

Rural Cambridgeshire: Ensuring a Vibrant Future Consultation on a new Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire



Report on the Rural Strategy Consultation Event held on Wednesday 16 September 2009 at Bar Hill Village Hall

This event was supported by Cambridgeshire Together, the commissioner's of the new Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire, and the South Cambridgeshire Local Strategic Partnership

INTRODUCTION

Organised by Cambridgeshire ACRE on behalf of Cambridgeshire Together and the South Cambridgeshire Local Strategic Partnership, this event is one of a series of District-based workshops allowing local people to give their views on the development of a new Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire.

A detailed rural evidence base of national, regional and local data has been compiled and consultation has been based around the emerging themes from this research. All attendees were encouraged to read a brief 'Summary of Evidence' before attending the workshop in order that they were fully prepared to contribute their thoughts and views on its conclusions.

OVERVIEW OF THE EVENT

A total of 39 people attended the event; a good mixture of representatives from local government (Parish, District and County Councils) and other statutory bodies (such as the Police and NHS Cambridgeshire) and community groups, businesses and land managers. A full attendee list can be found in Appendix 1.

The workshop programme was structured to maximise the amount of time spent in interactive sessions thus giving participants a good chance to discuss both the broader issues and to focus in on particular topics of interest. The outputs from these sessions will be used to inform the development of the new draft Rural Strategy. The Strategy will be accompanied by an action plan with timescales and responsibilities for delivery clearly set out so that its achievements can be monitored.

The event was led by Kirsten Bennett, Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire ACRE and facilitated by Nigel Boldero, an independent consultant, whose company 'Community Renewal' is experienced in community consultation.

REVIEW OF THE INTERACTIVE SESSIONS

Interactive Session 1 – What are the right strategic priorities?

In the first interactive session participants were asked to consider whether the priorities identified through the initial research for each of the three thematic areas were the right ones for rural South Cambridgeshire and also whether there were any further priorities that needed inclusion.

- Living in the Countryside: No new priorities were identified, however, those discussing this topic area queried whether 'New Growth – Planning and need for Community Development to be built in' be a priority on its own on the basis that whilst it runs through many of the other priorities, it is probably a distinct-enough issue to stand alone. This seemed to be a reflection on Cambourne and the perception of a lack of infrastructure.
- Economic Wellbeing: There was a strong opinion that a priority should be added for South Cambridgeshire to develop a district Economic Strategy that is *not* dependent on Cambridge. This opinion came through strongly both within this session and on the individual feedback forms.
- Land and Environment: The groups who discussed the priorities for this area conflicted in their opinions on which priorities were most important. Some saw climate change and food security as global issues over which they have very little influence but some suggested that these were important issues that could be tackled locally in the first instance. The need for protecting existing green spaces came through strongly, as did the need to have a 'hierarchy' of green space for local

play areas to larger destination parks. In terms of new priorities, the only new suggestion was 'energy security'.

Interactive Session 2 – Answering the big questions and finding the solutions

In the second session participants focused in on particular priorities within the three thematic areas and examined potential solutions.

- The full listing of participant responses to the questions under the theme of **Living in the Countryside** can be found in Appendix 2.
- The full listing of participant responses to the questions under the theme of **Economic Wellbeing** can be found in Appendix 3.
- The full listing of participant responses to the questions under the theme of **Land and Environment** can be found in Appendix 4.

Anybody wishing to contribute more detailed input, particularly to those questions their workshop table did not examine, is encouraged to complete the online consultation survey which can be accessed via the Cambridgeshire ACRE website – www.cambsacre.org.uk.

Interactive Session 3 - Marketplace

During this session, each table fed back the key points from its discussion to the rest of the room. Participants were then asked to consider everything they had heard and discussed about the different strategic priorities under each theme and to vote for the three they thought had most importance and relevance for South Cambridgeshire. Based on the percentage of votes received, the top three priorities for South Cambridgeshire are:

- Accessibility to services, work and training (including transport) (13.6%)
- Decline in rural services such as shops, pubs and post offices (11.4%)
- Supporting communities' engagement in self-reliance and self-governance (11.4%)

FEEDBACK FROM ATTENDEES

Attendees were asked to complete an event evaluation form. These have been analysed and a summary of the results is given below.

How would you rate the overall quality of the event? (Scale 1 – 5 where 1 = Poor and 5 = Excellent)

75% of participants gave the workshop a score of either '4' or '5' and the organisers are satisfied that the format and scope of the consultation worked well.

What did you really enjoy and what could have been done better?

Attendees felt the event was well organised event and had a well balanced programme that maintained their interest throughout. They particularly enjoyed the participative approach and a number commented that the event provided good networking opportunities.

In terms of what could have been done better, there were a couple of comments that longer sessions would have allowed more time for discussion.

How relevant was the event to your work?

64% of attendees felt the event was 'very relevant' to their work and a further 20% felt it was 'fairly relevant' to their work. This demonstrates to us that the event had been pitched at the right audience and advertised appropriately.

Has the event provided useful new learning for you? If so, what in particular?

There were many comments around the usefulness of having such a diverse range of agencies involved as this allowed attendees to hear the views of organisations who they would not normally work with and who have different perspectives on key rural issues.

How confident are you that the new Rural Strategy will help ensure a vibrant future for Cambridgeshire? (Scale 1 – 5 where 1 = Not at all confident and 5 = Very confident)

The level of scepticism about the ability of the new Rural Strategy to influence on rural issues is high in South Cambridgeshire with no one giving a score of '5' (Very confident) and only 14% giving a score of '4'. Unfortunately, a vast majority (86%) gave a score of '1', '2' or '3', meaning they are unconvinced that the strategy will bring about any change. Past experience has made people sceptical that change will happen and there were a number of comments to this effect, for example:

- 3 – but I live in hope!
- 3 – Would like to give 4 or 5 but the risk is the strategy not translating into action!
- 1 – I am cynical of all this good stuff – who takes any notice of it? Whatever happens to our ideas?
- 2 – Score based on fear that the final version will move to the 'vanilla' options.

Thanks again to all those who took part.

The outputs from this event will be fed into the development of the draft Rural Strategy which will then be launched for a further 12 week period of public consultation. All participants in these initial workshops will be invited to take part.

Appendix 1 - Attendee List

Firstname	Surname	Job Title	Organisation	E-mail
Leanne	Bacon	Clerk	Gamlingay Parish Council	clerk@gamlingay-pc.gov.uk
Trevor	Baker	Research Manager	Cambridgeshire County Council	trevor.baker@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Gemma	Barron	Partnerships Manager	South Cambridgeshire District Council	gemma.barron@scambs.gov.uk
Lenja	Bell	VoiCeS Project Co-ordinator	Young Lives	lenja@young-lives.org.uk
Kirsten	Bennett	Chief Executive	Cambridgeshire ACRE	kirsten.bennett@camsacre.org.uk
Nigel	Boldero		Community Renewal / Audax Design	nbold@lineone.net
Michael	Bond	Honorary Treasurer	The Magog Trust	administrator@magogtrust.org.uk
Philip	Broadbent-Yale	Area Manager	The National Trust	philip.broadbent@nationaltrust.org.uk
Alison	Brown	Head of Business Services	Cambridgeshire ACRE	alison.brown@camsacre.org.uk
Diane	Budd		Business Link East	d.budd@businesslinkeast.org.uk
Edward	Byam-Cook	Secretary	Madingley Village Hall	elbyamcook@aol.com
Douglas	Clarke	Life Member/Observer	The Magog Trust	administrator@magogtrust.org.uk
Jane	Davis	Councillor	Guilden Morden Parish Council	jane.davis100@btinternet.com
John	Edwards	Land Manager	Metropolitan Housing Partnership	john.edwards@mht.co.uk
Mike	Evans		Government Office for the East of England	mike.evans@goeast.gsi.gov.uk
Kathleen	Foreman	Company Secretary	The Magog Trust	administrator@magogtrust.org.uk
Mark	Green		Jobcentreplus	mark.green@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Firstname	Surname	Job Title	Organisation	E-mail
Richard	Hales		South Cambridgeshire District Council	richard.hales@scambs.gov.uk
Anna	Hoad	Councillor	Guilden Morden Parish Council	anna.hoad@btconnect.com
Brian	Ing	Parish Councillor	Impington Parish Council	clerk@hisimp.net
Sarah	Johnston	Business Services Assistant	Cambridgeshire ACRE	sarah.johnston@camsacre.org.uk
Nick	Lidstone		Cambridgeshire Constabulary	nick.lidstone@cambs.pnn.police.uk
Paul	Nelson	Passenger Transport Manager	Cambridgeshire County Council	paul.nelson@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Inger	O'Meara	Assistant Director, Health Improvement	NHS Cambridgeshire	inger.omeara@cambridgeshire.nhs.uk
Simon	Page		Cambridgeshire Constabulary	simon.page@cambs.pnn.police.uk
Gill	Pountain	Parish Councillor	Bourn Parish Council	pountain.holes@talk21.com
Helen	Randall	Chief Officer	Care Network	chiefofficer@care-network.org.uk
Kirstin	Rayner	Clerk	Gamlingay Parish Council	clerk@gamlingay-pc.gov.uk
Jez	Reeve	Chief Executive	Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service	jez@cambridgecvs.org.uk
John	Reynolds		Cambridgeshire County Council	j.e.reynolds@ntlworld.com
Sandie	Smith	Principal Officer - Third Sector Development	Cambridgeshire County Council	sandie.smith@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
David	Spreadbury	Vice-Chairman	Cambridgeshire ACRE	david.spreadbury.t21@btinternet.com
Mark	Taylor	Community Safety Officer	Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service	mark.taylor@cambsfire.gov.uk
Peter	Tod		Cambridgeshire County Council	peter.tod@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Mick	Walker		Cambridgeshire Area Probation	mick.walker@cambridgeshire.probation.gsi.gov.uk

Firstname	Surname	Job Title	Organisation	E-mail
Lynda	Warth		Stapleford Parish Plan Steering Committee	lynda@lmwarth.orangehome.co.uk
Megan	Warth	Assistant Planner	KWA Architects	kw@keithwarth.co.uk
Rebecca	Williams	Police Sergeant	Cambridgeshire Constabulary	rebecca.williams@cambs.pnn.police.uk
Jane	Williamson	Chairman	Waterbeach Parish Council	jane275@btinternet.com

Appendix 2 - Outputs from Interactive Session 2 – Questions focusing on Living in the Countryside

Question 1 Evidence tells us that more affordable housing is needed in the small villages and settlements of Cambridgeshire. How can we increase the amount of affordable housing in Cambridgeshire's rural settlements?

- Support housing needs surveys – comprehensive coverage of district – updated regularly. Housing for people with a local connection. Use Cambridgeshire ACRE and work closely with local parish.
- With new builds, proportion of houses for affordable housing (rent and shared ownership) vs open market. Balance is best for a community.
- Off the shelf – buying up existing ex-council housing. Too expensive at present but would be less intrusive particularly for very rural areas – encouraging re-use of existing properties sold through 'right to buy'.
- Design of exception site developments to fit with local/traditional design within the village.

Question 2 Population forecasts for Cambridgeshire predict continued growth and a shift towards an older age profile and a lower children population. Are the implications of more older people and fewer children in our villages and settlements being adequately addressed in terms of housing and care needs, schools and the viability of other services? What needs to be done differently?

- Patient transport services not planned when 'super' surgeries are developed. This also includes people visiting ill people.
- Mobile services needed in some villages.
- Camshare should be better advertised.
- Some small communities need/want more family homes in their villages but it isn't happening.
- Coffee and toilets might be needed on buses – Leeds example.

Question 3 Levels of deprivation in Cambridgeshire are not equal across the board. Some areas rank more highly than others on deprivation measures such as prosperity, health, education and fuel poverty. In addition, the sparse population in some areas means that deprivation is hidden. What more can be done to address rural deprivation in Cambridgeshire?

- Engagement of residents by parish councils, professionals such as fire & rescue service and VCS organisations.
- Mapping and understanding local activities, groups, etc – get away from hard statistics and include people's experiences. Value local knowledge.
- Confidence in a long-term non-political plan for translating need into community action.
- Sharing and compiling data systems (widen out CDRP data and analysis sharing systems).
- Opportunities for working together, all agencies and communities, to progress projects and access funding, similar to CDRP projects.
- Neighbourhood Panels – Need wider attendance, old people and young people – encourage to use as a place to air views and encourage representation from other agencies to answer questions and listen.
- Include faith communities.
- Joint health needs assessment (wider use of) – include local experiences in the process.

- Broadband across the whole county!!

Question 4 The national decline in rural services (shops, pubs and post offices) is being felt in Cambridgeshire as much as in any other part of the country. What opportunities are available to maintain/increase service provision within rural communities e.g. pubs, garages, shops and post offices, etc? Are you aware of any innovative schemes and solutions to rural service provision? What role can community buildings play in accessing key services in the future?

- (a) Depends on size of village but there are examples of combined pubs and shops / church and shop and post office / pharmacy and post office. Needs local goodwill and use. Need for marketing campaign to promote use of village facilities.
- (b) Chorley, Lichfield – village shop in local pub / Hemingford Grey / Cambourne – combined post office/pharmacy / community cafe/book cafe at Bassingbourn / Somersham library – community-run / rural car clubs in Norfolk.
- (c) Variety of use – rural police stations / fire stations / schools to make facilities available for use.
- Parish planning is useful for addressing this subject.

Question 5 Lack of access to adequate transport provision is a major issue for residents in rural areas, impacting on their ability to access services (where there is no local provision) and even travel to work. How can we improve access to transport? What might the local solutions be and what role could community-based transport play in the future?

- No main routes in sparsely populated areas – long distances to urban areas.
- No cheap options – trains, buses.
- Free public transport – elderly population means demand will be there and they are willing to use buses.
- Subsidy possible at county level for some routes.
- Frequency/distance are large factors.
- Stick/carrot approach – discourage car use, i.e. congestion charging, car sharing schemes, encouraging cycling with cycle ways.
- Investment in commuting routes.
- Volunteer schemes such as dial-a-ride – support for local provision and also improve advertising/availability of service.
- Rural car clubs.
- Public scheduled services do not fulfil flexible needs.
- Demand responsive transport being looked at by CCC.
- Devolve transport budgets to parish level.
- Soham/Fordham/Isleham study into transport requirements – no one solution.
- Need for transport links to main route, e.g. guided bus. However convenience of car often outweighs hassle of using public transport still – cost, congestion, etc.
- Villages where churches are linked or surgeries will often work together on community transport, e.g. Soham surgery bus.
- Need mobile service – i.e. one-stop shop including police, library, post office, etc.

Question 6 Under the law, eligible Parish Councils have a 'power of wellbeing' which permits them to do anything which they consider is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social, or environmental well-being of an area. This might include such things as saving and supporting local assets such as shops, pub or post office, or providing medical/health centres, a mobile library, meals on wheels or making local grants. Are parish/town councils and other community groups receiving adequate support to develop their capacity to influence plans and policies, to acquire and develop their own assets and to provide some services more locally? What further support do they need?

- More information – funding – contacts, etc.
- Agencies/services could visit some parish councils (or clusters on parish councils) to tell them about what they are doing.
- Opportunities to join in with projects.
- Clarify about contact and information routes and represent strategically, e.g. CPALC, Cambs ACRE, parish councils, local strategic partnerships.
- Structures need to be clearer and improve consistency.
- Top issue for us is building more capacity in co-ordinating parish councils / VCS / statutory agencies.

Question 7 There are health inequalities in Cambridgeshire by location, gender, ethnicity and deprivation. In addition, 'distance decay' results in people making less use of healthcare services the further they are away from their provision and this is a significant problem for the most rural parts of the county. Is enough being done to promote healthier lifestyles in rural areas? Does anything need to be done differently to provide better access to healthcare and health information? How can communities and healthcare agencies work better together and develop innovative solutions to health inequalities?

- Encourage 'outreach' services.
- Fight against centralisation – services to urban centres.
- Incentives for increased home visits/enhanced services.
- Rural GP services essential – fight against urban centralisation of GP services/other essential services such as dentists, physiotherapists, chiropractors, elderly support services.

Question 8 Recent research tells us that approximately one in ten residents in Cambridgeshire have taken part in a civic activity in the last twelve months. Do you think there is equality of opportunity for all members of the community currently to contribute towards and play an active role in their community? What do you consider to be the key barriers to people being able to play an active role and how could these be broken down?

- No – particularly for gypsies and travellers and especially if they are housed.
- Apathy/pressure of life/cynicism/working long hours.
- Local champions – opportunity to influence at local level.
- Lack of awareness – what is a civic activity? Sports? Arts? Helping neighbours? Volunteering?
- Joining a new community – knowing village etiquette and politics and knowing the social dynamics.
- New communities – community development techniques needed to break down barriers and encourage activities.
- Lack of resources – funding and people.
- Including all community members – finding the middle ground with traveller communities.

Appendix 3 - Outputs from Interactive Session 2 – Questions focusing on Economic Wellbeing

Question 1 Evidence shows there is a need to raise the level of skills and educational attainment of local people to support the rural economy. What are the main barriers/threats faced by rural individuals when they seek to raise/maintain their skill levels through education and training? How can a greater number of young people be encouraged to remain in rural areas with weaker economies?

Question not considered at this workshop.

Question 2 Central to rural Cambridgeshire's economic success is the ability to attract, retain and develop a workforce with the right skills to meet business needs and the provision of suitable workspace for business growth. Is there a sufficient skilled and available labour force for businesses to grow and develop without having to move away to larger urban centres? Are there sufficient workspace and business premises available at affordable rents for businesses to develop?

- (a) Capability assessments have shown there are a great number of people with no/very little skills/education – lots of people not in education or training.
- Continual development needed, not just one-off training.
- Range of skills at range of levels needed.
- Need to consider associated and supporting services, e.g. care.
- In the longer term older people need to be encouraged to remain in employment for longer.
- Greater awareness of the opportunities available needed – school careers advice should have local opportunity information – retain local people and skills. Talks from Business Link, for example.
- (b) Currently, yes. Lots of available places and reduced rents – and negotiation over rents is currently possible.
- Regulations and costs may discourage start-up businesses – more organic development could be encouraged as well as focusing on 'business hubs'. Enable rather than frighten start-up businesses.
- Issue is not just about premises, more knowledge/information is needed on how to offer appropriate support and advice.
- This ignores the possibility of growing businesses locally.
- Planners do not consider SME in planning approach. No mechanism for generating small premises.
- Entrepreneurial skill development (start 8 – 10 years old), qv European Chamber of Commerce, an EU research programme.

Question 3 Market Towns are essential hubs for service delivery and the rural economy. What support services need to be located in our market towns to support the populations both in the towns and in the surrounding rural hinterlands? Do our Market Towns provide sufficient heritage and cultural appeal to act as foci for encouraging the development of tourism? Could more be done to encourage visitors? Is enough being done to offset the impact of recession by addressing the issue of vacant shops and attracting shoppers?

- In South Cambridgeshire, rural centres do not have facilities. Where is the essential hub? We need market towns!

Question 4 Policy suggests there needs to be great recognition of the ways that economic growth can enhance community sustainability, especially providing opportunities for people to work near where they live. Can business support/other services be better marshalled to facilitate enterprise and entrepreneurial development? Is enough being done to support the use of new technologies to promote rural economic development? Has enough been done to support social enterprise and other options for improving job opportunities and the financial strength of families and communities?

- Not convinced the right question identified for South Cambridgeshire. What is there to be supported?
- Importance of broadband.
- Skills analysis – out of date focus – not on the new skills needed.
- Ageing population of well or semi-well – opportunity for new social enterprise including aged well to help provide local provision to cut down transport and increase employment.
- South Cambridgeshire strategy should not encourage commuting (carbon footprint) or not be inseparable from Greater Cambridge strategy.
- South Cambridgeshire was based in Cambridge and the District Council still has a Cambridge-centred view.

Question 5 The future of the financial and environmental sustainability of the food and farming sector is in question with significant changes in agricultural commodity prices and in elements of policy which is likely to have a visible impact on the way Cambridgeshire's countryside is managed. Are there opportunities for value added production and farm diversification activities through developing current activities? Should we be encouraging local supply chains between farmers/food producers and local communities? What needs to be done to make this successful?

- (a) Opportunities do exist but require different skills, e.g. business plan creation – can result in farmer running two businesses which is tricky.
- Partnerships to make best use of seconds – reduce costs.
- A lot of support available but making people aware of it can be tricky.
- Rules and regulations can drastically change a business model and have a huge impact – planning and funding.
- (b) More education needed about seasonal produce – should we have strawberries in December?
- People appreciate knowing where food comes from, e.g. local butcher, but costs can be higher.
- Regulations governing farm shops should be changed to encourage local food hubs. Currently only 10% can be from outside the farm. Local collaboration and ability for shopper to buy a variety of local goods from one place – addresses issue of convenience.
- Appropriate farm shop training is needed; supermarkets have a wealth of information on buying habits, etc, but farm shops can be going into it blind.

Appendix 4 - Outputs from Interactive Session 2 – Questions focusing on Land and Environment

Question 1 Building on the environmental assets of the Fens, there are ambitious habitat restoration projects proposed that will return intensively-farmed land back to native wetlands for nature conservation, education, countryside access and tourism. Is sufficient weight being given to green space planning to cope with the recreational needs of a growing population? Could more be done to develop the Cambridgeshire countryside as a high quality visitor destination and a usable asset for local people?

- Use information generated by parish plans to inform overall wider strategy – common themes likely to be footpaths, cycle paths, bridleways and dog walking.
- What's the definition of a 'high quality visitor destination'? Funding, sustainability – Wicksteed Park or Disneyland?
- Need to balance recreation/food/environment/health.
- Need for a hierarchy of greens spaces.
- There is under-provision of green space within most villages.
- Concern over lack of green space in new developments.
- Link green spaces.
- Introduce multi-use paths and also long distance paths.
- Raising awareness of what people can do in the countryside.
- Information points about what's happening in the countryside.
- Need to satisfy the demand for allotments. Give up large gardens and help look after the land and use it to grow vegetables.
- Encourage volunteers to help look after the countryside.

Question 2 Rural areas have a significantly higher carbon production rate per person than urban areas. This is principally due to greater emissions from heating homes and use of transport. Are the likely effects of climate change in Cambridgeshire being addressed in plans for future development and other investment decisions? Could more be done to help rural communities and businesses consider climate change adaptations? To what extent should local assets and the countryside be given over to the production of energy (e.g. wind power, bio fuels, etc) and how can the impact of this be minimised?

- Costs of bio fuels compared to traditional, e.g. nuclear, and impact on food crops.
- More consideration given to harnessing power from incinerators, reducing landfill and creating eco-power.
- Ditto on small scale for new housing.

Question 3 Major growth in houses, businesses and related infrastructure and human activity is probably the principle influence on how rural Cambridgeshire's land and environment looks and performs now and into the foreseeable future. Are plans for growth being used effectively to combat trends which are affecting the decline of rural services and the viability of rural areas? Are sufficient measures being taken to minimise the impact of new development on environmental quality?

- Parish Energy Partnerships
- Adaptation – do new builds need better natural ventilation to ensure not too hot in summer or at night.

- Insulation levels should be as high as possible.
- Tax breaks, easy (long-term) loans, promoting community enterprise.
- Develop sense of pride in a project such as a wind turbine.
- Encourage local collection of recyclables by providing financial incentives.
- Insulation campaigns.

Question 4 To maintain future food security our food must be reliable and resilient to shocks and crises and be produced and brought to market as sustainably as possible. Ensuring food security must sit alongside other priorities such as tackling climate change and securing a healthy natural environment. Is enough being done to forge new connections between local food and farming so as to promote the profitability and sustainability of both sectors? What will the effects of climate change be on the way food is produced in Cambridgeshire and how can environmental sustainability be achieved in the longer term?

- More emphasis on local food / local production.
- More promotion of farmers markets. However, better to encourage local shops to sell local goods. Their terms of trade should not be restricted.
- We will need to change varieties to cope with changing climate and its unpredictability.
- Be aware of reducing irrigation so customers will need to be aware of changing offer in the shops.
- Needs to be a more independent plant breeding to plan for future changes.
- Maintaining the skills for growing food.
- Educating children on where food comes from and on how the countryside is managed.