

**Rural Cambridgeshire:  
Ensuring a Vibrant Future  
A Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire  
2010 – 2015**



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# What is the Cambridgeshire Rural Strategy?

The Cambridgeshire 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.

The Government wants to strengthen local action and has identified the four cornerstones of localism to be:

1. Giving communities more power
2. Encouraging people to take an active role in their communities
3. Transferring power from central to local government
4. Supporting co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprise.

The Localism Bill is one of the key pieces of legislation that proposes a radical shift of power from central government to local communities. People who live and work in rural communities need to be able to respond to the 'localism challenges' and this strategy will play an important part in helping to 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 be delivered and monitored through the Cambridgeshire Rural Forum under the three priority areas: Living in the Countryside; Economic Wellbeing and Land and Environment.

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 has 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 that the best approach is taken, balancing national and local priorities.

# 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 which is linked to issues of material deprivation such as fuel poverty, isolation / loneliness and lack of transport.

Lack of affordable housing is an issue across the area, as well as declining rural services such as shops, post offices, transport and pubs. Finding the best way to deliver health and social care services in rural areas is also a challenge. The demands on these services will only increase with the ageing rural population and it is therefore important that people are helped to remain in their homes where possible through the greater personalisation / localisation of services. The way in which expected growth in the County is channelled and controlled could have a major impact on all of these issues.

New approaches to joint investment, community self reliance, self-governance and community involvement are needed to maximise future opportunities and meet the new challenges set out in the Localism Bill. Communities will be given more power and responsibility to achieve their own ambitions.



## 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 a 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 fewer 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 lower levels of young people not in education, employment or training 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.

The new Local Enterprise Partnership will play an important role in securing funding for key investment.



## 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.

## Who will we be engaging with?

The Rural Strategy works towards a more socially, economically and culturally inclusive rural Cambridgeshire. The Rural Strategy will promote values of inclusion and diversity through its ambitions and actions.

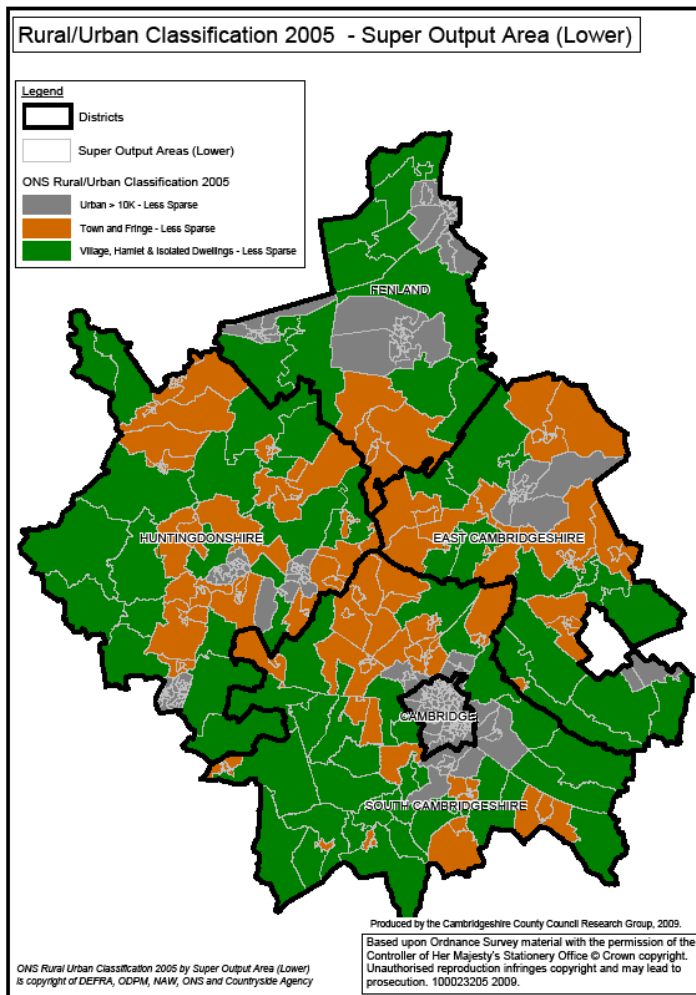
We recognise that there are many groups which represent community interests including Parish Councils, community asset management committees, social enterprises, community groups and faith groups. We commit to engaging with all groups representing community interests.

We recognise the importance of voluntary effort in achieving the ambitions of the strategy. We will actively support Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Panels/Forums, community groups and volunteers as the strong foundations upon which community-based activity will be built.

We are committed to meeting the diverse needs of the rural population, proactively engaging with as many community members as possible to ensure that the delivery of the action plan is both inclusive and representative.

We strive to ensure that all actions taken as a result of the Strategy are accessible to all, including young people, older people, those living in deprived areas and disabled people.

# What do we mean by 'Rural'?



For the purposes of the Cambridgeshire Rural Strategy, rural Cambridgeshire refers to the whole of the county excluding the city of Cambridge. This approach recognises there are common issues across areas that encompass market towns and surrounding rural areas.

However, different degrees of rurality exist at local level and are reflected in two other, more sensitive definitions: Each local authority is classified according to the percentage of rural population it contains. This classification (developed by Defra) creates six categories from 'Major urban' (the most urban), to 'Rural 80' (the most rural). East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire are classified in the 'Rural 80' group.

The definition used by the Commission for Rural Communities defines settlements of over 10,000 people as 'urban', and defines smaller 'rural' settlements into three categories: 'town and fringe', 'villages', or 'hamlets and isolated dwellings'. In addition, settlements are defined as to whether they are in 'sparse' or 'less sparse' areas.

The majority of wards within the four districts are classified as rural under this scheme with the exception of the urban wards covering the market towns of Ely, Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots, March and Wisbech. Nowhere in the County is defined as 'sparse' - the majority of the County is made up of 'less sparse' villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings.

## **Where do we want to be?**

Our vision is of a flourishing rural Cambridgeshire 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 deprivations, 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 homes to support a diverse rural population

#### Our Ambitions

- To work with planners to support the sustainability of smaller rural communities.
- To provide more affordable homes in rural areas.
- 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.
- More and better managed sites for the Gypsy/Traveller community.

### 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 health and social care

#### Our Ambitions

- To address peoples' concerns relating to the perceived centralisation of healthcare services.
- To look for opportunities where health and social care 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 awareness amongst young people about the health services available locally.
- Increased use of community buildings offering health and social care services.

### 5. Widening transport options

#### Our Ambitions

- To understand when, where and how people 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 for their own communities.
- To facilitate all rural communities in developing a clear vision for their own future through Community Led Planning.
- To ensure communities have the capacity to bring their plans to life.

#### What will success look like?

- Parish councils will be more involved in the management of services.
- Strong, cohesive, rural communities that work together for the benefit of all residents.
- Community members will have the capacity to lead on community initiatives.



# 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 infrastructure in and around rural parishes takes into account social, economic and environmental considerations.

#### What will success look like?

- Better use of green infrastructure 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 infrastructure plays a direct role in improving the lives, livelihoods and health of local people and communities.

### 2. Adapting and mitigating the impact of climate change

#### Our Ambitions

- To improve water management in rural areas.
- To support businesses and communities 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 and communities make better use of local assets and technologies.

### 3. Ensuring sympathetic development

#### Our Ambitions

- To build more energy, water and waste efficient homes.

#### What will success look like?

- New housing developments will become increasingly carbon neutral.

# 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 adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, protecting the local environment.
- Increased demand and support for people purchasing food grown locally.

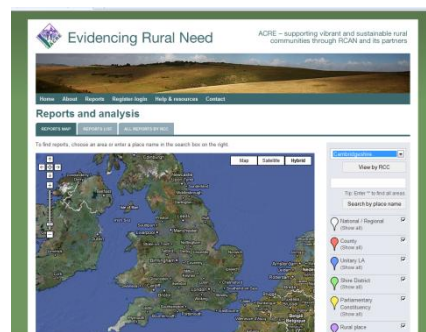
# Achievements so far

The Cambridgeshire Rural Strategy has been in existence for a year now and good progress has been made in delivering its actions. The following pages give a handful of case studies that highlight the best of those achievements.

## 1. Prevent rural deprivation

### Evidencing Rural Need

- Evidencing Rural Need is a web-based tool that shows the real picture of socio-economic deprivation across the rural areas of England and enables organisations to influence decisions about policies and services more effectively. There is a great deal of data available for the villages, hamlets and smaller towns of Cambridgeshire which can be used to influence resource allocation to small rural communities. It looks at what areas are like in terms of broad characteristics. For example, higher levels of unemployment, lone parents, children, social housing and long term illness.



### How can the success be replicated?

- Using the data effectively has helped to influence the need for this rural strategy and has given key evidence for supporting the inclusion of priorities.
- Cutbacks are causing local bus services to be reduced and the data has given an understanding of where community transport services can be targeted so that people can undertake local journeys.
- Communities have successfully used the evidence to lobby for rural services on behalf of their parish and support the findings of their parish plan.
- Funding applications have been successful by using the evidence to describe a picture of the needs of local parishes.

## 2. Protecting and enhancing rural services

### Rural Churches for Rural Communities

- This new programme seeks to find real opportunities for using historic buildings as service 'hubs' for supporting community life. Working with and on behalf of the Diocese of Ely, and funded by English Heritage, communities are helped to re-order their churches for better community use.



### How can the success be replicated?

- The project is targeted at those communities who do not have any form of meeting space and where a church can be altered to provide that space.
- A full audit of possible uses is undertaken and considered when designing the best way to alter the church.
- Working in partnership means that staff have the community development, ecumenical, financial and building preservation skills to assist communities.
- An approach that considers the needs of the whole community and of partners is taken in order to maximize the use of the finished space.

# Achievements so far

## 3. Building homes to support a diverse rural population

### Landbeach Affordable Housing Project

- Landbeach's affordable housing project has been led by the parish council and has responded to local demand. The community was engaged, and local housing need and potential sites for development were identified. Funding was secured from the Homes and Communities Agency. Hundred Houses Society is now building eight two and three bedroom houses for local residents, or those with a strong connection to the village, who are in housing need. The properties are expected to be ready for occupation in March 2012.



### How can the success be replicated?

- The Parish Council took a strong leadership role in this project from the outset, and refused to give up despite a number of significant obstacles along the way.
- The community was fully engaged from the start, and understood the case for affordable housing, this process included public events, meetings and exhibitions, and a housing needs survey.
- The support of Cambridgeshire ACRE was critical. This included assessing housing need, identifying and appraising sites, supporting the Parish Council and keeping the community informed.
- A deal with Cambridgeshire County Council saw the release of redundant land and farm buildings owned by the County Farms Estate, which was located outside the village development boundary.
- The Parish Council and key agencies worked well together. South Cambridgeshire District Council prioritised the project, Icen Homes was appointed by the District Council to develop the project, and Cambridgeshire ACRE facilitated good communication between all parties.

# Glossary

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

**Biodiversity:** The variety of life forms in a given area including diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.

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

**Global Food Security:** Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

**Green Infrastructure:** A network of spaces which have a range of uses that support the natural environment and the health and quality of life of communities.

**Localism Bill:** Legislation currently passing through Parliament that will give local authorities greater freedom and flexibility to respond to what local people want.

**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.

**Neighbourhood Plan:** Communities will come together to decide what their area should look like, where new shops, offices or homes should go and what green spaces should be protected. If local people then vote in favour of new 'Neighbourhood Plans' in local referendums, councils will have to adopt them.

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

**Right to Build:** New right under the Localism Bill that will allow communities to get together and take forward developments for new homes, shops and facilities in their area, without the need for an application for planning permission, if there is overwhelming community support for the development and minimum criteria are met.

**Rural 80:** Districts which have 80% or more of their population living in rural settlements (a population of less than 10,000) or market towns. South Cambridgeshire, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Huntingdonshire all fall in the Rural 80. Rural 50 refers to districts where 50% live in rural areas.

**Rural Exception Sites:** Small plots of land, solely for affordable and local needs housing, 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.