

Cambridgeshire ACRE Annual Review 2007/2008

We would like to thank our many members, funders, sponsors and partners whose help enables us to deliver our wide range of services and work with the communities of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough so effectively.

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Peterborough City Council
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Rural Action East
Rural Development Programme for England
Sanctuary Hereward
South Cambridgeshire District Council
South Cambridgeshire Strategic Partnership
The Right Reverend Anthony Russell, Bishop of Ely
The Right Reverend Ian Cundy, Bishop of Peterborough

and all Cambridgeshire ACRE staff, trustees, professional advisors and consultants.



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Cambridgeshire ACRE is registered in England as a charity (no.1074032) and a company limited by guarantee (no.3690881). Registered office: 32 Main Street, Littleport, Cambridgeshire CB6 1PJ



Our Vision

Our vision is of communities and voluntary and community organisations in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which are vibrant and viable, able to shape their own futures and which are actively working to create greater equality and improved opportunities for all.

Our Mission

We believe our mission is to strive to achieve this through working in partnership with other bodies, local communities and groups to gather information and develop understanding of community needs and to use this knowledge to be active in leading, influencing and facilitating the development of plans and actions to address these needs; through direct work in local communities and by supporting the development of voluntary and community organisations so that they and communities become more independent, cost effective and self-sustaining.

Our Values

- Putting the community first – focusing on effective communication with local people to identify needs.
- Turning regional and local rural priorities into action - working with organisations, groups and individuals to find practical and sustainable ways in which priorities and needs can be addressed.
- Aiming to make a real difference – ensuring that activity is geared to seeing real changes in people's lives and being able to demonstrate this.
- Always striving to improve – strengthening our ability to learn from what we do and drawing on lessons from elsewhere in our wish to do the best for local communities.

Welcome to our 2007/2008 Annual Review

2007/08 has been a busy and challenging year for Cambridgeshire ACRE.

Looking back, if 2006/07 was all about setting a clear direction for the future, then this past year has been all about consolidation and dealing with external influences. Our early recognition of the likely issues that were to lay ahead in 2007/08 and the resulting restructure of the organisation have meant that we have been ideally placed to deal with challenges of the past year.

We have seen radical changes to the way the organisation is funded. Spending public money in an open and transparent manner to achieve set outcomes has become a natural requirement for funders and has led to a contract culture for those they fund. With contracts comes formal procurement and this has put additional pressure on the organisation. We have had to engage competitively in open tenders and, whilst this has been a steep learning curve, we have had some notable successes, including winning the contract to host the Cambridgeshire LINK.

Our commitment to maintaining the quality of life for those that are most vulnerable is undiminished. Two of our major grant programmes, the Local Network Fund and LEADER+ have come to a successful conclusion following a number of years' successful delivery. These two projects alone have brought nearly £5m of investment into the area. Looking ahead, we

have secured new LEADER funding of £4m for a new grant programme for local rural and agricultural businesses that will start this September.

We have used the results from our Service User Survey, where our customers told us what was important to them, to shape the services we provide. Community buildings and open spaces have become increasingly important as centres for local activity and community service delivery. Those running these facilities locally told us they needed increased support and advice. As a result, we have expanded our service in this area, increasing the breadth of our knowledge so that we can support our customers in the way they want.

Working in partnership with others has been crucial to our success. One of the best examples of how different groups and sectors can come together was brought about by the Post Office network reconfiguration in the county. We have led a multi-agency group with representation from business, post offices, communities and local government to find new sustainable solutions in the provision of future post office services and to secure the long-term future of rural retail sector.

The past year has been exciting and challenging in equal measure. Our team of staff and trustees have risen to all the challenges they have been presented with and will, no doubt, continue to do so. We thank them for their commitment and support as we continue to deliver our strategy and work to ensure a positive future for the local communities of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

John Yates

Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Kirsten Bennett

Chief Executive

Sustainable Communities

To influence and support the development of sustainable communities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough



A key part of Cambridgeshire ACRE's work is to help communities do more to help themselves.

Here's what we did in 2007/2008.

Supported community-led planning

- Over the past two years, we have assisted 40 communities with completing a parish plan setting out their community's vision for the future and the actions they need to take to achieve it.
- A further 17 communities are still going through the process and we continue to empower local people by allowing them the chance to shape their community's future.

Facilitated better community facilities

- We have expanded our facilities advice service to cover outdoor spaces by developing expertise in the areas of playing field and play area management.
- As a result, we have seen a dramatic increase in the uptake of this service (up +100%) and we are now training additional staff to be able to support work in this area.
- We have provided significant support to communities considering new-build facilities, encouraging them to consider environmentally-sound options such as wooden structures.

- We have established ourselves as the new County Playing Fields Association for Cambridgeshire. Over the next year, we plan to develop a network of members across the county to benefit from specialist advice and support.

Worked to reduce health inequalities

- We have secured over £300k of new funding for two healthy living projects. Good Food for Cambridgeshire involves us working with children and their families to create sustainable community food gardens, teaching the importance of eating 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Carry on Cooking sees us working with groups of older people to overcome the barriers they face when trying to eat healthily.

Applied our grant management expertise

- After 6 years, we are nearing the end of the Fens LeAP LEADER+ Programme having brought almost £3m of investment into the area for improving the quality of life for rural communities. The programme should be fully closed down by the end of the year and it is anticipated that less than 1% of funding will be returned as unspent.
- The Local Network Fund for Children and Young People in Cambridgeshire came to the end of its 5 year funding programme. Over £1.85m has been distributed to over 150 projects, allowing approximately 50,000 children to benefit.

Encouraged communities to recognise their own achievements

- Working with a panel of sponsors we successfully delivered the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Community Life Awards with greater levels of community participation than ever before.

Developed new areas of work

- Through the Big Lottery's Children's Play programme we have been able to start a new project in Fenland developing and improving children's play areas.
- We have led a partnership called 'Cambridgeshire Play Landscapes' securing development funding from partners to allow a high quality bid to be submitted to Big Lottery's Playful Ideas programme.
- Cambridgeshire ACRE worked with the Greater Cambridge Partnership to make a successful application to the Rural Development Programme for England. The £4m of grant funding secured will be used through a community-led approach to improve the competitiveness of agricultural businesses and to safeguard and enhance sustainable rural businesses locally.

Working Together

To position Cambridgeshire ACRE in strategically appropriate and effective partnerships, to further develop support for the communities of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.



Partnership working is important to us as we know that combining resources and skills produces the best possible results.

Here's what we did in 2007/2008.

Developed strategic alliances to further the reach of our work

- Working with Age Concern Cambridgeshire, we have been successful in tendering for the contract to host the Cambridgeshire Local Involvement Network (LINK). This joint venture will ensure that people in Cambridgeshire have a chance to influence and improve the local provision of health and social care services.
- In forming the Cambridgeshire Play Landscapes partnership, we have brought together ten partners with direct influence over the provision of children's play facilities in the county. By working together on a shared agenda, we can maximise resources and have developed a Playful Ideas lottery bid. If successful, this will allow us to develop four 'natural play' areas for children, allowing better opportunities for creative play.
- We brought about the creation of the Post Office Network Change Group, a partnership of public, private and community sector organisations that are working together to minimise the impact of post office closures in the county. The Group has provided significant guidance to communities and affected businesses on how to move forward in a positive way and will continue its work over the coming

months to make the remaining post offices and rural retail businesses in the county as viable and successful as possible.

Provided opportunities for statutory partners and local people to get together to exchange views and hear about new developments

- We organise conferences to bring people together to discuss key issues affecting rural communities. In April 2007, following the launch of the Local Government White Paper, we brought together statutory agencies, local government and voluntary and community groups to discuss its implementation Cambridgeshire. The "Building Sustainable Rural Communities" conference last September allowed attendees to discuss the problems faced by rural communities and looked at how leadership and vision can overcome the trend of declining rural services and employment.

Ensure the voice of local Cambridgeshire and Peterborough communities was heard at a strategic level

- We have started to develop a rural evidence base for Cambridgeshire that will allow us to champion and influence rural interests. Data is being collected through the Rural Services Survey and via community-led plans.
- Following changes in Defra funding, we now have a strategic influencing strategy with clear priorities of: Stronger Rural Retail; Stronger Rural Assets; Stronger

Rural Voice. By completing work in these three specific areas we will improve and sustain rural public services in Cambridgeshire.

- We have prepared a number of papers on key rural policy issues for presentation to Strategic Boards to help inform their decision-making.
- Our Chief Executive is an active member of Cambridgeshire Together, the partnership that manages the Local Area Agreement for Cambridgeshire.
- We are active on the Local Strategic Partnerships and their thematic sub-partnerships and have played a vital role in feeding in community views, via community-led plans, during the development of the Sustainable Community Strategies.
- Our Chief Executive is Chair of the Cambridgeshire Investing in Communities Board, ensuring links are maintained between rural areas and the agenda for rural skills, enterprise and employment.

Developed strong relationships with other voluntary and community sector organisations.

- We are an active member of the Cambridgeshire Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Consortium. Using funding provided by Capacitybuilders, this group works to provide quality support for front-line organisations and to improve the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in the delivery of public sector services.

Customer Focus

To broaden the understanding of Cambridgeshire ACRE and effectively market its range of services



Ensuring that Cambridgeshire ACRE's name and remit is known countywide is key to our success, so people will know where to come for community advice and support.

Here's what we did in 2007/2008.

Increased our knowledge of marketing and branding techniques

- A new marketing strategy for the organisation was agreed by the Board in July 2007 and resulted in a complete review of all our marketing materials.
- A complete redesign of our website is underway, to modernise it and make it easier for users to navigate. The new site will be launched in Autumn 2008.

Developed our understanding of our customers' requirements

- We used the results of the Service User Survey we undertook in Spring 2007 to understand how customers use our services and how they come to find us in the first place.
- In partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council we conducted the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Rural Services Survey to build a comprehensive map of the local services available across the county. Repeating this survey on a regular basis will enable us to measure changes in the level of local service provision.

Provided information and guidance on a wide range of rural issues

- We continue to interpret government policy and legislation into language that local communities can understand, particularly information that has an impact on the running of community facilities and local charitable groups. Examples of this are our series of Community Building Fact Sheets and our Post Office Closure Guidance Notes.
- We publish Community Action, our membership magazine, on a quarterly basis and distribute it to approximately 500 readers. A reader survey conducted at the end of 2007 revealed readers consider it an interesting and informative read.
- In association with Rural Action East, we published 'Community Play and Recreation', a guidance manual for managers of community play and recreation areas.

Implemented a better way of managing our customer contacts

- Our new Customer Relationship Management System, ACT!, has provided us with a better system for managing customer contacts. It not only enables us to build up a history of our relationship with each and every individual customer but also to aggregate this information at parish or district level.

Involved our customers at all stages of our work from project development to implementation

- We held four play consultation events to allow children, young people and their families to give their views on how their ideal play area would look. The information collected at these events fed into a bid for Lottery funding which, if successful, will allow us to bring their vision to life.
- We look to build future sustainability into all our projects. For example, where we have helped create community food gardens, we have trained local people in the skills they will need to maintain the gardens in the longer-term.

Fit for Purpose

To ensure that Cambridgeshire ACRE continues to be an adequately funded and effectively managed organisation employing appropriately skilled staff



We strive to continuously improve the way we manage the organisation and its staff so that the high quality service we provide is maintained.

Here's what we did in 2007/2008.

Acknowledged the new funding culture and adapted accordingly

- We prepared ourselves for the end of certain grant funding streams by ensuring we were ready for the new tendering and contracting culture. As a result, we have been able to minimise the negative impacts on staff and our financial position. Notable achievements have included successfully tendering for the Cambridgeshire LINK contract and the new LEADER programme.

Adopted a new organisational structure

- Having restructured in April 2007, we have spent the past year building stronger teams that have been able to adapt to new cross-functional working practices. Rather than assigning single project officers to each project, we now work on a consultancy model which allows us to bring in specialist skills as and when needed. More staff than ever before are now employed on permanent contracts, giving stability to the organisation.

Maintained our commitment to achieving quality standards

- We maintained our accreditation under the Investors in People scheme, which we have held since 2002, with very positive feedback from the assessor.

- Our efforts to ensure our workplace is as environmentally sound as possible saw us reaccredited under the Business and Environment Management Scheme (BEMS).
- A panel of peer reviewers assessed us against Levels 1 and 2 of the ACRE Good Practice Quality Standards, a quality standard designed specifically for rural community councils. Having been successful in reaching level 2, we are now working to continuously improve our working practices which should allow us to demonstrate that we have met Level 3, the final level.

Improved our governance and project management

- We have worked with our Trustees to ensure that they can be truly effective in their roles by performing a Board Health Check and running a programme of individual interviews with the Chair and Chief Executive.
- To ensure our projects follow good practice, we introduced a Project Management Toolkit and project management training for all managers and project officers. This will ensure a consistent approach to setting up, running and monitoring projects. By using a measurable outcomes approach, we will always be able to demonstrate the 'on the ground' impact of our work.

Improved our internal communications

- We conducted a Staff Survey allowing all staff to contribute their views and opinions on the way Cambridgeshire ACRE is run and managed. As a result of feedback on our internal communications, we introduced regular electronic Staff Briefings to keep staff informed of staffing changes, project development issues and key forthcoming events.

Invested into ICT to enable us to provide a modern, seamless service to all our customers

- We have implemented a new ICT strategy and resulted in significant investment into our ICT hardware. A new server has provided greater stability to our office systems and additional technology has allowed remote working and enabled us to set-up satellite offices, such as the Cambridgeshire LINK office in St Ives.

Maintained a solid financial position

- In the financial year ending 31st March 2008, Cambridgeshire ACRE's turnover was £1.74m. A full financial statement can be found in our Group Report and Financial Statement, which is available on request.