is needed are:

- **Agriculture and land management practices** - by continuing to promote the sustainable management of land, reductions in diffuse pollution, the recreation of habitats and buffers for sensitive sites.

- **Access** - further efforts to promote access to the natural environment should be developed, for health reasons and to promote more community engagement in environmental management;

- **Water resources** - through promoting more sustainable management of water resources by increasing water storage capacity, water efficiency, water harvesting and collaborative irrigation schemes;

- **Flood risk** - by promoting sustainable drainage, innovative approaches to manage coastal flooding and 'soft' engineering solutions for river flooding;

- **Heritage** - through promoting the role of heritage and the historic built environment in supporting economic and community development;

- **Eco-system services** - by supporting further work to develop models to apply the concept of Ecosystem Services so that it can be used to help determine how land use is planned.

Recommendation number 10

Research and development should be undertaken into new models of sustainable land and water management systems which can produce positive economic, environmental and social benefits to the region and local stakeholders

Recommendation number 11

Environmental management schemes should experiment with new methods of delivering greater community engagement to support positive social and environmental outcomes by working collaboratively with landowners and land managers

Chapter 6 - Dealing with Climate Change

Summary

- Climate change is a particular threat to the East of England given its low lying topography and extensive coastline, with rural areas in the frontline

- Future projections suggest the region will be more severely affected than other regions with particular issues on increased temperature, water scarcity and sea level rise

- Action is needed to adapt to climate change as well as finding ways to reduce carbon emissions to mitigate future climate change

- Innovation is needed in how the East of England's rural areas work, travel and manage their buildings to adapt to climate change

Challenges

Due to its economy and landscape the region is at severe risk from the effects of climate change. The main impacts will be increased risk of coastal and fluvial flooding; more frequent storm events; an increase in demand for water; changes in biodiversity and loss of habitats; an increase in the growing season for crops and trees but reduced availability of water for irrigation[lxxi]. Health service provision, pollution control and leisure and tourism will also be severely affected.

Work carried out on behalf of Defra by UK Climate Projections in 2009[lxxii] has identified projected changes for the 2020s, 2050s and 2080s under the high, medium and low emission scenarios across the country and region by region. The key headlines from this work are:

- Sea level around the UK rose by about 1mm per annum in the 20th century, but the rate for the 1990s and 2000s has been higher than this;

- Average temperature across the UK has risen since the mid 20th century by between 1.0 and 1.7 °C, with the increase largest in the south and east of England and smallest in Scotland.

The key challenge for rural areas is to respond to the twin challenges of:

- Adapting to climate change impacts by both understanding and responding proactively to the risks and benefits which may result;

- Mitigating climate change by adopting lower carbon lifestyles.

In the East of England the biggest adaptation issues are connected to water resources, as was explored earlier in Chapter 5. Managing both the risk of coastal or fluvial flooding and measures to secure adequate water supplies will therefore be essential at the regional level. Rural areas have a major role to play within this as they are both in the frontline of coastal or river flooding, but can also potentially provide a home for new reservoirs or flood meadows to capture and store water at times of peak flow.

To play its part in helping to mitigate the effects of climate change the region must reduce greenhouse gases as proposed by Stern[lxxiii], and the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) has set a 2031 target for a 60% reduction in CO_2 emissions. To achieve this new building designs and infrastructure as well as changes to consumer products and transport and planning systems will be required.

Agriculture and the natural environment are very exposed to these changes and will need to adopt new land management systems to address the need for new crops and sustainable coastal management[lxxiv]. The Forestry Commission (Read 2009)[lxxv] have proposed that woodland can play an important role in climate change response.

In rural areas, some communities are experimenting with how to become carbon neutral[lxxvi]. In these areas where dependency on private car usage is high and there are limited local services, changes in behaviour and service delivery methods are needed to reduce carbon emissions.

Community participation and attitudinal change will also be needed, along with planning for sustainable lifestyles. One interesting area is whether the increase in home working, and a more devolved model of economic development as proposed in Chapter 2 could help to reduce the need for commuting and thus deliver substantial carbon saving benefits.

The region's climate change partnership has developed an understanding of existing activity on adaptation and mitigation and produced a climate change action plan[lxxvii].

Case Study: The Town off the Grid: Güssing – Austria[lxxviii]

In 1992 the Austrian town of Güssing, with 4,000 people, was struggling to pay its electricity bill. Public buildings were ordered not to use fossil fuels and an alternative energy industry developed. Since then, over 50 companies and 1,000 jobs have been created in the town in the renewable energy sector, and since 1995, Gussing has reduced its carbon dioxide emissions by 93%. This was achieved by identifying how the town could benefit from the surrounding natural resources.

The town now has 2.5MWe/ 4.5MWth wood gasification biomass power plant with 12km of district energy pipelines serving local homes (drawing wood from a 30 mile radius); a biodiesel plant producing 81 million litres per annum, a solar plant and a regional energy plan. The town's energy plants generate a surplus of 500,000 euros per annum for the community.

One of the key reasons for the towns success was the drive and determination of the mayor who was able to unite environmental, economic and security of supply interests.

As the region's population increases energy demand will continue to rise. Current distribution network capacity is problematic in several rural areas and careful planning is needed to ensure development in rural areas is not disadvantaged or halted through poor infrastructure[lxxix]. More flexibility will be needed to match the demand and supply from the national grid or embedded local generation.

> **Case study:** Villagers build their own Power Station[lxxx]
>
> It is possible through community ownership to help sustain the local economy and provide payback through economic, social and environmental benefits. With an increased number of dispersed, renewable energy schemes it is essential to engage local communities so they feel involved, consulted and supportive of new initiatives. Community involvement schemes tend to be less contentious and are beneficial as ownership provides a steady stream of income to invest locally.
>
> The village of Kentmere in Cumbria hope to build their own £1.25million hydroelectricity scheme to raise money for the community. The scheme will earn an annual profit of up to £100,000 by feeding the National Grid - and the profits will go to charitable causes in the village. The project will provide power for 300 average homes and subject to approval is likely to be running by the end of 2012. This community-owned scheme came out of a parish meeting two years ago and is run by a charitable trust.

The Housing Green Paper (2007) set targets for all new homes to be zero carbon by 2016. In order to meet these targets efficiency must be improved combined with increased use of local renewable generation[lxxxi]. This will also help combat fuel poverty, which affected 9.8% of the region's households in 2006, a figure which will increase if action is not taken[lxxxii]. Over 60 and single person households, and off grid rural areas like the Fens, have the highest levels of fuel poverty.

The East of England is the leading English region for renewable electricity, currently producing 8.9% of its electricity from renewable energy. The Renewables East 2008 Strategy[lxxxiii] has identified a road map to achieving the UK's 2020 objectives in the region. The key forms of renewable energy are on/off shore wind, biomass, farm waste and landfill gas. As some of these sources are intermittent in nature, they impose technical challenges in power system operation.

The key issues for rural areas in responding to the challenge of climate change are to:

a) Mitigate climate change by adopting lower carbon lifestyles;

b) Adapt to the challenges of climate change by making buildings, transport systems, communities and vital services less susceptible to the risks created by climate change.

Key Objectives

Climate change will affect all areas of the rural East of England. Whilst some impacts, notably flooding risk are dependent on location and topography, others such as temperatures, water shortage and potential threat of storms will impact across the whole region.

The key objectives for living with climate change are to:

a) Integrate and embed actions that will mitigate climate change into the regions rural constituents' day to day life and work style;

b) Ensure spatial, economic and environmental policy promotes low carbon models of rural development;

c) Ensure rural communities are prepared for the consequences of climate change and take appropriate proactive action to manage its impact on their lives and the wider environment.

What Needs to Happen?

Climate change is a significant long term challenge for the rural East of England, which will require action by a wide range of bodies and individuals over an extended period of time.

The key actions for rural areas in responding to the challenge of climate change are to:

- **Plan for climate change in spatial and physical development** - by ensuring the planning system promotes low carbon growth by supporting proposals for devolved models of economic development to reduce the need for commuting (including home working) or by promoting the use of low carbon local products and renewable energy schemes;

- **Plan for climatic extremes** - by putting in place contingency plans for severe weather e.g. floods, storms or heat;

- **Reward households, business and individuals for providing climate change adaptation resources** - by rewarding actions which contribute to climate change management at either the individual or community level e.g. by providing flood meadows to reduce urban flooding;

- **Reduce carbon emissions** - by adopting lower carbon lifestyles, embracing new technologies, improving resource management and promoting local renewable energy generation by making the licensing, regulatory and incentives regimes for renewable energy easier to use;

- **Demonstrate community leadership in climate action** - by promoting innovation, engaging with local champions to drive forward solutions and by focusing on the young.

Recommendation number 12

The region needs to develop a rural climate change action plan to promote innovative ways in which the rural community can reduce carbon emissions by changing behaviour, reducing the need for transport and by developing a low carbon model of development.

Recommendation number 13

The delivery of the regional plan for climate change adaptation should promote innovative ways in which rural communities can prepare for climate change impacts, and champion innovative solutions led at the individual, organisational or community level.

Chapter 7 - Living well

Summary

- Living well is about more than access to services, and has to be seen as a holistic concept where education, employment, housing, health and service provision collectively determine wellbeing

- The way services are provided is changing due to re-organisation, new technology and financial constraints and it is important for rural areas that these changes produce beneficial outcomes for rural communities through innovation and the positive engagement of rural communities

- Rural areas are safe places to live, but there is still opportunity to reduce the incidence of low level crime and to increase rural residents' perception that they do live in a safe place

- Addressing health and social care provision will be increasingly important as the rural population ages, although it is vital to still take account of the needs of the whole population in developing new ways of meeting complex needs

Challenges

Many of the region's rural areas are faced with declining or threatened local services. Unless a community has a range of households the demand for services will be hard to sustain (CPRE/NHF 2008)[lxxxiv]. Evidence suggests that rural areas which don't sustain a range of employment will struggle with service provision as they lack a daytime population to access services close to where they work. Home working and internet based enterprise can help to address this issue (CLG 2009)[lxxxv]. The regional plan stresses that new houses must be aligned with new jobs, but whilst this is normally assumed to mean urban employment, new ways of working and technologies such as broadband can allow this to occur in rural areas.

Case Study: Stutton Community Shop[lxxxvi]

This is an example of community action to provide local services following the closure of the village shop and post office. The new Stutton Community Shop, next to the Community Hall opened at the end of 2008 with the full cooperation of the Parish Council and the Community Hall Committee. It is registered as a Community Interest Company (CIC) and has a voluntary committee, a shop manager and a team of volunteers who staff the shop.

The shop stocks a wide range of products including freshly baked bread and will deliver to homes in the community for a charge of £1. In addition the shop acts as a meeting place for residents, serving tea, coffee and hot chocolate, and a Fish Van is located outside the shop on Thursday afternoons. The shop is open 7 days a week and is increasing the range of products that it stocks according to customer requirements/requests.

FSB (2009)[lxxxvii] highlights that there are 4,750 rural post offices in England and has called for a new Post Bank and highlights a failure to modernise services to keep up with those introduced by other providers as a key issue. The government has responded with plans for new financial services[lxxxviii].

For more affluent rural residents broadband is allowing improved access to retail and other services. However, many rural households lack broadband, don't have the income or skills to utilise online services and are dependent on local provision. In many areas local shops, pubs and other outlets are closing, and broadband is accelerating this as those with access to the internet take business away.

Rural community building usage has trebled since 1988[lxxxix], in buildings with a value of over £3bn and which form a crucial but largely ignored aspect of community engagement. The report suggests that these facilities have supported an increasingly wide range of outcomes for the community, but only 3% receive regular funding from their local authority, and many struggle with viability, maintenance and repairs.

Community safety as measured by crime rates is lower than in urban areas, however the perception of rising crime levels causes concern to rural residents. Action to reassure residents and address theft from remote premises, anti-social behaviour or fly tipping can do much to allay the fear of crime in rural areas, although the action taken needs to be well publicised to achieve this.

It is widely assumed that rural populations are healthier and mortality is lower in rural areas. However, a number of studies have challenged this and found that differences in socio-economic circumstances largely explain most of the differences (HSQ 2008)[xc]. Rural communities across the region are diverse and those in poverty, and thus at risk of poor health, are dispersed amongst the affluent, masking their needs. There are also marginalised groups (e.g. travellers and migrants), whose needs are often not apparent in routine NHS monitoring.

Case study: St Michael's Care Complex-Aylsham, Norfolk [xci]

This is an innovative project which when completed in 2011 will provide a state of the art health centre, housing with care scheme, care home with nursing and community centre for local people through a partnership between the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The development partnership includes NHS Norfolk, Aylsham Care Trust, Runwood Homes and Circle Anglia, with Aylsham Town Council, Norfolk County Council, Norfolk Community Health and Care and the Hungate Street Medical Practice also involved in the planning process. Local residents were also involved in the planning process through a survey commissioned by NHS Norfolk and carried out by Ipsos MORI, with the support from the Community Involvement Panel (CIP).

The opening of a new 24-bed dedicated stroke rehabilitation unit at Norwich Community Hospital has formed a crucial part of the planning of future care in Aylsham as it means fewer community beds are required at Aylsham, whilst stroke care and rehabilitation, although centralised has been considerably improved for patients.

The age balance is also shifting, with the elderly choosing to live in rural areas, whilst the young migrate out. In fact the latest research shows that the East of England's elderly rural population is increasing faster than any other region except the SE, with the number of residents over the age of 60 increasing by 135,000 between 2001-'08[xcii].

Together with longer, but not always healthier lifespans, these changes increase the demand for services. Rurality also increases the risk of isolation, mental and physical ill health e.g. suicide rates in males are 11% higher in rural areas than urban (after allowing for deprivation (HSQ 2008)), and evidence suggests rural patients present later which can affect outcomes e.g. cancers.

Rural residents are likely to spend more time in the car compared to urban residents. There is increasing evidence of the physical, mental and emotional benefits of time spent in green space (Natural Heritage 2008)[xciii], and the Walking the Way to Health initiative has been shown to have real health and economic benefits (Natural England 2009)[xciv].

Key Objectives

To support rural residents in living well it is important to ensure that community, economic and social infrastructure supports healthy vibrant communities. Rural residents need to be supported so they can easily access appropriate services as well as focusing on proactive and preventative action to stop problems arising in the first place.

The key objectives for delivering a living well agenda in rural areas are to:

a) Ensure rural people have access to education, training and jobs which allows them to fulfil their economic and social potential;

b) Ensure they have access to housing that is affordable, built or refurbished to 'decent homes standards' and appropriate to their family needs;

c) Provide an appropriate mix of service provision relevant to all ages and needs;

d) Ensure that transport solutions are appropriate, timely and responsive to rural needs;

e) Making rural areas "safe" places to live and work in terms of both the perception and reality;

f) Ensure that health and social care provision is 'the right care, in the right place at the right time'[xcv].

What Needs to Happen?

Ensuring that people in the rural East of England live well is not simply about access to services and health provision. Evidence shows that economic and social deprivation are determinants of poor health and wellbeing, and therefore to ensure people live well it is important to address housing, employment, skills, health and access to services in a holistic way.

The main areas where action is needed are:

- **Services** - to ensure all rural residents regardless of age, needs or location can access the services they need to live well by:

    o Encouraging the provision of more services in market towns and larger villages which are accessible to local rural residents;

    o Facilitating community ownership approaches to services and delivering public services in new ways by making more use of community buildings[xcvi] and by promoting partnerships with the private sector, e.g. in village or farm shops;

    o Promoting remote access to services through improving broadband and mobile phone coverage as explored in more detail in Chapter 4;

- **Community Safety** - where better promotion of actions which are being taken is needed to reassure residents as well as targeted new programmes to deal with specific issues such as preventing anti-social behaviour by delivering effective local youth services.

- **Health and social care** - by providing appropriate health and social care locally in new and flexible ways[xcvii], whilst balancing local and specialist centralised provision to take account of the diverse nature of the rural population. Care provision also needs to be imaginative and accessible and this should include creative and effective ways of engaging people in NHS preventative services and health promotion activity.

In addition action in relation to living well links to other Chapters dealing with:

- **Employment and skills** - to match housing growth with appropriate growth in a range of employment and skills opportunities to help rural residents fulfil their potential as explored in more detail in Chapter 2;

- **Housing** - where both appropriate and high quality housing is provided as explored in more detail in Chapter 3;

- **Transport** - where improving transport provision allows rural people to access the services they need as explored in more detail in Chapter 3;

- **Living Environment** - where an attractive and healthy local natural environment aids people's wellbeing as explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

Recommendation number 14

New creative solutions to provide activities for rural young people, particularly the 14-17 year old age group, who are not currently engaged and therefore at risk of causing anti-social behaviour

Recommendation number 15

The provision of rural service provision in villages and market towns should be increased through building on multi-agency approaches including the third sector and through making more use of community buildings, whilst recognising that in some circumstances it is better to provide appropriate transport to assist rural residents in accessing centralised specialist provision, particularly in relation to complex health needs

Chapter 8 - Engaged Communities

Summary

- To deliver change in rural communities it is essential to engage local people

- Rural areas have strong established communities, but particularly in remote locations connections from these communities to many public sector structures are weak

- Rural communities have witnessed rapid demographic change and this has led to new groups within the community who are often marginalised

- Engagement overload, the need to co-ordinate action and new ways to communicate with residents are all key issues which need to be addressed

Challenges

Change only happens with engaged people and communities to champion and drive forward action, and genuine empowerment comes from people taking responsibility for making things happen[xcviii].

Since April 2009 all Councils have had a "Duty to Involve". However, a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008)[xcix] found that services are delivered by an increasingly diverse range of providers, with corresponding issues for user and community involvement. The research suggests that clearer links are needed between strategic partnerships at ward level and those at local authority level.

Previous research on policies promoting local decision-making has identified an 'implementation gap' when policy is put into practice. The Joseph Rowntree study concludes that it is possible to achieve community empowerment but that it will need to be designed into policies and actively resourced and promoted by government. Community empowerment actions also need to allow for local practice that reflects the social and geographical characteristics of diverse rural areas.

Historically communities in rural areas have been self supporting but due to demographic and social trends this is changing. In rural areas the ability to engage effectively is compounded by access issues, and incomers such as migrants are particularly at risk of not having their views heard effectively.

E-communication channels are potentially useful to target hard to reach groups, but so far have only been used in limited situations. The Local Government Information Unit (2009) has urged councils to use social networking to boost youth participation[c], and mobile phones also provide a route to these communities. In rural areas where many people live remotely from the communities in which they seek services, this move to e-communications could help to overcome one of the barriers many rural residents face, but issues with mobile phone and broadband coverage as outlined in Chapter 4 is an obvious issue in delivering this. Care homes are using Nintendo Wii to keep the elderly fit, this has a built in web browser and Councils could improve website access for this audience via this

route. Digital television also offers the potential to engage with people who don't access the internet[ci].

The Rural Community Councils[cii] have found that the principles of good engagement may be helped by simpler governance structures, however many rural communities have expressed concerns that unitary structures based on large urban areas risk marginalising them. They also found that in order to increase the rural voice some parish and town councils have introduced "clustering", to address common issues across multiple communities.

ACRE[ciii] has identified that in order to reach the hard to engage and hard to reach it is important to use creative approaches through for example the involvement of existing local groups. The extended dialogue increases local people's understanding of the needs of all residents, particularly those disadvantaged by lack of mobility, lack of employment, or marginalised for other reasons.

Communities who have a diverse number of residents will increase their skills, knowledge and confidence to actively participate and volunteer in their community. This helps them to feel that their views are heard.

The importance of volunteering to rural community life is vital in improving community cohesion. Where there is a thriving and well-supported voluntary and community sector, including infrastructure, anchor organisations and social enterprises communities tend to be empowered.[civ] It is recognised that volunteers need skills, but can also use volunteering to develop life and work skills, and greater alignment between volunteer groups and skills providers should be promoted. Learning Champions within the community also have a potentially significant role to play.

Case study: St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Youth Forum and Vision 2025[cv]

What will you be doing in 20 years time? What will your area be like? What should the council be doing to plan for the future? These are questions which St Edmundsbury borough Council, along with its partners, asked as part of its Vision 2025 project.

The 2025 Project was developed in order to establish a long-term vision that cuts across all of the council and partner organisations. The existing strategies such as the Community Plan and Local Plan help shape short term aims, but are less focused on longer term issues such as the growth of the M11-Stansted corridor, expansion of the Cambridge region and pressure for more housing and improved transport links.

The process involved thematic meetings as well as more general round table events and discussions with particular groups. As part of the Vision 2025 project, the council worked with students from upper schools and colleges in the borough to generate actions that will make the vision a reality. Work on the Vision was the catalyst for a new Youth Forum.

Effective community engagement is never easy, is resource intensive and time consuming. In rural areas these issues are compounded by the distance from resident to service centres and the

tradition of self sufficiency. With rapid changes in demographics in rural areas there is a particular need to engage with new groups in society and those who are under-represented e.g. young families, to ensure that their particular needs are understood and addressed.

Key Objectives

To deliver effective community engagement action needs to find ways to engage more people, ensure all sections of society are included and help people who want to participate to do so.

The key objectives for strengthening community engagement are the need to:

a) Develop Council and local rural democracy structures to improve their interaction with community action;

b) Share consultation across all delivery bodies to make it easier for views to be heard and to stop residents becoming disengaged by consultation overload[cvi];

c) Support the role of volunteers in delivering rural community capacity and services;

d) Achieve meaningful engagement of all parts of the rural community, including the young.

What Needs to Happen?

Delivering community engagement will depend on ensuring that rural residents, across all groups in society, feel they have a role and route by which to participate in local decision making and action.

The main areas in which action is needed are:

- **Rationalising local community structures and consultation routes** - so that rural residents have a clearer understanding of local service provision and organisations and how to interact with them, and local service providers have a better route to obtain feedback from across the community by sharing consultation across all delivery bodies (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2008). Consideration needs to be given to more inclusive and representative community consultation by using targeted market research and new technology;

- **Community led planning** - by revisiting the relationship between very local level plans (e.g. Parish Plans) and LSP and LDF processes to ensure that all planning processes are holistic across the community (e.g. services), economic (e.g. jobs growth) and environmental agendas;

- **Young people** - more effort needs to be directed at finding ways to both understand young people's needs as well as ways to address their problems by working with the East of England Youth Parliament on rural issues;

- **Community delivery** - through providing communities with more empowerment to deliver their own local community action plans primarily by ensuring that existing rural volunteers and

activists are supported. Empower communities to work together at a local level to address key issues such as local transport and access plans and climate change

Recommendation number 16

The East of England Rural Forum should work with the East of England Youth Parliament to encourage debate on rural issues. In addition a network of rural young people across the region should be encouraged to engage in helping to shape the future of their communities via networking sites such as facebook.

Recommendation number 17

Community planning needs to be more holistic and strengthened by becoming more forward looking by involving employers and younger residents. In addition communities should be encouraged to cluster to develop an area wide vision which can feed directly into the Local Development Framework.

Chapter 9 - Delivery

The East of England Rural Forum is constituted as a body to represent rural communities in the East of England and is not a delivery body. It neither has the powers or the resources to deliver the recommendations set out within this Rural White Paper.

Delivery of the recommendations will therefore be dependent on working with partners across the region. All of those who live within, work in or support rural communities have a role in delivery and the Forum looks forward to discussing the issues raised in this paper with its many partners over the next few months.

Set out below are some initial proposals on how the delivery of the paper should be monitored and the key groups with whom the Forum needs to communicate to take the recommendations forward.

Monitoring delivery

To monitor progress with delivery of the Rural White Paper recommendations it is proposed that the East of England Rural Forum should work with partners to develop a set of key indicators. These measures would be used to produce an annual report which monitor changes in these indicators to track progress with delivery.

The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) has produced a list of '10 Big Numbers' [cvii] to monitor the health of rural communities. It is proposed is extend this list to include more emphasis on employment creation, workspace, skills, the environment, digital inclusion and climate change. Other numbers within the list will also be developed and refined to suit conditions in the East of England and the aspirations set out within this White Paper, but it is recognised that further work is needed to develop the full set of indicators as some are currently unavailable.

The CRC 10 Big Numbers are:

1. Rural population

2. Net migration into rural areas

3. Households more than 2 km from a post office

4. Households below the poverty line

5. Full time weekly wages

6. Households in fuel poverty

7. Ratio of the average cost of a rural house to annual rural household income

8. Rural businesses registered for VAT

9. Second homes in the region

10. Increase in the rural population over 60

The proposed measures (to be debated and developed further) by which success in delivery of the Rural White Paper could be assessed are:

Chapter	Proposed CRC '10 big numbers' to use	Additional indicators to measure delivery
1 - Sustainable Rural Communities	1 Rural population 2 Net migration into rural areas 10 Increase in the rural population over 60	Increase in rural employment Changes in the skill levels of rural employees
2 - Delivering A Dynamic Economy	5 Full time weekly wages 8 Rural businesses registered for VAT	Rural employment in higher skilled jobs Annual growth of the rural economy
3 - Modern infrastructure	7 Ratio of the average cost of a rural house to annual rural household income	New workspace created in rural areas Affordable housing built in rural areas
4 - Embracing the Digital Age		Access to broadband at 2Mbps in rural areas Broadband uptake Access to high speed broadband in rural areas
5 - A Living Environment		Progress with BAP targets Agri-environment scheme takeup
6 - Dealing with Climate Change	6 Households in fuel poverty	Renewable energy uptake in rural areas Carbon footprint of rural households
7 - Living well	3 Households more than 2 km from a post office 4 Households below the poverty line	Health of the rural population Reported crime rates in rural areas
8 - Engaged Communities		Percentage of rural residents engaged in the community

Communications Plan

The East of England Rural White Paper needs to inform debate and action at many levels. It contains recommendations for changes to policy at the national, regional and local level, as well as a series of actions for the public sector as well as rural communities, businesses and people themselves.

We therefore recommend that the Rural Forum should develop a rolling communications plan which seeks to use the messages within the RWP to both inform debate and prompt action.

Initial targets are to:

- Present the Rural White Paper to all county rural forums by December 2010;

- Discuss the Rural White Paper with regional government bodies by September 2010 to seek commitment towards helping to implement its recommendations;

- Use the Rural White Paper in conjunction with input from other regional rural forums to argue for changes in government policy where needed, both through the production of specific thematic papers and the medium of the regular meetings between DEFRA (and other departmental) Ministers with the Rural Forum chairs.

Summary of Recommendations

The recommendations made in the RWP are:

1. National, Regional and Local development policy and the planning system must place more emphasis on achieving sustainable rural communities, and should facilitate the growth of rural villages and Market Towns so that their communities can fulfil their potential and be sustained in the long term

2. More resources need to be provided to promote the skills and aspirations of the indigenous rural community so that they can fully engage in the growth agenda for rural areas

3. Economic development policy must focus on creating rural jobs at a faster rate than the increase in the resident rural population of working age, and a target of growing the East of England rural economy at 3% per annum compared to the RES target of 2.3% per annum for the whole economy should be adopted

4. Funding allocations for skills provision must recognise the need to increase flexible skills provision in rural areas and to close the gap in skills performance in more remote rural areas

5. Planning policy should support the growth of rural communities to help them become more sustainable economically and socially

6. The government should review the treatment of refurbishment in relation to VAT to encourage more rural properties to be brought back into commercial, community or residential use

7. In order to ensure perpetuity of affordable housing and increase supply, the Secretary of State, under the provisions of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 should designate all rural settlements with populations of less than 3000 as "protected", thereby enabling providers of shared ownership to limit the amount of equity that can be purchased, or require that the property is sold back to the provider if the resident purchases 100% of the equity and then wishes to move

8. Effective broadband should be seen as an essential utility in rural areas in line with the EU Commission who have said that high speed broadband should be affordable and available to all EU citizens, and Government should work with rural communities to ensure all areas have access to 2Mbps by the end of 2010 and next generation broadband by 2013 through using all available technologies

9. Broadband policy must be future proofed by looking at all available technologies, including mobile, so that broadband roll out recognizes changing user needs (e.g. more mobile access) and new technological solutions to provide universal high speed broadband

10. Research and development should be undertaken into new models of sustainable land and water management systems which can produce positive economic, environmental and social benefits to the region and local stakeholders

11. Environmental management schemes should experiment with new methods of delivering greater community engagement to support positive social and environmental outcomes by working collaboratively with landowners and land managers

12. The region needs to develop a rural climate change action plan to promote innovative ways in which the rural community can reduce carbon emissions by changing behaviour, reducing the need for transport and by developing a low carbon model of development

13. The delivery of the regional plan for climate change adaptation should promote innovative ways in which rural communities can prepare for climate change impacts, and champion innovative solutions led at the individual, organisational or community level

14. New creative solutions to provide activities for rural young people, particularly the 14-17 year old age group, who are not currently engaged and therefore at risk of causing anti-social behaviour

15. The provision of rural service provision in villages and market towns should be increased through building on multi-agency approaches including the third sector and through making more use of community buildings, whilst recognising that in some circumstances it is better to provide appropriate transport to assist rural residents in accessing centralised specialist provision, particularly in relation to complex health needs

16. The East of England Rural Forum should work with the East of England Youth Parliament to encourage debate on rural issues. In addition a network of rural young people across the region should be encouraged to engage in helping to shape the future of their communities via networking sites such as facebook

17. Community planning needs to be more holistic and strengthened by becoming more forward looking by involving employers and younger residents. In addition communities should be encouraged to cluster to develop an area wide vision which can feed directly into the Local Development Framework.

Conclusions

The ranges of issues set out in this White Paper reflect the complexity of the rural communities across the East of England, which are neither uniform nor all facing the same challenges.

Three issues, however, stand out from all the areas covered in the Rural White Paper. These all came through strongly in the consultation process and have resonance across many of the chapters above. These are:

- **Digital inclusion** - rural areas are enthusiastic to embrace the opportunities provided by the digital revolution, but this is being placed in jeopardy by the growing digital divide between urban and rural areas. Current plans for the delivery of high speed broadband is seen as too little too late by everyone who has been consulted, and significantly the UK targets place the rural areas in particular at a substantial disadvantage to other developed countries.

  Addressing this would:

  - Help to strengthen the region's rural economy and create new jobs, therefore delivering big economic gains and benefits to the treasury through more wealth creation;

  - Help to deliver social inclusion by allowing rural people to access more services remotely and therefore allow business and the public sector to reduce their delivery costs;

  - Reduce the need for people to travel to access services thus saving rural residents money as well reducing the carbon emissions associated with travel.

- **Rural economic growth** - rural areas have enormous potential to substantially increase their economic contribution and delivering this would produce benefits to:

  - Rural households and residents by broadening the range of jobs on offer locally and by closing the gap in incomes from which many rural residents currently suffer;

  - Communities by making them more sustainable as more local workers would help to justify investment in local services by both the private and public sector;

  - The environment by reducing the need to travel thus leading to reduced carbon emissions and less congestion whilst also contributing to a reduction in stress.

- **Young people** - where a lack of affordable housing, coupled with urban centred employment opportunities and centralised skills provision is leading to many young people leaving their community in their late teens or early twenties. Addressing this would:

  - Create more vibrant and sustainable rural communities with a more viable demographic mix and reduce the number of families and communities which are ruptured by the young being forced to leave, thus making family structures more self sufficient;

  - Create a virtuous circle for the rural economy by retaining intelligent and innovative young people within the community, thus allowing the economy to thrive and therefore providing more opportunity for future generations of rural young people.

Addressing these three areas should be central to any plans to deliver the Rural White Paper in the East of England, but this in no way downplays the importance or significance of the other areas covered above. This White Paper began by arguing that balanced growth is essential to the future of our rural areas, balanced in the sense of the mutually supportive relationship between urban and rural but also in the sense of ensuring that the development of rural areas balances future growth in population with economic growth, community services and respect for the environment.

The delivery of the Rural White Paper must ensure that the rural voice is central to all decision making on the future at the sub-regional and regional level. To be effective rural views must be central to the initial drafting of proposals, and in this regard there is a need to find new ways to get more rural people engaged in their local democratic processes.

In line with the third over-arching issue above - young people, new ways must be used to get them engaged in helping to shape the future of rural communities. This generation do not in general attend meetings or consultation events, but their views are essential to the future success of rural areas. Media such as social networking sites and other informal networks must be used to both understand their needs, and to help them contribute more fully to rural society.

Rural areas can increase their contribution to the region and in developing this White Paper the Forum has been struck by the number of people who are passionate about how rural areas can become more sustainable, primarily by creating jobs so that more people can live and work in their rural communities, and in so doing sustain local services. Indeed this desire to grow the rural economy, create new high value jobs and to embrace the digital age came through strongly both at the consultation event and in the ranking of issues which participants were asked to undertake.

Equally, everyone has recognised that alone they cannot hope to deliver the change which is needed, and the Forum therefore looks forward to working with rural communities and the public sector across the region to deliver the ideas and recommendations set out within this paper.

Appendix 1 - Ranking of issues from RWP consultation event 3rd March 2010

The rankings are based on the average score given to each potential issue by all the participants at the East of England Rural White Paper consultation event. Results were:

1st
- Recognising broadband as an essential utility for rural areas

2nd =
- Providing affordable housing in rural areas
- Promoting sustainable water resource management

3rd =
- Ensuring the planning system promotes rural economic growth
- Promoting policies to drive rural employment growth
- Providing more rural workspace & technology to support rural industries & jobs including home working
- Engaging young people in local community activities
- Improving links between Councils, local democracy structures & community action

4th =
- Closing the gaps in rural education & skills attainment
- Promoting local empowerment at ground level

5th =
- Planning for climate change impacts
- Embracing new low carbon technologies and land use

6th =
- Developing enhanced public or community transport
- Immediately creating at least 2MB universal broadband access by using satellite or wireless technology

7th =
- Promoting local renewable energy generation
- Adopting lower carbon lifestyles

8th =
- Providing superfast (next generation 100-200MB per second) fixed line broadband to all rural areas by 2017
- Supporting local volunteers

9th =
- Developing better social, cultural and economic links between rural communities & the towns & cities which serve them
- Enhancing mobile phone coverage and ensuring access to mobile broadband (20% & rising of population don't have landlines)
- Promoting new measures to support community safety
- Investing in community buildings (service & community cohesion)
- Promoting better health outcomes by promoting service clustering in Market Towns & remote access to regional specialist centres

10th
- Managing environmental and cultural assets to support community access and tourism development

11th =
- Changing agricultural practice to improve environmental outcome
- Focusing business support on new markets & businesses

12th =
- Enhancing the role of Market Towns
- Ensuring policies supports the growth of all types of business

13th
- Promoting new delivery methods to improve access to services

14th
- Developing rural road infrastructure

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