

Rural Cambridgeshire: Ensuring a Vibrant Future

A Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire 2010 – 2015

Under consultation from 1 February – 23 April 2010



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What is the Cambridgeshire Together Rural Strategy and how does it affect me?

The Cambridgeshire Together Rural Strategy is a plan for the future viability of the County's rural areas. It assesses the upsides and challenges of living and working in the countryside, reviews the area's economic wellbeing and looks at the land and environment that surrounds us. It goes on to set out a long-term vision for rural Cambridgeshire, how we can get there and who can make it happen.

Why do we need a Rural Strategy?

The need for a Rural Strategy is clear. Significant parts of the County of Cambridgeshire experience a quality of life which is considerably below that of the national population at large. Alongside this, traditional rural life is gradually being eroded and yet local people tell us they want to keep the special 'rural nature' of the communities where they live and work.

Many of the problems in our local communities are distinctive and are rooted in their rural nature and legacy from the past. The Rural Strategy will play an important part in helping to describe and understand these conditions and will help shape and monitor how well the County's major plans and organisations are addressing them.

How can a document change things?

The Rural Strategy will influence the work of Cambridgeshire Together, the partnership that delivers the Cambridgeshire Local Area Agreement. The Local Area Agreement sets out the relationship between central and local government and what each expects from the other. This is documented in an action plan that has a balance of national and local priorities.

The Rural Strategy will ensure that the County's rural areas are not forgotten when public money is being spent on these priorities, creating a vibrant rural economy that ensures people can live and work locally in a safe and pleasant environment.

The Strategy will have its own action plan that will set out exactly what will be done, by whom and by when. It will influence and co-ordinate existing activities to ensure the best approach is taken.

Where are we now?



Living in the Countryside

Living in the Countryside is a different experience across the County. Some areas, typically in the north and in pockets across the rural areas, show evidence of considerable disadvantage as measured by things such as income levels, access to services and transport.

Deprivation measures tend to focus on local concentrations and in rural areas more thinly-spread disadvantage can often go unnoticed, particularly that linked to issues of material deprivation such as fuel poverty, isolation / loneliness, lack of transport and fear of crime.

Lack of affordable housing is an issue across the area, as well as declining rural services such as shops, post offices and pubs. The ways in which expected growth in the County is channelled and controlled could have a major impact on these issues. New approaches to joint investment, community self-reliance and self-governance are needed to maximise future opportunities.



Economic Wellbeing

In recent years, traditional industries such as agriculture and manufacturing (especially food) have been added to by new technology and knowledge-based businesses and greater levels of self-employment and home-working.

Economic well-being across the County as whole is generally strong and expected to remain so, but the broad picture of economic prosperity and growth masks areas and communities which are relatively poor and less productive. Rural Cambridgeshire tends to have lower wages, smaller scale firms and employment opportunities with much economic activity operating below the radar of attention and support. Key potential areas for economic growth are tourism, food and farming (especially looking to build on local, distinctive products and markets) and other rurally-based business.

Whilst Rural Cambridgeshire has levels of young people not in education, employment or training lower than the national average, these levels are fast increasing and follow the more general patterns of deprivation in the County. This is resulting in the out-migration of many young people to more urban areas.



Land and Environment

Land and the environment in rural Cambridgeshire has undergone and continues to experience significant change, mainly as a result of the continuing development of new housing, business premises and associated infrastructure. Other influences are changes in agriculture (an overall decline in land used for farming but also shorter term shifts in the intensity and types of production), plus increased attention to recreation needs (mainly through increased access to the countryside).

The effects of climate change are expected to have different impacts on the different landscape areas and parts of the County, but a key challenge for the future is to ensure new development is more environmentally sustainable – including the better matching of where people live, work and access services, so as to reduce the amount of travel and its impact on the environment and local communities.

Where do we want to be?

Our vision is of a rural Cambridgeshire that will flourish with sustainable rural communities that are prepared for the challenges ahead.

People living in rural Cambridgeshire will have access to the jobs and services they require; the rural economy will be successful and diverse; and the environment will be protected and enhanced.

How do those who live and work locally see the future?

In putting together this Strategy, we consulted with over 230 local people who gave us both individual perspectives and views from the organisations they represented. Here are just some of them:

Philip Bradshaw
Farmer, Flegcroft Farm, Whittlesey

“There is recognition that food production has to increase dramatically at a local and international level in the very near future, and Cambridgeshire is able to play an important part in this process. It is essential that land based industry in the County is encouraged to accept the challenge of increasing output in a way that is sustainable, responsible and profitable.”



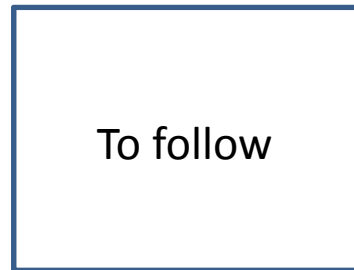
Helen Copping, Completely Chilli
Local Entrepreneur, Haddenham

“Setting up a new business is tough. Having the right idea and stacks of enthusiasm is just the start. Support from specialist advisors and local funding is crucial to getting your business running and keeping it going.”



Philip Broadbent Yale
Outdoor Programme Manager, National Trust

“The National Trust has a crucial role to play protecting Cambridgeshire’s unique landscape. We are lucky to have an amazing variety of places and habitats in this County and we will work in partnership to look after them for ever, for everyone.”



Hugh McCurdy
Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Wisbech

“My area of the Diocese encompasses many different villages. There’s a huge variation in economic prosperity across the County and I’d like to see more support to help communities help themselves.”



Living in the Countryside - What do we need to change?

The people we consulted have collectively identified six 'priorities' for action that will improve 'living in the countryside'. For each priority we have considered what our ambitions should be and how we would know if we had been successful in achieving them...

1. Preventing rural deprivation



Our Ambitions

- To ensure the allocation of resources takes account of all types of deprivation, including isolation and fuel poverty.
- To support local neighbourhood management / partnership working as a method of counteracting rural deprivation.

What will success look like?

- Increased number of community neighbourhood initiatives in targeted communities making them better places to live.
- Rural isolation is reduced through the provision of 'social hubs' in each community.

2. Building local homes for local people



Our Ambitions

- To work with planners to support the sustainability of smaller rural communities.
- To build more homes on rural exception sites.
- To understand the scale of hidden homelessness in rural Cambridgeshire.

What will success look like?

- Vibrant, rural communities with a good mix of housing and associated infrastructure.
- Increased housing built in rural areas.
- Communities have better ways to manage homes that stay in local ownership.

3. Protecting and enhancing rural services



Our Ambitions

- To halt the decline of essential rural services.
- To support communities so they are able to play a greater role in finding their own solutions for viable service provision.

What will success look like?

- Increased number of community enterprises.
- Communities with better access to vital services with a reduced need to travel.
- More multi-use centres delivering a number of different services under one roof.

Living in the Countryside - What do we need to change?

4. Providing access to local healthcare



Our Ambitions

- To address peoples' concerns relating to the perceived centralisation of healthcare services.
- To look for opportunities where healthcare services can be provided locally in existing community facilities.

What will success look like?

- People believe that their primary care needs are being met within their local community.
- Increased use of community buildings offering some kind of healthcare service.

5. Widening transport options



Our Ambitions

- To encourage people to think differently about how they travel.
- To consult people in order to fully understand when, where and how they want to travel.
- To increase rural transport options.

What will success look like?

- Increased number of journeys made by community and public transport.
- Greater use and integration of public and community transport schemes.
- A Local Transport Plan that reflects rural need.

6. Supporting and strengthening local communities



Our Ambitions

- To increase the role of parish councils in providing governance to their own communities.
- To facilitate all rural communities in developing a clear vision for their own future.
- To ensure communities have the capacity to bring their plans to life.

What will success look like?

- Parish councils will be managing services through the Well-being Power.
- Strong, cohesive, rural communities that work together for the benefit of all residents.
- Community members will have the capacity to lead.

Economic Wellbeing - What do we need to change?

The people we consulted have collectively identified three 'priorities' for action that will improve the County's 'economic wellbeing'. For each priority we have considered what our ambitions should be and how we would know if we had been successful in achieving them...

1. Improving employment opportunities



Our Ambitions

- To improve business and social enterprise support in order to facilitate rural entrepreneurship.
- To encourage more high skilled jobs in rural areas to alleviate the need for commuting.
- To create the correct mix of business premises to allow business development and growth.
- To improve broadband and mobile phone connectivity.

What will success look like?

- Better mix of employment opportunities.
- Increased number and mix of businesses operating.
- Reduced commuting.
- No broadband or mobile phone network 'notspots'.

2. Maintaining and enhancing market towns as essential service hubs



Our Ambitions

- To support the tourism opportunities within and around market towns.
- To ensure all market towns have appropriate master plans for their future development.

What will success look like?

- Increased visitor numbers to market towns.
- All market towns have a long-term vision for development of the local economy.

3. Improving skills through education and training



Our Ambitions

- To enhance training and educational provision across all rural areas and at all skill levels.
- To reduce the barriers to young people in accessing education, vocational training and apprenticeships.

What will success look like?

- Young people have more choice in learning and training provision enabling them to remain in the rural areas.
- Cambridgeshire has an adequate workforce with varying skill levels across the whole County.

Land and Environment - What do we need to change?

The people we consulted have collectively identified four 'priorities' for action that will improve the County's 'land and environment'. For each priority we have considered what our ambitions should be and how we would know if we had been successful in achieving them...

1. Making the most of Cambridgeshire's unique landscape



Our Ambitions

- To ensure that the planning of green spaces in and around rural parishes takes into account social, economic and environmental considerations.

What will success look like?

- Better use of green space is linked to the needs of the rural population and the wider Cambridgeshire environment.
- More opportunities for enhanced landscapes, better access and greater biodiversity value.
- Green spaces play a direct role in improving the lives, livelihoods and health of local people and communities.

2. Mitigating the impact of climate change



Our Ambitions

- To support communities with programmes of climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- To fully understand the effects and concept of 'peak oil' and 'peak water'.
- To support businesses with schemes which promote green technologies and energy efficiency.

What will success look like?

- Increased number of parishes with local climate change interventions being delivered.
- People have an understanding about the impact of climate change on rural sustainability.
- Businesses make better use of local assets and technologies.

3. Ensuring sympathetic development



Our Ambitions

- To recognise the character and distinctiveness of rural parishes across Cambridgeshire.

What will success look like?

- Rural Cambridgeshire will remain an attractive place to live, work and visit.
- Communities will feel their voices are being heard when new development is planned.

Land and Environment - What do we need to change?

4. Promoting Cambridgeshire's food



Our Ambitions

- To address the issue of global food security by Cambridgeshire-specific interventions.
- To develop better local food supply chains and clearer labelling.
- To develop a better understanding of food production.

What will success look like?

- Changes in local farming practices to mitigate against the effects of climate change and to protect the local environment.
- Increased demand for people purchasing food grown locally .
- Increased number of local community food projects.

How will we know what's been achieved?

Success in delivering the Rural Strategy will be overseen by the Cambridgeshire Together Board monitored through its Safer and Stronger Partnership. An Action Plan has been developed which details who is responsible for overseeing the delivery of each ambition. The actions are shown on pages 14 – 17.

The phrase 'rural proofing' is used within the Action Plan and this is the process of checking the effect that policies, programmes, initiatives and individual projects could have on rural communities. It ensures that the particular needs of people in rural areas are not overlooked and that policies or projects do not have any unintended negative outcomes for rural communities. One of the key elements of the Cambridgeshire Rural Strategy will be to rural proof key local initiatives.

Nine key performance indicators (KPIs) have been set to enable us to measure the vibrancy of Rural Cambridgeshire going forward. These are:

1. Number of homes built on rural exception sites in Cambridgeshire.
2. Number of essential rural services maintained.
3. Number of new rural enterprises set up.
4. Number of Cambridgeshire parish councils using the Well-being Power.
5. Number of broadband notspots and slowspots in rural Cambridgeshire.

How will we know what's been achieved? (continued)

6. Number of people that work within five kilometres of their home address.
7. % of apprenticeship opportunities located in Cambridgeshire's rural villages/market towns.
8. % of Cambridgeshire communities with a green infrastructure section within their community led plan.
9. Number of village design guidance documents adopted by parish councils to inform their response to planning consultations.
10. Number of organisations taking part in developing and signing up to a Cambridgeshire Food Policy.

These KPIs will be measured each year and an annual report on progress towards achieving the ambitions of this Rural Strategy will be issued.

What actions will be taken?

LIVING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Priority 1: Preventing rural deprivation

- Use OCSI (Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion) data to develop and interpret the Cambridgeshire rural evidence base to influence how local services are provided in rural parishes.
- Liaise with parish councils and attend rural community events (such as meetings and fairs) in order to raise awareness of fuel poverty, energy efficiency, grants for repairs and assistance available for vulnerable rural households.
- Ensure each parish has at least one local service / meeting place that provides a 'social hub'.
- To achieve one new intervention in an agreed area of deprivation in each district.
- Develop Neighbourhood Forums as a way of clustering parishes in rural areas in order to develop wider approaches to local issues and needs.

Priority 2: Building local homes for local people

- Build relationships and gather best practice information from Rural 80 and Rural 50 local authorities on how they deliver affordable housing through all available methods, including Section 106 agreements.
- Develop a Countywide set of principles to ensure effective development in rural communities on rural exception sites, in agreement with the Regional Spatial Strategy.
- Rural-proof District Local Development Frameworks to ensure rural housing provision is catered for and that it will aid rural community sustainability.
- Continue to conduct an independent Housing Needs Survey where applicable to ascertain local needs and make people aware of the results.
- Set affordable rural housing development targets for rural exception sites.
- Continue to develop Cambridgeshire's Affordable Rural Housing service bringing together Local Authority Housing Providers (RSLs), Local Authorities and parish councils in order to address proven need in rural areas.
- Explore the concept of Community Land Trusts for delivering affordable rural housing in Cambridgeshire.
- All statutory agencies to assess their own estates for land which could be released for the provision of affordable housing.

Priority 3: Protecting and enhancing rural services

- Monitor the change in provision of rural services by repeating the Rural Services Survey (last undertaken in 2007).
- Build relationships and gather best practice information from Rural 80 and Rural 50 local authorities on how they are supporting reducing the decline in rural services.
- Support multifunctional mobile service facilities, such as libraries, police, citizens advice bureau and health services, to work together to bring services to rural areas.
- Support communities with saving essential rural services that are under threat.
- Provide support to community groups / parish councils for widening the use of existing buildings (e.g. village halls, churches, libraries, etc.).

What actions will be taken?

LIVING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE (continued)

Priority 4: Providing access to local healthcare

- NHS Cambridgeshire to promote local service provision in order to allay fears.
- Work with parish councils and other community groups to identify gaps in local service provision and consider what services could be provided.

Priority 5: Widening transport options

- Undertake a consultation to understand attitudes towards public transport.
- Rural-proof new Local Transport Plan to ensure that it reflects local rural needs.
- Support the development and implementation of accessibility action plans in the LTP priority action areas, informed by a robust evidence base and genuine stakeholder participation.
- Roll out of a Demand Responsive Transport scheme across Cambridgeshire and evaluate its success.
- Map community transport provision in each District in order to identify gaps and opportunities for integration of services.
- Encourage cycling and walking between rural communities by making footpaths and bridleways suitable for everyday, year round use – perhaps by introducing a network of ‘inter-village routes’ that are off-road but surfaced (and possibly lit) in such a way that make cycling and walking possible at all times.

Priority 6: Supporting and strengthening local communities

- Co-ordinate a training programme for all parish councils that supports the increased use of the Well-being Power.
- Support parish councils to own and run community assets through the Well-being Power.
- Support and encourage parishes to achieve Quality Parish status.
- Support and encourage the development and delivery of Community Led Plans by ensuring appropriate mechanisms at all levels for responding to actions identified.
- Provide training and support for local people to develop the community leaders of the future.

What actions will be taken?

ECONOMIC WELLBEING

Priority 1: Improving employment opportunities

- Encourage specialist business advice for self-employed people at all stages of work to gain skills and develop their business.
- Ensure full allocation of the funding available through the Fens Adventurers Rural Development Programme in order to increase land-based businesses.
- Attract a wider range and larger number of businesses to set up and expand in rural Cambridgeshire.
- Encourage the development of rural workspaces in appropriate locations by ensuring that appropriate references are made in Local Development Frameworks.
- Encourage the growth of home-based businesses.
- Investigate the potential for reduced business rates as a means of encouraging rural business growth.
- Influence decision-makers to draw attention to the consequences of digital exclusion.

Priority 2: Maintaining and enhancing market towns as essential service hubs

- To increase support for tourism in market towns through local farm diversification and business development.
- Produce a master plan for each market town.

Priority 3: Improving skills through education and training

- Support initiatives which increase qualification attainment levels (both higher and basic skills) in sectors where there are emerging employment opportunities.
- Work with rural employers to improve the skills of their workforce, in order to equip them for the business challenges of the future.
- Encourage collaboration between businesses and further education facilities to develop apprenticeships with the intention of encouraging young people to stay in rural Cambridgeshire.

What actions will be taken?

LAND AND ENVIRONMENT

Priority 1: Making the most of Cambridgeshire's unique landscape

- Develop a project where parishes are supported to create green infrastructure plans.
- Support communities to develop projects that increase biodiversity and access.

Priority 2: Mitigating the impact of climate change

- Work with parish councils to increase the awareness of the impacts of climate change to allow them to lead communities in making a difference.
- Undertake Cambridgeshire-specific scenario planning on the effects of peak oil and peak water on rural communities, using existing projection models.
- Encourage businesses to take up renewable energy schemes, green technologies and energy efficiency measures.

Priority 3: Ensuring sympathetic development

- Investigate the use of Village Design Statements as a mechanism for influencing decisions on design and development so as to respect the local identity.

Priority 4: Promoting Cambridgeshire's food

- Develop a 'Cambridgeshire Food Policy' to enhance local food supply chains and encourage stronger loyalty to local food production.
- Encourage retailers and local businesses to promote and source local produce.
- Continue support for projects that localise local food and farming such as community orchards, farmers markets and community food projects.

Glossary

Affordable Housing: Housing which is built on rural exception sites with a subsidy from a Housing Association, made available for rent/shared ownership, allocated (in priority) to households with a local connection and is kept affordable for local people.

Biodiversity: The variety of life forms in a given area.

Fuel poverty: Those who spend more than 10% of their annual income on heating their home.

Global Food Insecurity: The result of rising food prices and increased demand for food. Rapidly increasing energy costs, increased global population and lower yields due to volatile weather result in global food insecurity.

Green Spaces: Protected areas of undeveloped landscape and the natural environment.

Local Transport Plan: A Local Authority plan which sets out local transport strategies, policies and an implementation programme.

Material Deprivation: A relative term to describe the inability of individuals /households to afford those goods and activities that are typical in a society at a given point in time.

Notspot: An area where broadband or mobile phone signal is unavailable. (Slowspots refers to those areas where broadband speed is less than 2 Mbps)

Peak Oil: The point at which oil is being extracted at maximum rate is known as the peak, after which oil production decreases as it becomes harder to extract.

Peak Water: The point at which demand for fresh water is greater than the natural rate of replenishment. Peak water will affect some locations more than others.

Rural Exception Sites: Small plots of land, solely for affordable housing developments, within or bordering an existing rural settlement which would not otherwise be available for market housing.

Social Hubs: Places which encourage community activities, inclusion and regeneration.

Well-being Power: Passed in 2000, it allows local authorities in England to do anything they consider likely to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area unless forbidden elsewhere in legislation.

Enjoyed reading this and want to know more?

To read the research and evidence that underpin the Rural Strategy, please visit www.cambsacre.org.uk where you can download :



Evidence Base



Summary of Evidence



Reports on the District-based Consultation Workshops



Summary Report on the Countywide Consultation undertaken in September and October 2009



Full Cambridgeshire Rural Strategy Action Plan

The Cambridgeshire Together Rural Strategy was produced by the partners of Cambridgeshire Together, in conjunction with local stakeholders throughout the County .

Strategy production was led and facilitated by Cambridgeshire ACRE

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