

# Rural Cambridgeshire: Ensuring a Vibrant Future

Summary of Evidence for  
Stakeholder Consultation

Version: Final  
August 2009

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The Cambridgeshire Rural Strategy development is facilitated by Cambridgeshire ACRE and funded by the partners of Cambridgeshire Together.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE TOGETHER RURAL STRATEGY

### Background

Cambridgeshire Together is the working name of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) Board for Cambridgeshire. Cambridgeshire Together brings together representatives from key local organisations to improve the quality of life for those who live, learn, work and travel in the County.

In January 2009, Cambridgeshire Together agreed for a new Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire to be created.

The purpose of the strategy is to ensure that the work of Cambridgeshire Together adequately reflects the distinct set of social, economic and environmental issues which affect rural communities and businesses in Cambridgeshire.

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<sup>1</sup>.

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 influence and monitor how well the County's major plans and organisations are addressing them.

### Approach

We believe that those who live and work in Cambridgeshire (our rural stakeholders) will be able to offer vital local knowledge and views that will help shape the final strategy document and its accompanying action plan.

In order to design the most relevant and 'fit for purpose' strategy possible, we therefore want to gather input from as many rural stakeholders as possible. We want to consult with parish/town councils, community leaders, smaller voluntary and community groups, businesses, Third Sector organisations, statutory agencies like the Police and NHS Cambridgeshire, Local Authority Officers, Strategic Partnerships at County and District level, and as many individuals as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Cambridgeshire ACRE Service User Survey, 2009

Stakeholders will be presented with a number of opportunities to contribute their views. Workshops are being held in each of the four Districts during early September 2009 and, in parallel to these, an online survey will also take place.

Learning from these exercises will be presented back to stakeholders at a public evening of rural debate being held on 29 September, after which the draft Strategy will be produced and launched for a further (12 week) period of consultation.

The final Rural Strategy will be published in February 2010 and will be used to check whether Cambridgeshire's plans and policies are meeting the needs of its rural population.

### Consultation Methodology

The first step towards developing the strategy has been to research an evidence base of data. National and regional rural evidence has been reviewed to understand the most important issues and then local data and evidence relating to Cambridgeshire has been drawn together from a number of sources to understand the local impacts.

The findings from this research are set out at a high level in this document, [Summary of Evidence for Stakeholder Consultation](#). The aim of this document is to get stakeholders thinking about the issues for Cambridgeshire.

This document starts by setting the scene and gives an overall profile of rural Cambridgeshire. It then presents the emerging issues from the research in three chapters relating to the themes of:

- Living in the countryside - issues such as population change, access to services, transport, housing, health, education, community cohesion and disadvantage.
- Economic well-being - rural economies, incomes, employment and enterprise.
- Land and environment - planning and development, farming, leisure, environmental quality and climate change.

Each chapter starts by presenting the relevant key issues taken from the 'State of the Countryside' Report and then gives a summary of emerging issues for rural Cambridgeshire.

At the end of each chapter, a list of questions for stakeholders to consider is given. These questions are not intended to be exhaustive but to provoke thought and to provide a basis for discussion and consultation.

As an annex to this main document, we have produced an [Evidence Base](#), which presents the detailed evidence reviewed at national, regional and local levels. The evidence is presented under sixteen topics including population and migration, disadvantage, transport, employment, land use and development, farming, and recreation. The full document is available on the Cambridgeshire ACRE website at [www.cambsacre.org.uk](http://www.cambsacre.org.uk)

## SETTING THE SCENE - A PROFILE OF RURAL CAMBRIDGESHIRE

### Executive Summary

Taken as a whole, Cambridgeshire has seen significant population, economic and associated growth in recent years. This, despite the recent economic downturn, looks likely to continue into the foreseeable future. However, population trends in terms of both overall numbers and age structure are expected to vary across the County; some rural areas will see their population decline, the age structure of the population will move towards greater numbers of older people and reduced numbers of children, although in areas of significant new developments such as Northstowe the profile is of a younger population. Profiles of each of the four 'rural' districts show how social, economic and environmental conditions vary. Broadly there is a significant difference between areas to the north (which relate to the wider Fens area) and areas to the south of the County (most influenced by Cambridge City).

### Defining Rural Cambridgeshire

The four districts of South Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland are classified as rural under the local authority rural classification scheme developed by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). A ward-level classification scheme has also been developed to give a more detailed picture of rurality at the local level. 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, which have populations ranging from 15,000 to 26,000.

The spatial distribution of these larger market towns makes them important hubs for social and economic activities. Relationships between the market towns and their rural hinterlands are complicated by the economic role of Cambridge and Peterborough and related commuting patterns. Whilst recognising this complexity, planning and regeneration policies identify market towns as key employment and service centres for their rural communities.

Reaching an agreed definition of "rural" has historically been difficult. For the purposes of the Cambridgeshire Together 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:

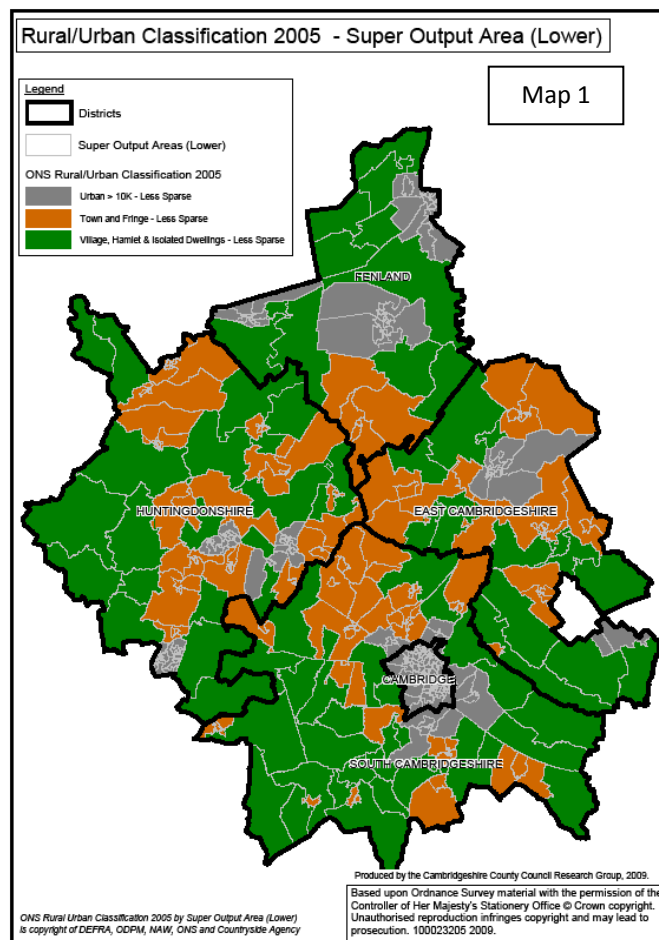
- Each local authority is classified according to the percentage of rural population it contains. This classification (developed by Defra) creates six categories from 'Major urban' (the most urban), to 'Rural 80' (the most rural). All four of the Cambridgeshire

districts (East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire), are classified in the 'most rural' (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. This definition can be used at most official levels of data collection from individual address and postcodes up to Ward and Super Output Area. Under this definition, people living in rural areas comprise 19.3% of the total population of England, about half of whom live in small towns. Only 3.1% live in settlements smaller than villages and only 1.5% are defined as living in sparse areas.

Map 1 shows the picture under this definition for Cambridgeshire. This shows that:

- nowhere in the County is defined as a 'sparse' rural area
- the majority of the County area is made up of 'less sparse' villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings. 31% of the county population (2001) lived in these areas.
- 'town and fringe' areas tend to be located in an east-west belt close to larger urban centres such as St. Neots, Huntingdon, St. Ives, Ely and to the north of Cambridge. There are also 'town and fringe' areas on the boundaries with Peterborough and Newmarket.



## System of Government

Cambridgeshire has a three-tier system of local government.

The County Council is responsible for the provision of County functions throughout the Shire County of Cambridgeshire, excluding the Peterborough area. These functions include Education; Libraries and Heritage; Social Services; Roads and Traffic; Environment; Strategic Planning; Trading Standards; Waste Disposal and the County Farms Estate.

Within the area covered by the County Council, there are four rural District Councils covering East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire responsible for the provision of District functions. These include Housing; Leisure and Recreation; Waste Collection; Local Planning; Council Tax Collection; and Environmental Health. The city of Cambridge has its own separate City Council which operates in the same way as a District Council.

Parish and Town councils are the first tier of local government and are particularly relevant to the governance of rural areas. They have a wide range of powers which essentially relate to local matters, such as looking after community buildings, open spaces, allotments, play areas, street lighting, bus shelters, car parks and responding to local plans. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 extended the 'power of wellbeing' to eligible Parish Councils. The Act offers opportunities for new initiatives such as Parish Councils saving and supporting local assets such as shops, pubs or post offices. There are 213 parish/town councils in Cambridgeshire and 21 parish meetings in communities too small for a full council.

NHS Cambridgeshire is accountable for improving the health of Cambridgeshire's communities by assessing health needs and providing services that respond to those needs. They are responsible for developing primary care services including those services provided by GPs, dentists, pharmacists and opticians. There are currently 76 GP practices, 80 dental practices and 91 pharmacies.

Cambridgeshire Constabulary employs around 1,400 Officers and 200 Police Community Support Officers to cover an area of over 3,500 km<sup>2</sup> and a resident population of around 0.7 million.

## Population Trends

The four rural districts in the County had a total population estimated at 471,700 in 2007 – this had grown overall by nearly 30,000 people since 2001 (+6.65%). Table 1 overleaf shows how this growth was distributed across the four areas.

Table 1: Population estimates and forecasts for rural Cambridgeshire Districts 2001-2021<sup>2</sup>

District	Population 2001	Population 2007	Change 2001-2007 (%)	Population 2021	Change 2007-2021 (%)
East Cambridgeshire	70,900	77,900	+7,000 (9.87%)	79,900	+2,000 (2.5%)
Fenland	83,700	91,300	+7,600 (9.08%)	99,400	+8,100 (8.9%)
Huntingdonshire	157,200	162,000	+4,800 (3.05%)	164,500	+2,500 (1.54%)
South Cambridgeshire	130,500	140,500	+10,000 (7.66%)	169,800	+29,000 (20.85%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>442,300</b>	<b>471,700</b>	<b>+29,400 (6.65%)</b>	<b>513,600</b>	<b>+41,900 (8.88%)</b>

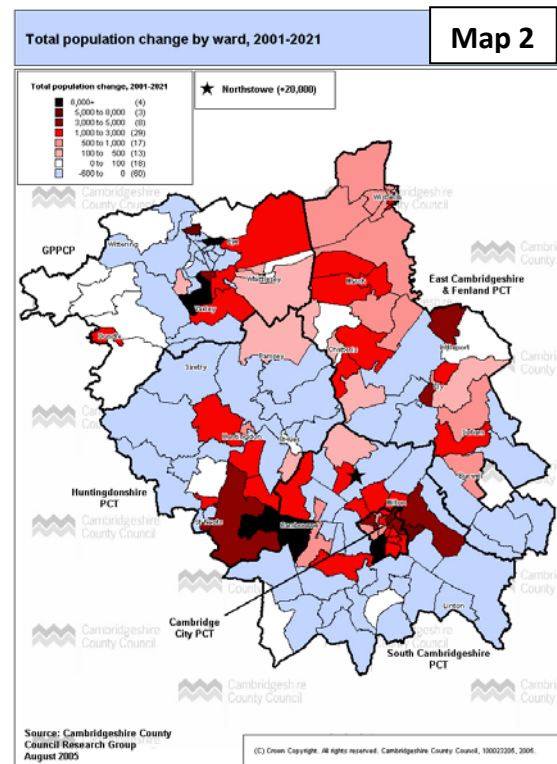
This Table also shows projected population growth to 2021. Overall, numbers are expected to increase by a further 42,000 or by nearly 9%. These forecasts assume continued substantial in-migration (70% of growth from migration). Most of this growth is expected to take place in South Cambridgeshire where growth will be significantly above recent trends (29,000 people, or nearly +21% on 2007). In Fenland and Huntingdonshire growth will be close to recent trends, whereas in East Cambridgeshire, growth will be below recent trends.

At local levels forecast changes between 2001 and 2021 (see map 2) will see:

- Overall population decline in many rural wards
- Population growth in rural wards in Fenland
- Growth concentrated in and around Cambridge, in new settlements and in market towns

Changes to the age structure are also expected:

- Declining numbers of children in most areas (especially in rural areas and smaller towns), but increases in towns and major new developments, which will be dominated by young couples and families
- Increases in the numbers (and proportions of the total population), aged 65+ everywhere (except in Cambridge), and particularly in rural areas.



<sup>2</sup> Source: Cambridgeshire County Council population estimates and forecasts

## The four 'rural' districts

Profiles for each of the four rural districts in Cambridgeshire are shown below<sup>3</sup>. Important variations in the characters of these areas can be clearly seen.

The northern part of the County - including most of Fenland, and parts of Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire - is part of the wider Fens, which have a distinctive landscape and socio-economic character, with higher levels of deprivation and other indicators of a lower than average quality of life. Much of this area falls within the influence of towns and cities outside the county, notably Peterborough. Some towns within it – notably Wisbech - have an influence on parts of Norfolk and Lincolnshire in the wider Fens area.

Areas to the south fall more directly under the influence of Cambridge and smaller towns such as Huntingdon and some beyond the County such as Newmarket and Bedford. South Cambridgeshire district has no market towns, but a number of large and smaller villages, from which many people travel out to work in Cambridge.

## East Cambridgeshire

- Rural area with three market towns of Ely, Littleport and Soham.
- Mixed character - southern area around Newmarket relatively prosperous whilst some parishes in the north have previously received European transitional area funding.
- Ely with its outstanding cathedral is an attraction for national and international tourists. Quality of life in Ely is high - a recent national survey rated Ely one of the 10 most desirable places to live in the UK.
- Population of 76,400, with an increasing proportion over retirement age.
- Traditional agricultural employment declining and being overtaken by new industries (such as the biotech and knowledge-based) spreading north from Cambridge.
- The largest single factor affecting the area is the impact of population growth.
- One of the fastest growing districts in the Country.
- Challenges - affordable housing and the increasing pressure on the transport infrastructure, particularly the A10 corridor and the rail route to Cambridge and London, related to out-commuting (almost half of all employed residents commute to work outside the district). Employment growth is low.
- Overall East Cambridgeshire is ranked at 285 out of 354 authorities for deprivation (with 1 being the most deprived).
- However, pockets of deprivation exist in the district as a result of the declining traditional industries, limited public transport access and rural isolation.
- 2% of East Cambridgeshire's population is from ethnic groups other than White – the largest ethnic minority population is Travellers.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Based on 'Cambridgeshire's Vision 2007- 2021- Countywide Sustainable Community Strategy'

## Fenland

- Rural district of unique and beautiful landscapes and with a thriving local community.
- Four market towns of Wisbech, March, Whittlesey and Chatteris provide the main service, commercial and social centres for the area.
- Many residents live in rural settings and therefore access to services is a key concern for local people.
- Great progress has been made through partnership working in improving the quality of life for Fenland's communities.
- Challenges related to the area's high level of deprivation; teenage pregnancy; nearly one in four children live in a low-income households - implications for their health and educational achievement; relatively lower life expectancy; relatively higher level of premature deaths - related to poor diet, low levels of exercise, high levels of smoking, and high level of road traffic accidents; highest level of obesity in the East of England and high levels of diabetes.
- A fast growing district - need to ensure services and infrastructure are fit to serve growing population, with a large and growing migrant population, particularly from Eastern Europe. Shortage of affordable housing - increased house prices outstripping increases in average earnings.
- Average full-time wages low compared to the rest of the county (£421.90 per week compared to Cambridgeshire's average of £493.00).
- Raising skill levels in the district is a key challenge.
- Great potential for increased inward investment and business growth- most likely to be achieved in sectors relating to environmental technologies, food and drink, manufacturing and engineering, and knowledge-based business.

## Huntingdonshire

- Largest district within Cambridgeshire - both area and population size.
- Diverse area of nearly 350 square miles - half the population live in four market towns – Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and Ramsey - and the remainder in key settlements and villages in varied and attractive countryside.
- Huntingdon and St Neots are the largest towns and key economic and service centres. Generally prosperous area where the majority of people enjoy a good quality of life. However, pockets of higher relative deprivation within market towns – Oxmoor in Huntingdon, Eynesbury in St Neots and parts of Ramsey – and some rural areas are affected by sparsity, isolation and poor access to services and facilities.
- At the centre of the Cambridge to Peterborough growth area - significant growth in the past 20 years, which has resulted in an imbalance between jobs, houses and infrastructure.
- Large number of people commute out of the area to work and there is a lack of facilities in some communities.
- A good mix of new homes that sit alongside historic buildings and current and future opportunities to provide strategic open space.

- Affordable housing is a challenge, with average house prices at more than six times the average annual wage and the pressures of land availability and funding.
- Managing the opportunities and pressures from future growth is a continuing focus.

#### South Cambridgeshire

- Approximately 900 square kilometres of countryside surrounding Cambridge.
- Predominantly rural area with no market towns - has a number of smaller settlements and 101 parishes.
- Part of one of the government's four "growth" areas identified for substantial development over the next 10 - 12 years.
- Population forecasts predict the district will grow by 24% by 2021 from a population of 138,200 people in 2006.
- Population of the growth areas is likely to be younger and economically active, but in the rural areas is likely to become older (87% increase in people aged over 65 by 2021).
- District ranked in the top ten places to live by Channel 4's 'Location, Location, Location'; a quiet place; exceptionally low crime figures; 100% kerbside recycling; good travel links to London and Stansted Airport; plenty to do in the district and in Cambridge City.

## LIVING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

### Executive Summary

*Living in Cambridgeshire 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. Because deprivation measures are focused on local concentrations, in rural areas more thinly-spread disadvantage can often go unnoticed. 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 channeled and controlled could have a major impact on these issues, and it may be that new approaches to joint investment, community self-reliance and self-governance are needed to maximise future opportunities.

### Overview of national picture<sup>4</sup>

- Rural areas continue to fare better on most measures of quality of life than urban areas; they are characterised by having an older age profile, more people moving in than moving out, fewer homeless people, more healthy lifestyles, better educational achievement, lower crime, and less deprivation than urban areas; but they also have worse access to services, worse housing affordability, and the greater numbers of older people mean that illness is more prevalent for many diseases.
- Sparse and remote areas often fare worse on deprivation indicators, and when mapped, there are areas that show up consistently as offering a poorer quality of life.
- Much deprivation in rural areas is not picked up - even by small area mapping and analysis.
- Polarisation both between areas and within areas seems to be more of an issue than widespread deprivation and disadvantage.
- Rural areas are not universally better off than urban areas - some of the most serious issues – of housing affordability, access to services, and a lack of public transport – have continued as major issues. Access to financial services is also an issue affecting many rural areas.
- Few would argue that there is no need for action to address the issues that rural disadvantage poses – but there is often a lack of priority and focus and geographically targeted solutions are less likely to be effective.

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Summary of the main findings from the 'State of the Countryside' Report 2008

## Overview of local picture<sup>5</sup>

Rural Cambridgeshire has witnessed considerable growth in population over recent years, most of it coming from people moving into the area. Forecasts suggest that this growth will continue and be concentrated in and around Cambridge, in new settlements and in market towns. Forecasts indicate that there will be important changes in the overall distribution of people (some rural areas in overall decline and newer developments and market towns growing). Age structures will change to show an older age profile and a lower child population.

The pattern of relative deprivation across the area is significant. Overall, people tend to feel that the quality of life locally is good and, taken as whole, the population appears to be relatively advantaged. However, there are significant variations in prosperity, health, education, fuel poverty and other measures, with large parts of rural Cambridgeshire (particularly in Fenland, and areas in Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire) ranking highly on measures of multiple deprivation. In addition, because the focus tends to go on areas with the greatest geographical concentrations of disadvantage, rural deprivation can often go unnoticed.

Growth has brought with it busier roads caused to a degree by the mismatch between local population numbers and local jobs. Overall, the area has relatively high population density, especially surrounding Cambridge, but there remain significant problems for some people (especially the elderly and disabled); of access to transport and/or services.

The Post Office Network Change Programme has meant the closure of 24 rural post offices. The impact on services is significant due to the central community and services hub position post offices hold. Many post offices are co-located in village shops and without the footfall generated by post office business, many of these shops face difficulties and possible closure. In 2007, c48% of Cambridgeshire parishes/settlements had a general store in their village.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 extended the 'power of wellbeing' to eligible Parish Councils. The Act offers opportunities for new initiatives such as Parish Councils saving and supporting local assets such as shops, pubs or post offices.

As rural services are lost, the lack of access to transport provision has made accessing alternatives increasingly difficult. Due to the sparsity of many parts of the county, conventional bus services (which run along set routes) can be an inefficient use of limited resources. Demand responsive schemes, such as dial-a-ride or community-operated car schemes can offer more appropriate alternatives.

Broadband technology remains patchy across the county with available data showing many areas experiencing insufficient speed and reliability and some areas having zero coverage.

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<sup>5</sup> Source: Summary of Evidence – Annex to Basis Report for Stakeholder Consultation, Cambridgeshire Together, 2009

There are clear substantive issues that affect the provision of healthcare in rural areas including 'distance decay' the phenomenon which sees people make decreasing use of healthcare services the further they are away from the provision and the ageing population often hampered by decreasing mobility and car ownership.

Lack of affordable housing, especially in the southern part of the area remains an important issue. House prices are generally very high, yet wages in many rural industries and occupations are lower than average. There are relatively fewer social rented homes than in towns and in recent years the bulk of the rural social stock has been sold under the right to buy. Rural Exception sites offer new opportunities for providing homes limited to the occupancy of local people and can be developed through schemes such as community land trusts.

Many of Cambridgeshire's rural communities already demonstrate a culture of self-reliance and self-governance; planning their own futures, owning their own assets and facilities, delivering services or contributing their own efforts towards maintaining what are normally thought of as public services. Examples include undertaking of a community led plan or the management of village halls and green spaces. In the rural context, the landscape of public policy and investment needs to reflect the voluntary efforts and the success of community organisations in keeping rural services and facilities alive.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR RURAL STAKEHOLDERS**

##### **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?

##### **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?

##### **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?

**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?

**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 to 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?

**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?

**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?

**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?

## ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

### Executive Summary

*Economic well-being across the County* as whole is generally strong and expected to remain so, but once again there are significant differences in the incomes, employment levels, skills and qualifications and productivity of different parts of the County; again following the broad north-south split. A more general trend is for many rural communities at a very local level to show a greater polarisation of socio-economic conditions within this broader picture.

### Overview of national picture<sup>6</sup>

- The term 'The Rural Economy' does not adequately describe economic activity and health in rural England – multiple 'Rural Economies' is a more appropriate label - due to rural:urban interdependencies, two-way flows of goods, services, people and ideas reinforcing economic and social activity in both rural and urban communities.
- Rural areas have achieved levels of economic growth and outputs that have matched or exceeded those achieved even in urban areas outside of London; as measured by levels of new enterprises and employment rates, with more rural authorities having achieved the target of full employment.
- Rural economies have become the drivers of the national economy.
- Many residents and employees in rural areas have higher household and personal incomes than urban dwellers. However, sparse rural settlements and peripheral rural districts remain amongst the least prosperous economies as measured on several factors.
- Rural settlements and districts often support the highest rates of growth within the same measures. This, and changes in the businesses and employment in rural areas (declines in farming and the more rapid growth in the banking and other financial and business services), suggest a convergence of poorer rural areas with other rural areas and urban economies. However, the persistence of low wages, dispersal of disadvantage, smaller scale of firms and employment and more economic activity operating below the radar of attention and support, contributes to persistence of problems and slower change. The list of worst performing areas remains remarkably similar.
- Government action has tried to increase productivity in the poorest rural economies through Public Service Agreements and departmental objectives. The 'State of the Countryside' Report suggests that new approaches to enhancing economic performance are needed which are more locally sensitive and focused and which use a more comprehensive analysis and direct action to promote 'economic well-being' rather than economic growth. There also needs to be a more sophisticated understanding of the ways in which rural and urban economies interact.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: Summary of the main findings from the 'State of the Countryside' Report 2008

## Overview of local picture

The overall picture for the economic well-being of rural Cambridgeshire is a generally positive one - in recent years traditional industries such as agriculture and manufacturing (especially food) have been added to by newer technology and knowledge-based businesses, and greater levels of self-employment and home working. The area appears to be well placed to take advantage of the developing business opportunities stemming from the 'low carbon agenda'.

Economic growth in the wider sub region has been considerable, such that the Cambridge area is recognised as the major focus of regional as well as sub regional growth. Despite the current economic downturn, this looks likely to continue in the longer term, unless issues of congestion and wider infrastructure shortfalls (e.g. business premises and skills availability) intervene. A key issue is the development of greater local employment opportunities to match population growth and reduce the amount of commuting both outside and within the area.

This broad picture of economic prosperity and growth masks areas and communities which are relatively poor and less productive. Levels of overall prosperity in South Cambridgeshire are considerably above those in other parts of the area and other indicators such as employment levels show similar patterns, with Fenland showing the poorest performance. Significant employment growth can be expected in the county over the next 10 - 15 years, accompanied by further structural change away from agriculture (which is expected to see a decline in the number of people employed) and towards business services (which is expected to see the greatest increase in the number of people employed).

This picture is mirrored in related fields such as levels of education and qualifications. Rural Cambridgeshire has percentages of young people (16-19) not in education, employment or training (NEET) lower than the national and regional averages. Recent levels of NEET have increased as a consequence of the economic downturn, and though at lower levels than nationally/ regionally, this is still an important issue for rural Cambridgeshire, affecting many young people. Levels of NEET tend to follow the more general pattern of deprivation, with the highest levels in parts of Fenland, East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.

The overall picture, therefore, is one of general prosperity and economic vibrancy with an underlying problem of localised economic under-achievement in some rural areas and communities, exacerbated by the out-migration of many younger people into the more urban areas. Those unable or unwilling to take advantage of the broader economic growth in the area will need to look to other sectors for employment and business development opportunities. Key potential areas of growth are tourism, food and farming (especially looking to build on local, distinctive products and markets) and other rurally-based businesses (e.g. local retail, craft and specialist services and products) especially given the expected growth in population numbers and changes to age structures.

Key to achieving the growth in opportunities is the availability of business premises, business advice and support services, training and development and in some cases collective promotion of an area and what it offers (e.g. through market town partnerships, development of local 'farmers markets' and similar opportunities). This points to an approach to economic development which complements the more strategic focus on the sub region's technological and associated strengths with something more sensitive and responsive to local conditions and opportunities. A possible example of this is the Fens Adventurers Rural Development Programme, though this is limited in its geographical and financial scope.

## QUESTIONS FOR RURAL STAKEHOLDERS

### 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 economics?

### 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?

### Question 3

Market Towns (or larger settlements in South Cambridgeshire) 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?

**Question 4**

Policy suggests there needs to be greater recognition of the ways that economic growth can enhance community sustainability, for example by 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?

**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? How could these activities support the local economy?

## LAND AND ENVIRONMENT

### Executive Summary

*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.

### Overview of national picture<sup>7</sup>

- The rural environment is changing and, in many respects, the pace of change is accelerating.
- There is strong pressure for new housing. Planning policies have shaped rather than prevented development - most towns and villages have seen small-scale residential 'infilling' and the redevelopment and subdivision of buildings for housing. The high cost of rural houses relative to local earnings has grown as an issue and is likely to have further consequences on the character of rural settlements.
- Farming is undergoing a shift in direction. The previous period of low incomes and retrenchment has been replaced by a significant rise in agricultural prices and a return of confidence, due to a range of factors.
- Recreational activities in the countryside have increased; mainly as a result of more open access - Government plans will further increase these opportunities. A high proportion of the population take part in outdoor recreation, but there is little evidence to show a significant increase either in the number of people or the intensity of use of the countryside. This is despite a growing focus in public policy on the benefits of outdoor exercise and leisure.
- Environmental regulations and incentives have contributed to improvements or stability in the condition of the rural environment. The environmental implications of a more prosperous farming sector are unknown, but intensification of use is likely to put pressure on environmental quality.
- Climate change poses particular challenges for rural communities - the sustainability of people's car-reliant lifestyles and in the way landscapes and biodiversity will adapt. There is likely to be a new set of sustainability issues that will need to be considered and which will shape the countryside.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: Summary of the main findings from the 'State of the Countryside' Report 2008

## Overview of local picture

Cambridgeshire is made up of a number of different landscape 'character' areas which provide the canvas on which man-made activities make their impression.

Changes in the climate will have a differential impact on these areas, with the Fens possibly most at risk of significant changes such as flooding. Much of the area is below sea level due to the shrinkage of the peat through water loss and oxidation. Peat has been declining at a rate of about 2cm per year since 1970 and loss is eventually predicted to cause a change in farming from valuable root crops, such as potatoes and sugar beet, to less valuable combinable crops such as wheat and barley.

Tackling climate change is one of the most difficult challenges facing the county. The current and expected rate of growth poses a challenge but can also be an opportunity to build sustainability into new and expanding communities. High levels of motor traffic and carbon emissions need to be mitigated to ensure minimum impact on quality of life in local communities.

Peak oil - the term used for the time when demand for oil will exceed our capacity to produce it at an affordable price - is predicted to hit by 2030. Impact will be far greater on rural communities with their reliance on private transport to access services and also the use of oil for heating.

The impact of global food security must also be considered locally; our food must be reliable and resilient to shocks and crises and be produced and brought to market as sustainably as possible. Some of the key threats and challenges identified by Defra's food security assessment could have a significant future impact on Cambridgeshire's environment; for example, climate change may create new stresses on natural resources. Ways of sustaining a profitable agriculture sector in the face of major disease outbreaks, shifts in subsidy regimes and global pressures on food markets, as well as initiatives to build local food markets are of continuing importance.

Cambridgeshire is not as well provided with accessible open space as some other parts of the country, mainly due to the dominance of arable agriculture - especially in the fens areas to the north and east. Nonetheless most people are within a reasonable distance of a 'strategic open space'. Work has been completed on a 'Green Infrastructure Plan' for the Cambridge sub-region and a wider 'Green Vision' which encompasses the whole County. The Infrastructure Plan is under review. The main thrust of current plans is to meet the needs for open space of new and expanded communities as well as addressing the areas of historic under provision, mainly in the Fens area.

Most rural communities have some open green space that is owned and managed by the Parish Council. This space is often allocated for children's play provision or sports such as football, cricket and bowling. District-based play strategies highlight deficiencies in play

provision and plans for improvements. Government funding for improved play facilities is being invested around the County via the County Council's 'Play Pathfinder' programme.

Levels of participation in sport in Cambridgeshire are below national targets and are especially low in Fenland. Though there are gaps in sporting facility provision at present, a higher proportion of the existing facilities are newer than the picture nationally and most are in generally good condition. The priority is to meet gaps in provision, especially to take account of population growth and to improve the existing facilities that need it.

Since 1600, over 99% of traditional fen wetland has been lost. Only three fragments remain – Woodwalton Fen, Wicken Fen and Chippenham Fen, which together make-up the Fenland Special Area for conservation, a legal designation which affords protection at a European level.

Two Fenland habitat restoration projects are proposed; the Great Fen Project and the Wicken Fen Vision, which have the ambition to return intensively-farmed land back to native wetlands. There are potential multiple benefits to support wildlife and people including nature conservation; education; countryside access and tourism; income generation creating local jobs and protection from flooding.

Recreation linked to population growth and trends in behaviour is impacting on the rural nature of the County, principally through the impact of increased access to the countryside. The linear Rights of Way network covers an existing 3,210 km and in addition there are other access opportunities such as Country Parks, National Trust and RSPB land, 22 Woodland Trust reserves and 50 Wildlife Trust reserves (including Peterborough). The Countryside Stewardship Scheme and permissive open access areas give further access for passive countryside recreation.

Arts organisations in rural areas suffer many of the problems of other services, for example resources, infrastructure and transport/access. These organisations are seen as an important vehicle for reflecting the way of life in rural areas and the changes and challenges affecting them. There is flourishing arts and cultural sector in and around Cambridge and in some of the market towns, but activity is less evident outside of these focal points. The County Council supports and advises on the arts and cultural sector, but there are concerns that resource reductions will reduce the effectiveness of this role, especially for some rural-based organisations, such as voluntarily-run museums which add to the tourism offer in rural areas.

Major growth in houses, businesses and related infrastructure and human activity is probably the principal influence on how rural Cambridgeshire's land and environment looks and performs now and into the foreseeable future.

The major issue for rural Cambridgeshire is controlling the overall scale of growth and directing this in a sensitive way so as to create sustainable communities (whether in major new settlements or through additions to existing villages and towns) and minimise the negative impact on environmental quality, both in the natural and man-made environment.

A recent review of the current growth strategies for the Cambridge area has concluded that there is likely to be an imbalance between the growth in population/housing and the supply of jobs, especially in proximity to the planned housing locations. Due to man's extensive requirements there are always competing pressures on deciding the best use of available land.

## QUESTIONS FOR RURAL STAKEHOLDERS

### 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?

### 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?

### Question 3

Major growth in houses, businesses and related infrastructure and human activity is probably the principal 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?

### 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.

- What more could be done to encourage local supply chains between farmers/food producers and local communities?
- 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?