

6. **The Vision**

The Countryside Agency and Groundwork are promoting a vision of the rural urban fringe as one of a :

“ rural urban fringe that is attractive, accessible, diverse and multi-functional. It serves the needs of both urban and rural communities, strengthens the links between town and country, and contributes fully towards sustainable development”.

Such a vision is considered to be of particular relevance to South Cambridgeshire given the nature of the district and its impending substantial growth. These areas are important in creating and enhancing the setting of the city and the villages within the South Cambridgeshire landscape.

7. At the national level various on going schemes, including Community Forests, illustrate the possible achievements from long-term, integrated planning for landscaping these rural urban fringes. In the South Cambridgeshire context the proposed initiatives by the Woodland Trust, National Trust and the Cambridgeshire Preservation Society, as well as the major settlement developments will all contribute to an evolving urban-rural fringe. It is, therefore, considered that development of a coordinated vision for South Cambridgeshire, to form the basis of a landscape strategy focused on the rural-urban fringe will be of benefit to the evolution of the district.
8. Current government housing density guidance and developmental needs within Cambridgeshire, and specifically with regard to Northstowe, the Eastern and Southern Fringe developments, further emphasise the local importance and significance of these peripheral city areas for :
 - The health and well being of both existing and future residents.
 - The overall setting of the developments.
 - The replacement of the landscape lost due to development.

The suggested Countryside agency/Groundwork vision also accords with the environmental objectives of the recently adopted Community Strategy which focuses on improving access to the countryside and sustainability.

Considerations

9. The draft Countryside Agency/Groundwork vision statement illustrates many potential benefits of developing such a strategic approach. These include a means to focus local action and thereby :
 - Promote greater countryside accessibility with new footpaths and cycle ways, through new and improved parks, woodlands and green spaces.
 - Improve and reinstate many natural landscape features.
 - Create accessible, safe and attractive open areas for relaxation and leisure activities, improving 'well being'.
 - Creating gateways to the countryside and to the town, ensuring that fringe areas, often neglected in development, are designed to complement and enhance the local character.
 - Providing educational areas for many facets of life on the doorstep.
 - Increasing sustainability with the multi use areas, such as natural drainage swales and ponds being used both as a wildlife resources and flood risk management.

- Enabling and encouraging local farmers to supply local produce directly.
- Enabling communities to develop through their involvement in the creation and management of these areas.
- Improving the biodiversity, air and water qualities.

10. The approach recommended is the creation of new partnerships between the Countryside Agency, Groundwork, the local authorities and the landowners to indicate a method to encourage more diverse use of these peripheral areas. If adopted the proposed approach would assist the local authority in moving towards the development of a more holistic landscape strategy. This is necessary as the rural urban fringe often falls outside the remit of planning applications, master plans, and current planning legislation. The more holistic approach would enable a bringing together of the broad range of individual initiatives under coordinated strategy.

11. The Consultation exercise asks members to consider the draft Countryside Agency/Groundwork's draft vision in the form of a series of questions, the key points of which are summarised below with suggested responses :

1. Do you consider a renewed focus and a push for coordinated action on the rural fringe to be, low, medium or high priority?
Suggested response : Given the nature of the district and the development proposed in the area such a strategy is considered to be a high priority.
2. Does the vision capture the potential of the rural urban fringe and provide a way forward?
Suggested response : Yes, but it needs to be adapted to suit South Cambs.
3. Would an urban rural fringe toolkit be a worthwhile resource?
Suggested response : Yes, provision of a best practice guidance note by the Countryside Agency/Groundwork for use by the authority which indicates tools and techniques and offers local solutions would be very useful and would help guide the development of a local strategy.
4. Are there other forms of support that would help in the urban rural fringe?
Suggested response : Yes, a coordinated approach to funding regimes.
5. Do existing policies and regulations need to change to enable the vision to be realised?
Suggested response : Yes, increasing access to central resources for landscape development, including planting schemes.
6. Would we wish to deliver this through free standing Area Action Plans or through existing plans and strategies?
Suggested response : Development of specific Action Area plans, tied into the Local Development Framework would appear to be the most effective form of coordinating delivery.
7. This will require action at local, sub regional and regional level, how can this be coordinated?

Suggested response : The Countryside Agency/Groundwork should prepare the essential toolkit and policy guidance which could then be adapted by individual authorities to address individual requirements/conditions.

Options

11. The Conservation Advisory Group are asked to consider the following options :
- (a) To support the proposed Countryside Agency/Groundwork vision and recommend that the Conservation Portfolio Holder supports the drafting of a 'stand alone' Rural Fringe Area Action Plan to be developed as an integral part of the Local Development Framework.
 - (b) To support the proposed Countryside Agency/Groundwork vision proposals, and recommend that the Conservation Portfolio Holder supports the drafting of guidance toolkit for local authorities to be subsequently adapted to the South Cambridgeshire rural/urban fringe requirements within the Authorities Area Action Plans
 - (c) To support the proposed Countryside Agency/Groundwork vision and request that the Conservation Portfolio Holder supports the development of coordinated action for the district's rural urban fringe.
 - (d) To recommend that the Conservation Portfolio Holder does not support these proposals as others are satisfactorily addressing the issues.

Financial Implications

12. This cannot be currently quantified, but it is envisaged that in the long-term support would be required from both central government and the local authority, particularly with regard to the long-term maintenance of these areas. However, the first priority must be to attempt to coordinate development of an appropriate local vision and strategy which can be then used to bid for appropriate resources.

Legal Implications

13. None specific

Staffing Implications

14. None specific. The Landscape Design Officer would be available to work with the partnership to develop the local vision and strategy.

Consultations

15. There are consultations currently being undertaken by the Countryside Agency/Groundwork partnership with a wide range of groups. There would be more detailed local consultation as any individual project evolves

Conclusions/Summary

16. Countryside Agency and Groundwork currently do not propose to create new rural urban fringe policies but to provide a 'toolkit' to assist the policy framework at the local level. This would involve providing guidance for Regional Spatial Strategies, Local Development Frameworks, and Area Action Plans and encouraging their

implementation on the ground through planning obligations, interim land use agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Strategy actions.

17. Whilst the draft vision cannot provide a solution to all the issues, it reflects much of the current governmental guidance on multi functional use of land, sustainability, health and well being, whilst providing interesting landscapes, in which to address biodiversity and accessible recreational needs. The proposed development of such a vision at the local level, utilising the proposed toolkit of best practice is therefore considered to be of particular relevance to South Cambridgeshire.

Recommendations

18. That the Conservation Advisory Group express support for the preparation by the Countryside Agency/Groundwork of a rural urban fringe vision and 'toolkit' and recommend that :
- (a) the Conservation Portfolio Holder supports the drafting of a 'stand alone' Rural Fringe Area Action Plan for South Cambridgeshire, to be developed as an integral part of the Local Development Framework.
 - (b) the Conservation Portfolio Holder authorises a response to the consultation exercise supporting these draft proposals as set out in paragraph 11 above.
 - (c) The Conservation Portfolio Holder authorises development of enhanced rural urban fringe proposals in partnership with the Countryside Agency/Groundwork and appropriate agencies for the benefit of the district, reporting back to the Conservation Advisory Group as projects are developed.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Unlocking the potential of the rural urban fringe.- A consultation by the Countryside Agency and Groundwork.
- Groundwork 2004
- Groundwork Yearbook 2003

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