

Rural White Paper for the East of England

# Vibrant Rural Communities

*Unlocking the Potential of the East of England's Rural Areas*



East of England Rural Forum

September 2010

# Vibrant Rural Communities

Unlocking the Potential of the East of England's Rural Areas

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## Foreword

The East of England Rural Forum (EERF) is pleased to present its East of England Rural White Paper. It comes at a time of unprecedented change for rural areas. The East of England is subject to as much change as any region with pressures as diverse as economic, climatic, demographic and social change creating multiple challenges and opportunities for rural areas and communities.

The EERF's vision for rural areas is that over the next ten years, rural areas will increase their contribution to the region in economic terms, whilst becoming more sustainable socially and environmentally and that communities will be supported and empowered to engage fully in defining their future.

In developing this Paper, the Forum has been determined to challenge some of the long held misconceptions about rural areas and to demonstrate that rural areas have a distinct, but vital role to play in the future health and success of the region. It is our belief that by stimulating dynamic and innovative rural solutions that rural areas can play an increased role in the region and help everyone to enjoy sustainable prosperity whilst promoting community health and vitality.

The East of England has no major cities and has nearly a quarter of England's market towns and numerous villages all linked economically and socially to larger towns and small cities. This settlement structure presents particular issues due to the dispersed nature of the population which is not helped by the Region's weak infrastructure. In a region which is ageing rapidly and where large scale growth is foreseen, the interaction between larger towns and their rural hinterland will remain a source of debate.

Rural areas need to grow to sustain the services they need. Unfettered growth is not desirable, but modest steady rural growth supported by communities and which ensures a sustainable balance between the growth in population (which is happening anyway) and growth of the economy and services is both feasible and desirable.

The vision for rural areas set out within this Rural White Paper is challenging and dynamic. It builds on the unique nature and traditions of rural areas, but argues strongly that rural areas must embrace change. Rural communities themselves must take the lead in delivering this change and there are no quick fixes for many of the issues they face. We believe that if we work together we can promote diverse and progressive rural communities to meet the needs of those of who live and work there, whilst bringing wider benefits to the whole region.

The purpose of this White Paper is to focus on the priorities for rural communities in the East of England against a changing backdrop of national, regional and local policy and organisational structures. It needs to inform debate and action at many levels and contains recommendations for changes to policy at national and local level. This Paper is supported by a separate Action Plan which describes what needs to be done by the public sector as well as by rural communities, businesses and people in order to deliver the recommendations and achieve the ambition.

This paper identifies three key challenges for rural areas, all of which if addressed positively can bring significant benefits to the whole region.

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**Digital inclusion** can help to spread economic growth, increase access to services and reduce under-achievement in education.

**Rural economic growth** can deliver growth for the regional economy whilst also helping rural areas to be more sustainable, reducing the need to commute and bringing community cohesion benefits.

**Demographic change** is real and challenging but with appropriate policies on affordable housing, employment and skills, we can retain more young families in rural communities and make them more sustainable whilst improving the services we provide to the growing elderly population.

The forum will work with partners to ensure that the messages within this paper are promoted in the development of local plans and where appropriate used to campaign nationally for policy changes which will assist delivery.

The Forum itself has only very limited resources, all of which are focused on engagement and consultation and it will work with communities, businesses, the third sector and public bodies to take the ideas within this paper forward. We shall engage with everyone with an interest in rural areas to ensure that the ideas set out within this paper are delivered to benefit all who live in the East of England.

This White Paper with its analyses and recommendations provides a reference for people and organisations at all levels, informing and challenging them to make better decisions for the long term health and well-being of rural communities and to actively participate in achieving our vision for sustainable rural communities.



**Pat Holtom - Chairman of the East of England Rural Forum**

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## Executive Summary

This East of England Rural White Paper sets out the key issues affecting the East of England's rural areas and makes recommendations which need to be taken to improve their sustainability. This Paper should be read in conjunction with the detailed Action Plan\* which accompanies it. This Action Plan will be used to monitor and record progress and will be updated periodically as appropriate to reflect changes which impact on rural areas and the ambition of the Rural White Paper.

The East of England has few major cities and is a predominantly rural region with nearly a quarter of England's market towns which with their rural hinterland are home to nearly 40% of the population. The landscape is gently rolling or flat with a long coastline and many important natural and built landscape features, although there are challenges in both maintaining the existing natural and built environment and in planning for future changes created by climate change and resource constraints.

The rural population is growing, but there is also significant demographic change with rural areas having fewer young families, more retired people and in a rapid increase in migrant arrivals. The growing population is putting pressure on services and housing affordability is a significant issue.

The rural economy has been changing quickly and has seen a faster growth in knowledge based businesses than urban areas and rural areas now have an economic mix which is similar to urban. However, the economy of more remote Market Towns is performing poorly, qualifications levels in many remoter rural areas are well below regional averages and the economy is more reliant on tourism and the food and farming sector than the region as a whole.

This Rural White Paper proposes that balanced and sustainable rural growth should be the overarching objective for the region's rural areas. Balance is needed between the growth of rural and urban areas so that are mutually supportive. We need to match population growth with growth in rural jobs and to ensure that service provision meets the needs of a growing population. Whilst continued demographic change is inevitable, more must be done to help young families to stay in rural areas, by increasing the supply of affordable housing so that a more balanced demographic profile can be achieved and by creating the skills and employment opportunities they need.

Delivering a dynamic economy is a theme which runs throughout this White Paper because of the need to ensure that rural people have access to a wide range of opportunities. Currently too many people who live in rural areas commute long distances to work, creating congestion, reducing rural community sustainability and creating social and environmental costs. Growing the rural economy would help younger people to stay, rather than leaving their community to find work and thus maintain a better demographic mix. The importance of skills provision to economic growth is also highlighted for both young people as well as the growing need to up-skill the existing workforce.

To be successful rural areas need modern physical infrastructure, including a mix of appropriate and affordable housing, workspace for a diversity of business and modern service facilities. Modern and

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\* While a draft Action Plan has been written, much of its detail will depend on the forthcoming government announcements regarding the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), the localism White Paper and further changes to regional governance. Once these are known, the Action Plan will be issued to all concerned with its implementation.

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efficient transport infrastructure is also essential to deliver economic and social inclusion, but rural transport solutions are not the same as in urban areas. Green infrastructure such as open space is also of growing importance as we increasingly recognise the health and economic benefits which it can bring, but perhaps surprisingly many rural areas suffer from a lack of accessible green space.

The digital age offers real advantages to rural areas by opening up many more services and economic opportunities, but rural areas are being disadvantaged by poor access to high speed broadband or mobile services, with speeds in urban areas consistently outpacing those available in rural areas. Addressing this would help to grow the rural economy and increase access to services.

Growth also needs to be sustainable in terms of ensuring that it does not impose unacceptable costs on the environment, whilst promoting positive impacts such as enhanced biodiversity or restored landscapes. Whilst progress is being made, the range of environmental issues which needs addressing remains large and as well as landscape quality and biodiversity, includes newer challenges such as water management where both the prospect of flooding and water shortages are causing increased concerns.

In common with the whole country, the East of England's rural areas will have to live with climate change and arguably with a long coastline, extensive low lying areas and fragile habitats, they are in the frontline of many of the changes climate change will bring. Proactively addressing these challenges can produce economic as well as sustainability benefits and will help to prepare rural areas for the future.

Rural areas are attractive places to live, but rural residents can suffer from poor access to services. New ways of delivering services, using online services or by combining the services from multiple public sector bodies with the third or private sectors can all help to address problems with poor access to services. Whilst crime is lower in rural areas, the perception is often different and continued effort by councils and the police is needed to help rural communities feel safe.

To be successful rural communities need effective champions and real empowerment supported by people who are engaged in helping to facilitate community activities. Whilst many service providers are now much better at seeking user views, there is a danger of consultation overload without true involvement in decision making. It is vital to ensure that all sections of the community participate and while there are particular problems with seeking the views of young people, new technology and new ways of engaging them can produce results.

In all the areas above the Rural White Paper sets out actions which need to be taken to unlock the potential of rural areas. With the right support and a conducive environment the contribution which rural areas make to the East of England economy, community wellbeing and environmental sustainability can all be substantially increased.

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In particular three headline areas are highlighted which have impacts across all rural areas:

- Digital inclusion is seen as critical to the future success of rural areas with a need to deliver next generation access to all rural areas being fundamental to growing the rural economy and in helping rural inhabitants to access services;
- Rural economic growth needs to occur at a faster rate than growth in the regional economy as a whole, reducing the need for rural people to commute and bringing economic and community benefits to rural areas, whilst providing a future for rural young people within their community;
- Demographic change requires active interventions to support young families through access to affordable housing and older people by ensuring rural services meet their needs.

## Introduction

The East of England Rural Forum\* (EERF) is an independent body which draws its membership from public, private and third sector organisations and which provides a forum to capture issues, consider solutions and comment on policy drafting. It is mirrored by similar groups in other regions and meets regularly with Ministers and the other regional forums to promote the case for rural areas.

This Rural White Paper builds upon a series of position papers that the Forum has developed and unites them into a comprehensive statement of how the rural East of England needs to develop over the next 10 years and beyond. It is intended to be a living document and therefore whilst many of the ideas it sets out are forward looking, it is recognised that solutions will evolve and change due to new technology or changes in government policy and economic and social conditions. The associated Action Plan will be used to capture these changes and identify new, more appropriate solutions to the emerging circumstances.

In many areas, this need to recognise that change will happen is essential given the pace and impact of change and throughout this paper we argue that policy making and intervention must respect the changes we are seeing in the way people want to live and actively empower them to participate in the decision making process. Two notable examples relate to economic policy and digital policy.

In relation to economic policy, many government plans, whether at the national or local level propose that most economic growth should be concentrated in urban areas despite the fact that new ways of working, new technology, the faster rise in the rural as opposed to the urban population and the gridlock which is increasingly common in our urban areas makes this untenable. It is essential that economic policy is re-examined to re-balance the drive for economic growth across the whole of the East of England's geography.

The paper therefore identifies the most important issues facing rural areas and suggests areas in which policy needs to change. In all areas the chapters seek to identify what needs to change and what the objectives of this change should be. In many areas suggestions for how the benefits of change can be used to increase economic output or to reduce costs are made in recognition of the squeeze on expenditure which is widely foreseen for the next few years.

## Rural White Paper structure

The Rural White Paper has been structured into eight chapters, but where appropriate, links between the chapters have been identified. The chapters are:

- Chapter 1 - Sustainable Rural Communities - planning for balanced and sustainable rural growth, role of villages, market towns and urban centres (including land use)
- Chapter 2 - Delivering A Dynamic Economy - employment, new markets and businesses, education and skills, supportive business environment
- Chapter 3 - Modern Infrastructure - transport, housing, workspace

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\* See [www.eerf.org.uk](http://www.eerf.org.uk) for further information.

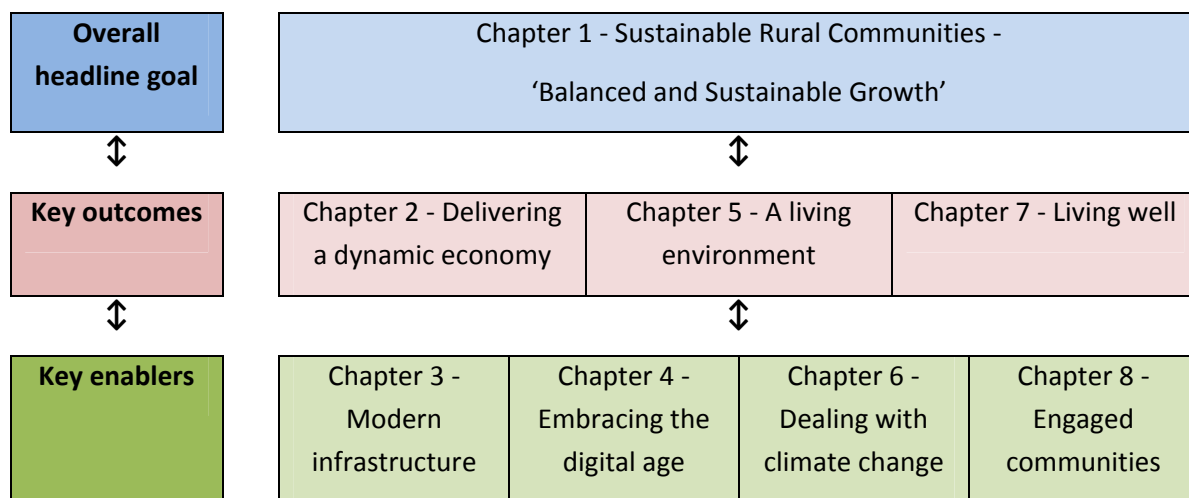
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- Chapter 4 - Embracing the Digital Age - broadband, mobile phones and digitally enabled communities and businesses
- Chapter 5 - A Living Environment - biodiversity, landscape, heritage and built environment / distinctiveness, access to the environment, water resources
- Chapter 6 - Dealing with Climate Change - mitigation, resilience and business continuity (adaptation), energy
- Chapter 7 - Living well - Access to services - role of community buildings, health and wellbeing, community safety
- Chapter 8 - Engaged Communities - empowerment, councils and local structures to deliver chapters 1-7 through engaged people and communities who champion and drive change

The relationship between the chapters can be seen in Table 1 below which explains how the different areas fit together to present an overall set of actions for rural communities.

**Table 1 - Rural White Paper structure**



## Process

The process to develop the East of England Rural White Paper included a series of consultations to ensure the final paper represented the views of the rural community in the East of England. This process included:

- Development of the proposed focus for the Rural White Paper by the EERF steering group and approved by a meeting of the full Forum in 2009;
- A draft issues paper which was discussed with the EERF Rural White Paper steering group on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2010;
- An issues paper which was circulated to all EERF members and other invitees to the consultation event;

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- A formal consultation event held at Shuttleworth College on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010 and attended by over 50 EERF members and guests;
- A draft Rural White Paper circulated for comments and feedback on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2010;
- A final discussion with the EERF Rural White Paper steering group on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

The output of all of these consultations has been used to guide the focus and issues which this paper has sought to address.

In addition to this specific series of consultations, the production of this paper built on the policy position papers and minutes from the Rural Forum over the previous four years and reflects the issues and concerns reflected in these previous meetings\*.

At the consultation event participants were asked to rank 30 potential issues in relation to the development of the East of England's rural areas. For each issue participants were asked to allocate a score using a 1-5 scale and all the scores were averaged to identify the most important issues. The results of this ranking process are presented in full in Appendix 1, but the top issues identified by this process were:

- 1st • Recognising broadband as an essential utility for rural areas
- 2<sup>nd</sup> = • Providing affordable housing in rural areas
- Promoting sustainable water resource management
- 3<sup>rd</sup> = • Ensuring the planning system promotes rural economic growth
- Promoting policies to drive rural employment growth
- Providing more rural workspace & technology to support rural industries & jobs including home working
- Engaging young people in local community activities
- Improving links between Councils, local democracy structures & community action

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\* See [www.eerf.org.uk](http://www.eerf.org.uk) for copies of these documents.

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## Rural East of England

The rural East of England is a diverse and complex area from the expanses of salt flats in North Norfolk with its low population density and small coastal villages, to the rich pastures and agricultural lands of 'Constable Country', or rapidly expanding villages in the commuter belts of Essex and Hertfordshire. None of these areas are typical, all are unique in their mix of issues and challenges, but collectively they illustrate the enormous diversity to be found in the rural East of England.

This section describes some of the key features of the rural East of England and outlines the ways in which it is changing as well as some of the key challenges it faces in the future.

Rural areas are often seen as being old fashioned and slow to change, but this is dispelled by the finding as reported in the Taylor Review (2008) that knowledge intensive businesses only increased by 21% in urban areas between 1998-2005, but by 46% in rural areas. In a similar way official data tends to hide rural deprivation by working at ward level or above without recognising that in rural areas each ward contains both the more affluent as well as the deprived, unlike the position in most urban areas. As shown in the table, rural areas have significant numbers of deprived residents (147,520) but few specific programmes to address the issues created.

|                                               | East of England - Rural |         | England - Rural |         |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|
|                                               | N                       | % share | N               | % share |
| All People                                    | 1,756,635               | 30.7    | 9,803,535       | 19.1    |
| Working-age client group                      | 99,235                  | 22.6    | 592,525         | 12.0    |
| Income Support (IS) claimants                 | 25,235                  | 18.4    | 147,590         | 9.0     |
| People who are "income deprived"              | 147,520                 | 22.2    | 859,850         | 10.9    |
| Children living in income deprived households | 33,930                  | 18.7    | 195,930         | 9.0     |
| Pension Credit claimants                      | 66,840                  | 29.4    | 372,675         | 16.3    |

Source: DWP 2009, CLG 2007.  
'Share' refers to the proportion of the total population (on an indicator) that live in rural areas.

Rural areas are also seen as attractive places to live because of the pleasant and green landscape, but this hides the fact that rural residents on average walk less than urban residents and that the very landscape which makes them so visually attractive also presents problems for accessing services.

The stereotypes of rural areas are therefore largely untrue and the reality is far more complex with rural areas containing high numbers of knowledge intensive businesses, significant deprivation

\* The information in this and similar tables throughout the White Paper is obtained from the Rural Evidence database developed by Oxford Consultations for Social Inclusion (OCSI) and ACRE, see [www.rural-evidence.org.uk](http://www.rural-evidence.org.uk).

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(alongside wealthier residents) and real problems with access to the modern services and facilities which most urban residents take for granted.

## Population

Rural areas are attractive places to live and research shows a continued trend for affluent families and retirees to move to them. Coupled to an influx of migrants, the increased population has put pressure on rural services, but we argue that incomers should be welcomed for the growth and ideas they bring. Clearly we cannot allow their arrival to deprive local people of services or housing and so we set out some innovative ways in which these seemingly intractable problems could be solved.

The East of England is one of the fastest growing regions in the country. The population is currently 5.7 million and expected to rise to 6.2 million by 2021<sup>i</sup> and approximately 40% of the population live in rural areas and market towns. The East of England is experiencing rapid change and significant development pressures are affecting many of its rural areas. The provision of suitable and affordable housing for those working in rural areas is a key issue facing the region.

| The proportion of people in age gender and household composition groups that live in rural areas in East of England (rural share) |                         |         |                 |         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|
|                                                                                                                                   | East of England - Rural |         | England - Rural |         |
|                                                                                                                                   | N                       | % share | N               | % share |
| All People                                                                                                                        | 1,756,635               | 30.7    | 9,803,535       | 19.1    |
| Males                                                                                                                             | 869,420                 | 30.8    | 4,838,180       | 19.1    |
| Females                                                                                                                           | 887,215                 | 30.5    | 4,965,355       | 19.0    |
| Aged 0-15                                                                                                                         | 319,405                 | 29.4    | 1,756,415       | 18.2    |
| Working age                                                                                                                       | 1,028,955               | 29.5    | 5,739,815       | 18.0    |
| Pensionable age                                                                                                                   | 408,270                 | 35.3    | 2,307,305       | 23.5    |
| Lone-pensioner households                                                                                                         | 94,070                  | 29.8    | 541,835         | 18.4    |
| Lone parent households                                                                                                            | 25,560                  | 21.6    | 155,265         | 11.8    |

Source: ONS Mid Year Estimates 2008, Census 2001.  
 'Share' refers to the proportion of the total population (on an indicator) that live in rural areas.

The East of England is characterised by a growing rural population which is increasingly deriving its income from employment outside the traditional rural economy, either by working in growing sectors of the economy such as financial services, through commuting to major urban areas or by working remotely using ICT. This is particularly significant in the south and west of the region where the majority of rural inhabitants work outside their immediate community.

The East of England has also experienced a net inward migration of migrant workers from the most recent accession countries, with all areas of the region experiencing significant in-migration particularly since about 2004 when movements from the Accession States became possible. These migrants have filled many hard to fill jobs, helped the economy grow and brought new ideas.

The region's rural areas also suffer a high percentage of out migration from those who are moving to access further education outside of the East of England and not returning, with rural England having

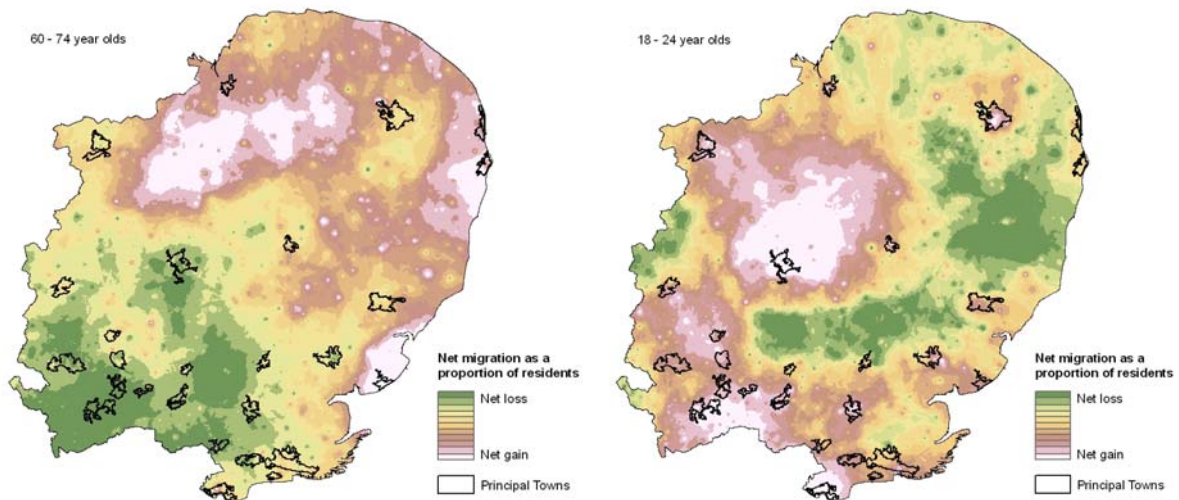
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400,000 fewer young people aged 15-29 than 20 years ago (State of the Countryside 2007). The map below shows a particular issue with young people leaving much of Suffolk, Norfolk and North Essex.

Conversely rural areas have seen a 200% increase in migrant arrivals since 2004 and ongoing in-migration by middle aged residents and those at retirement age.

There are particular hot spot areas where there has been an increase in the older population as a consequence of people moving to the countryside to retire – particularly in parts of North Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and along the North Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex Coasts as shown on the maps below (Birbeck 2008).



**Net migration of pensioners (60-74)**

**Net migration of young people**

All these issues have led to skewed demographics in many rural areas in the East of England with a lower than expected number of young families and an over-representation of retired people. The issues surrounding the long term sustainability of some rural communities are therefore very real.

## Employment and incomes

As described below the rural economy has changed rapidly and in many senses is now similar to that found in urban areas. Looking forward, however, whilst the internet has enabled economic diversity to increase, the continual struggle for higher internet speeds risks marginalising many rural communities unless we find a rapid solution to deliver these higher speeds in rural areas.

The East of England rural population is relatively affluent on average but this masks very large variations in income. The large number of professionals (many of whom work in cities and major towns) and wealthy pensioners (many of whom move into rural areas at retirement) living in rural areas mask the real economic problems facing many locals, especially young families. Average wages in rural areas are more than £4,600 per annum below the urban average (Taylor 2008).

Low incomes translate into major challenges relating to the affordability of housing, with parts of the North Norfolk coast now having average prices which are nearly ten times average local incomes<sup>ii</sup>. These problems are exacerbated by the high levels of seasonal employment in these areas.

Rural household incomes are variable depending on how sparse or remote they are from large urban areas. In the East of England, this is particularly noticeable when comparing areas in the Norfolk and

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Cambridge Fens to areas around major cities such as Cambridge and Norwich<sup>iii</sup>. The Fens is one of the worst areas for rural deprivation in the UK despite its relative closeness to rapidly growing urban areas such as Cambridge and Peterborough. The rural parts of the commuter belt in the South of the region are more affluent although even here there are hidden pockets of deprivation.

Being adjacent to London imposes significant development pressures on the East of England's rural areas. Whereas until recently this effect was only significant in the south of the region, improved rail links and problems with housing affordability has led to a big increase in commuting from areas such as Cambridgeshire and Suffolk to London and from across the region to its major cities such as Cambridge, Peterborough and Norwich.

However, London is also likely to deliver significant growth potential for the East of England's rural economy. From high technology and business services companies serving urban markets, to tourism and the food and drink sector, London's proximity is likely to be a major factor in future growth. For example the demand for 'local' food with clear provenance has been growing strongly and with London accounting for nearly 20% of the UK's food consumption and 40% of the UK's restaurant trade the London market is a major opportunity for this sector. However – particularly in the north and east of the region – there are concerns about continuing economic underperformance and an over-reliance on traditional employment sectors such as food processing and farming.<sup>iv</sup>

The tourism sector is growing strongly with the East of England outperforming most other areas and in a predominantly rural location, most tourism is rural in nature. East of England Tourism at its 2009 conference reported that 60% of businesses expected to see an increased turnover in 2010 and that in the period 2006-08 tourism spending by staying visitors increased by 6.6%<sup>v</sup>. With short breaks growing faster than longer holidays, the accessibility of the East of England to major urban centres in London and the Midlands suggests the prospects for future growth are strong.

The East of England has 120 market towns which is nearly a quarter of the total across England<sup>vi</sup>. Most market towns are adapting to economic change, however, the more remote rural market towns have made less progress and have a higher level of poverty than other rural areas.

### Land use and the environment

The low lying topography and dry climate in the East of England makes the region particularly susceptible to climate change with rural areas in many cases being even more exposed than urban areas. Positive action on this and many other environmental issues including landscape quality, biodiversity, flooding and carbon emissions will be needed. Rural areas are in the frontline of many of these issues and can provide innovative solutions which benefit the whole region.

Approximately 75% of the East of England land area is in agricultural use with a further 7% in woodland. Compared to other regions, the farming and food sectors are characterised by larger businesses, with considerable consolidation having occurred in recent years. These businesses are primarily based on arable, intensive horticulture, pigs and poultry. The agri-food sector is a significant employer of people who live in the East of England, especially in the northern part of the region. The region's agri-food sector is nationally significant in a wide range of products and in 2008 produced 63% of the nation's sugar beet and turkeys, over 50% of its ducks, a 1/3 of all potatoes, peas and beans, 29% of all vegetables and salads, 28% of the wheat and 24% of the pigs. National

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data also suggests that a third of all haulage is related to the food chain. If employment in the whole food chain is totalled (including food retail and catering) the sector employs 1 in 7 of the East of England workforce<sup>vii</sup>.

The East of England is a low-lying region, with a wide range of rural and coastal landscapes, communities and economies. It is the driest region in England, but even so 25% of its land area is at risk from river valley or coastal flooding. Climate change presents challenges from both changing rainfall patterns and rising sea levels. As a result there are particular issues around water security, flood management and coastal realignment.

The East of England has a distinctive and diverse natural environment that supports many of the UK's rarest and best loved habitats and species within the region's Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). However, whilst the condition of our nationally important SSSIs has improved significantly over the past decades, biodiversity in the wider countryside remains in a fragile state and is in a significantly poorer state than the SSSIs. It is a region of dramatic and often sharp contrasts with landscapes ranging from a long, low-lying coastline (featuring windswept beaches, dunes and marshes), to large scale arable farmland and forestry plantations, extensive lowland heathland and a more intimate mosaic of mixed woodlands and hedgerows. The topography and geography of the region alongside a long standing commitment to new energy sources has enabled the East of England to be the leading English region for renewable electricity.

The historic environment of the East of England is rich and varied and important both for its own sake and because it is a significant driver of economic and social objectives. It contributes to the quality of life of all, whether local residents, visitors from the wider region or tourists. It also cuts across and unites environmental, social and economic issues through its role in tourism and education; the re-use of historic farm buildings for new businesses; and training in historic building repair methods which both develops skills and contributes to the conservation of important buildings.

## Chapter 1 - Delivering Sustainable Rural Communities

### Summary

- Rural communities need to embrace the growth required to allow them to sustain healthy and vibrant communities in the long term
- Planning policy must support the growth of villages and Market Towns so that they are sustainable economically and socially in the long term
- National and local economic policy must recognise how the growth of the rural economy can help to deliver local and national economic goals

### Challenges

The need to plan for balanced and sustainable rural growth is the fundamental cross cutting issue which underpins all other areas of the White Paper. Without a balanced and sustainable planning and development agenda, the rural areas of the East of England risk being marginalised, leading to an imbalanced population of the rich and retired, whilst younger families and those in lower paid employment are driven out. Unless rural areas are allowed to grow and provide economic opportunities and affordable housing for a diverse population, it will be impossible to sustain the services which are needed.

The East of England is projected to be the fastest growing region in England to 2030 with the last Regional Spatial Strategy<sup>viii</sup> foreseeing the population reaching 6.2 million by 2021<sup>ix</sup>. Whilst much of the growth is proposed in major urban centres, housing projections and job creation targets foresee more general growth across the region and in urban areas the scale of development will have major impacts on their rural hinterlands.

Work by Birkbeck College (2008)<sup>x</sup> for EEDA looked at the linkages between urban and rural areas and found multiple links in terms of the economy, travel to work, access to services and cultural links with major cities and market towns having significant impacts on their hinterland.

The Rural Forum's own papers on planning<sup>xi</sup> and growth have called for changes in the planning system to support more balanced and sustainable rural growth, where economic growth is aligned with housing growth. The need for balance also extends to commercial (e.g. retail) and public services (e.g. health, policing) which need to be developed in parallel to housing growth and the need to ensure that development is undertaken in ways which both minimises negative impacts on the environment and promotes positive action in areas such as embedded energy generation, water management and wildlife.

The Taylor Review (2008)<sup>xii</sup> stated that *"a fundamental shake up of planning & affordable housing policy is vital to breathe new life & prosperity into rural communities"* and said that *"if we fail to build affordable homes to enable people who work in the countryside to live there we risk turning our villages into gated communities of wealthy commuters & the retired"* and that we need a *"more flexible approach to work-based extensions to homes"*.

On market towns, Taylor proposed a change *"from endless bland housing estates to create new neighbourhood extensions with shops & community facilities, workplaces & open spaces"*. This

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concept may seem simple and sensible, but unfortunately the evidence of recent decades from many market towns is that they have expanded through edge of settlement housing estates with no services, limited green infrastructure and an expectation that the inhabitants will commute to employment in major urban areas. Clearly this is not conducive to the creation of sustainable communities and instead creates dormitory towns, with rural communities in the south of the region close to London, or those on major access routes particularly subject to this dormitory effect.

National data shows the rural population is growing by 70,000 people per year (CRC 2007), with projections by ONS suggesting the rural population will increase by 16% in the next 20 years but only 9% in urban areas.

To drive forward rural communities, an educated and aspirational local population is essential. As explained in more detail in Chapter 2, remote rural areas tend to suffer from lower levels of educational attainment in the workforce than that found in urban areas. Lower educational attainment levels impact on not only the potential for employment, but also have impacts on health, wellbeing and the ability for rural communities to fulfil their potential.

More balanced and sustainable rural growth with more people working locally in a wider range of employment, would allow young people to understand the importance of education and increase their aspirations. This in turn would lead to more potential growth in the local economy.

However, to enable young people and young families to live in rural areas other issues also need to be addressed including access to appropriate services and critically, the supply of affordable housing needs to be increased. As is explored in more detail in Chapter 3, a lack of affordable housing is a key reason young people leave rural areas.

In a crowded region, decisions on land use are central to the debate on balanced and sustainable growth. Since 2000 the rural counties of Norfolk and Suffolk have seen the largest increase in their urban areas in the region<sup>xiii</sup>.

Agriculture and Forestry are the two main land users covering 82% of the region, but there has been a 6% drop in this area since 1998<sup>xiv</sup>. The area of woodland is increasing but some is being lost to development, the restoration of other habitat types, deer browsing and climate change<sup>xv</sup>. The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan<sup>xvi</sup> has also recommended increasing woodland by 10,000 hectares per annum to aid emissions reduction and renewable energy is also a land user of increasing importance. With the forthcoming Feed in Tariffs and a proposed renewable heat incentive which would potentially lead to a big increase in demand for biomass from 2011, the pressure to divert land to energy generation may increase. These issues form the central argument of the CLA Food and Environmental Security policy<sup>xvii</sup> and the concept of eco-system services<sup>xviii</sup> both of which propose the need for multi-functional land use to be recognised.

Tourism, leisure and heritage are key regional economic sectors and the Spatial Strategy<sup>xix</sup> has identified specific, often rural, local features or assets as being key drivers of tourism. However, there is a desire to develop new sustainable tourism away from “honey pot areas” to both spread the economic benefits and to lessen the impact of environmental damage on fragile sites.

EERF has previously argued that positive planning policy which is applied consistently is essential, but too often, evidence suggests that local interpretation of planning policy is inconsistent and in some

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rural areas is a major constraint on the growth which is needed to make these areas more sustainable. The content of local development plans, and how these are interpreted, will continue to have major impacts on how rural areas develop and it is essential that these plans therefore include a strong commitment to appropriate rural growth to increase community and economic sustainability.

### Key objectives

Balanced and sustainable growth in this context could be defined as the need to:

- a) Balance the economic growth of rural and urban areas so that they are mutually supportive;
- b) Match increases in rural population with growth in rural employment to avoid rural dormitories;
- c) Ensure rural areas provide the modern infrastructure, community facilities, services, green space and housing to support a growing, vibrant and diverse population;
- d) Recognise the impact of increasing population in the region on the countryside, particularly on the region's landscape and biodiversity. This should ensure that growth contributes positively to the environment through a planned approach to green infrastructure;
- e) Recognise the need to maintain most rural land so that it can be used for multi-functional land use delivering food, fuel, high quality landscapes and recreational opportunities whilst supporting the aspirations to increase the woodland area.

The delivery of **Balanced and Sustainable Rural Growth** is therefore the overarching objective for the RWP.

### What Needs to Happen?

Delivering balanced and sustainable growth is not easy, as it requires many, sometimes conflicting pressures on land and resource use to be accommodated. However the achievement of balanced and sustainable growth is central to ensuring that rural areas are sustainable economically, environmentally and socially. It is therefore vital that both rural communities and planners embrace the concept of balanced and sustainable growth and work together to achieve this.

Rural areas have always changed and whilst the picture postcard image of slow paced, traditional rural communities is attractive to some, in practice if we wish to see vibrant and inclusive rural communities which are able to sustain a range of services and facilities they have to change, but this can and should be accomplished whilst retaining the distinctive character of the area. All rural communities should develop a vision of their future which embraces an appropriate scale of growth which will allow them to meet the needs of all members of their community.

The delivery of sustainable rural communities requires a proactive planning system which promotes a balance between rural and urban, economic and housing growth, all underpinned by appropriate growth in infrastructure and positive action on the environment.

To achieve this, action is needed at the local, sub regional and national level:

- **At the local level** - the implementation of planning policy must ensure that rural community sustainability is promoted by balancing housing, infrastructure (physical and green) and

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economic growth **and** rural communities must embrace change and growth to ensure they remain sustainable;

- **At the Unitary or County level** - councils and other statutory bodies must ensure their plans promote the long term sustainability of rural communities;
- **At the national level** - planning and economic policy must support balanced and sustainable economic and physical development which recognises that both rural and urban areas need to play a full part in economic, community and environmental development.

## Recommendation 1

Development policy and the planning system must place more emphasis on achieving sustainable rural communities by facilitating the growth of rural villages and market towns so that they fulfil their long term potential.

## Chapter 2 - Delivering a Dynamic Economy

### Summary

- The rural economy needs to continue to diversify and actively embrace all types of potential business, including building on its success in attracting knowledge based business
- Investment should be focused on all growth sectors, whether these be established industries such as food or tourism, or newer sectors such as IT businesses
- Skills policy must support an increase in the rural take up of training provision to close the under-performance in qualification levels which is most marked in more remote rural areas
- Support for the rural economy has to recognise the economic contribution of small businesses and ensure that regulatory, planning and fiscal policies support their needs and growth

### Challenges

The employment mix of rural areas has been changing and is now close to that found in urban areas with employment spread across the commercial, public and third sectors. The Taylor Review (2008) reported that the sectoral mix was very similar (e.g. 15% of businesses in both urban and rural areas are in the manufacturing sector).

The Taylor Review also reported that home-based working is under 10% in urban areas, 17% in rural areas and 31% in the most rural areas and this represents the most significant difference between urban and rural Britain for employment patterns.

Self employment is higher in rural areas and it is imperative to ensure the regulatory and fiscal framework supports smaller businesses. In its New Approach to the Rural Economy<sup>xx</sup>, the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) has argued strongly for rate relief, empty buildings rate relief and more positive support for economic diversification to enhance the sustainability of rural communities.

National policies such as community infrastructure levies have a disproportionate impact in rural areas where developments are smaller and even when a levy is raised, there is a danger it would be spent outside the community which hosted the development.

Despite these issues, recent national reports by the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee and the Commission for Rural Communities have proposed that rural areas have the capacity to develop their employment levels through diversification<sup>xxi</sup> and by supporting more work-live units (Taylor 2008). These reviews have also argued that rural areas are suitable locations for nearly all types of businesses and have called on planning policy to support this.

Another area needing consideration is the role of rural areas in accommodating public sector employment. Whilst provision of remote services (on line, phone etc.) and centralisation of services has tended to reduce rural public sector jobs, other initiatives such as relocation of government departments and agencies to rural areas is moving the other way.

The Taylor Review (2008) found that knowledge intensive businesses only increased by 21% in urban areas between 1998-2005, but by 46% in rural areas, dispelling the myth that rural areas lack a focus on high tech enterprise, but reinforcing the need for access to new infrastructure technology e.g.

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mobile telecommunications and broadband. Without increased broadband accessibility, including the rapid deployment of Next Generation Access (NGA) as explored in detail in Chapter 4 this growth in knowledge based business will be difficult to sustain.

## **Case study: Melbourn Business Park**

In the late 1980s, The Technology Partnership (TTP) was established to create a world-leading technology and development organisation. As a fledgling company it located itself within the newly developed science park in the village of Melbourn, which is situated alongside the A10 and 9 miles south of Cambridge.

In 2000 the site was acquired by The Technology Partnership Group and is now home to a broad range of companies engaged in pharmaceuticals, biochemistry, communications, printing, electronics, mechanical engineering, testing and technology consulting. The Melbourn Science Park covers some 17 acres with nine buildings totalling over 200,000 sq ft.

The park is interlinked with village life and the staff are able to enjoy all the amenities of Melbourn Village including sports facilities, restaurants, shops, pubs, post office and building society. The partnership also makes charitable donations to village related activities.

TTP is one of the four core specialist technology consultancy companies that are located around Cambridge. The companies between them employ 900 people and in 2008/09 their combined sales amounted to £140 million. Together they form part of The Cambridge Technopole that has become one of the most successful high technology business clusters in Europe.

A report by the Commission for Rural Communities (2008)<sup>xxii</sup> on Releasing the Economic Potential of Rural Areas has suggested that it may be possible to double the economic output of rural areas. The UK Renewable Energy Strategy (2009)<sup>xxiii</sup> and New Industry New Jobs (2009)<sup>xxiv</sup> have both pointed to a need to develop new high value, high growth markets. Given the increase in high technology businesses in rural areas (Taylor 2008) and potential for sustainable products, including renewable energy from land, rural areas have a growing role to play in the economy.

Despite the recession, research continues to show an increased demand for sustainable products (DEFRA 2009)<sup>xxv</sup>, with 47% of consumers willing to do more to help the environment and a jump from 31% ('07) to 51% ('09) in the percentage of consumers who believe a green lifestyle is normal.

In addition to the role which the rural East of England can play in the broader economy, there are a number of growing sectors which are over-represented in rural areas, e.g. food and tourism.

The agriculture and food sector has continued to grow during the recession and has been a major influence on the East of England rural economy and landscape over many years but is undergoing radical change. The food chain represents 1 in 7 jobs in the regional economy and produces over 7% of the region's Gross Value Added (GVA). The region has set out a 2020 Vision for the Food and Farming sector<sup>xxvi</sup> which identifies three major areas of activity which will shape the future of the sector in the region, the need to: increase production; manage the environmental impact of the sector; and address the problems created by poor dietary choices. The short term areas proposed for action are spelt out in more detail in the East of England Sustainable Farming and Food Action

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Plan 2009-2013<sup>xxvii</sup> and focus on: research and development and technology transfer; skills; increased investment by businesses and the public sector.

The East of England has a growing tourism industry which has benefitted from the recession. However, unlike many regions, the East of England has very few large cities and therefore its tourism sector is predominantly focused on the countryside and coast. East of England Tourism estimated that in 2008<sup>xxviii</sup> 131million tourist visits were made to the region, spending £5.15billion in a sector which employs 180,000 people. To recognise the potential of rural tourism East of England Tourism has focused recent campaigns on sustainable tourism, local food and drink and encouraging visitors to visit the countryside. Looking forward, it is the region's countryside and the numerous market towns, historic houses and coastal communities which will underpin this important sector.

The EERF produced a position paper on skills in 2007<sup>xxix</sup>. Whilst regional and national research shows that rural areas do well for learning attainment until about the age of 14-15. After this, attainment particularly amongst the adult workforce falls behind urban areas. There are big differences between the more accessible and remote rural areas, with remote areas fairing badly on attainment and access and even worse in the smallest market towns (State of the Countryside 2007)<sup>xxx</sup>.

Across rural East of England:

- 326,555 adults in rural areas have no qualifications, 30.1% of the total number of adults with no qualifications across East of England.
- By comparison, 229,655 adults in rural areas have degree level qualifications, 32.6% of the total number of adults with degree level qualifications across East of England.

Furthermore, East of England performs worse than rural England as a whole.

- 27.3% of adults in rural areas in East of England have no qualifications, higher than across rural areas in England (26.4%).
- By comparison, 19.2% of adults in rural areas have degree level qualifications, lower than across rural England (21.0%).

The figures for rural workforce qualifications are believed to be adversely affected by the loss of highly skilled young people who move to urban areas to study or for jobs, as well as low participation rate for adults in up-skilling. In both cases the lack of local training provision is a key factor. Whilst rural specific funds such as RDPE support specialist rural skills provision, the major focus must be on flexing mainstream skills funding to meet rural needs.

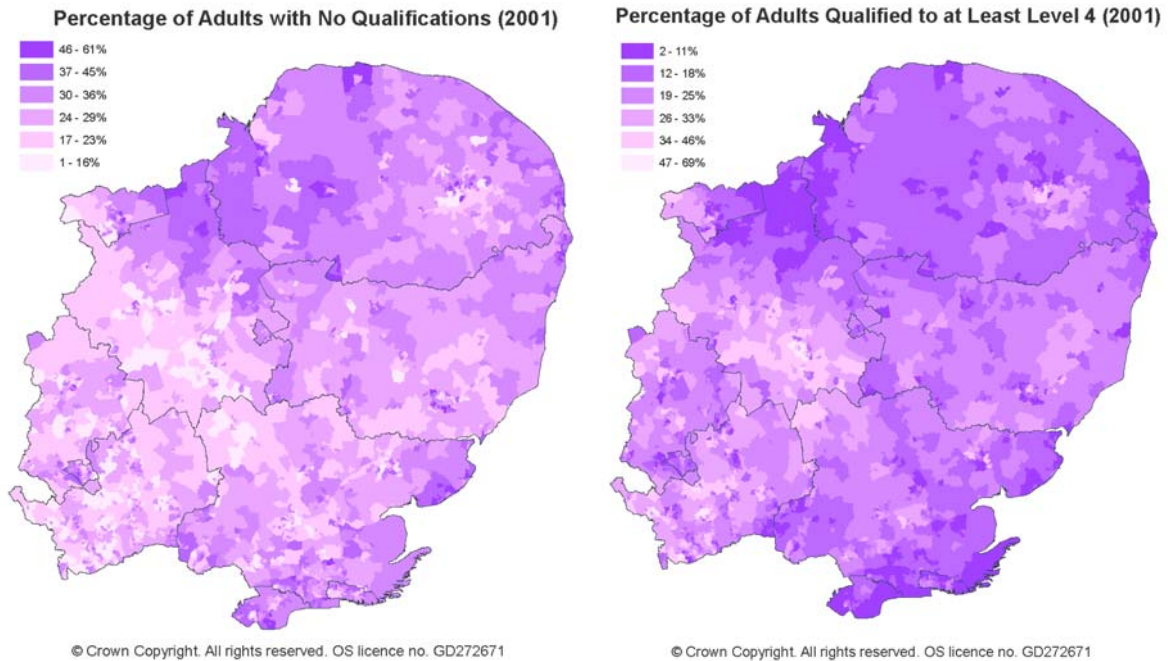
### **Case study: Innovative transport solutions to increase access to training provision**

Norfolk is a large and sparsely populated county with many of the more remote rural locations having poor public transport links. Easton College<sup>xxxi</sup>, a specialist land based and sports college located just to the West of Norwich, has therefore created a series of direct bus services to move students from outlying locations to the College. With each year seeing more routes being added to the network, the College has been able to open up its courses to many more students and this has helped to address low take-up in the more remote parts of the county.

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A more recent scheme<sup>xxxii</sup> announced by Norfolk County Council has increased rural sparsity funding from £120 to £200 per student for those studying for the new 14-19 diploma to specifically support the access needs of those living in rural locations. The county council is also looking at whether in some circumstances it is more cost effective to move tutors around to service the diplomas.



All reports predict a continued increase in the demand for higher level skills, with rural areas lagging even further behind urban areas in this regard e.g. in Breckland only 16% of the workforce is qualified to Level 4 against nearly 50% in South Cambridgeshire (EESCP 2007). New Industries, New Jobs (BIS 2009) predicts that in developed countries demand for unskilled workers will have fallen 16% but increased 19% for skilled workers over the period 2001-30 and rural skills policy must therefore focus on increasing the proportion of the workforce with higher level qualifications.

## Key objectives

To deliver a dynamic rural economy, action needs to be taken to increase the growth of existing rural business and to encourage more new businesses in rural areas.

The key objectives for delivering a dynamic rural economy in the East of England are to:

- a) Increase rural jobs at a faster rate than the increase in the rural working age population;
- b) Invest in sectors which are knowledge intensive where an attractive rural business environment and rural quality of life can be used to attract high calibre employees and inward investment;
- c) Build on the opportunity created by new technology to reduce the need for businesses to be based in urban areas (see also Chapter 4 on Embracing the Digital Age);
- d) Increase the production of sustainable materials, food and renewable energy to meet growing market demand and build on the trend towards more sustainable tourism;

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- e) Increase the skills of the rural workforce to the average of the whole economy;
- f) Ensure national policies do not hamper rural economic growth through rural proofing.

## What Needs to Happen?

Delivering a dynamic economy will ultimately depend on the ambition, entrepreneurship and innovation of rural people and businesses. There are, however, many areas in which targeted and appropriate interventions by the public sector locally, regionally or nationally can help to foster a culture of economic growth.

The main areas which action is needed are:

- **In relation to planning and spatial development policy** - to ensure that planning policy supports the creation of more rural employment land to match the increase in rural housing stock and supports home working to reduce the need for commuting;
- **In relation to economic development policy** - to ensure that policy supports a more dispersed economic development model which assists new businesses, champions diversification and allows existing businesses to grow within their host community, thus reducing the need for commuting and promoting the creation of new high value jobs in the rural economy;
- **In relation to skills policy** - to ensure education funding recognises the specific issues inherent in delivering education and learning provision in sparsely populated areas, increases its focus on adult, continuing and bite size courses through flexible local provision and makes investment in learning and skills less bureaucratic and more attractive to rural employers;
- **Young people and the long term unemployed** - to address the specific needs of young people not in education or employment (NEETs) and older long term unemployed who are particularly disadvantaged by the lack of access to job centres and skills provision in remote rural areas;
- **In relation to regulation and fiscal policy** - to ensure that business policy is supportive of rural business, in particular smaller enterprises by ensuring that new regulatory or fiscal burdens are proportionate and targeted and that support services recognise the special needs of smaller rural businesses.

## Recommendation 2

Economic development policy must focus on creating rural jobs at a faster rate than the increase in the rural population of working age, with a target to grow the East of England rural economy at 3% per annum compared to the last RES target of 2.3% for the whole economy

## Recommendation 3

Resources need to be targeted at promoting the skills and aspirations of the young and unskilled in rural areas so that they can fully engage in the growth agenda

## Recommendation 4

Funding allocations for training must recognise the need to increase flexibility of provision in rural areas and aim to close the gap in skills performance in remote rural areas

## Chapter 3 - Modern infrastructure

### Summary

- Rural areas need new housing to be provided in all settlements to allow them to be sustainable
- Rural workspace should be expanded to facilitate local economic growth and planners need to support requests for home based workspace
- Buildings in rural areas need to be refurbished to ensure they meet modern standards and to ensure that the large number of currently redundant buildings in rural areas are re-used
- Government needs to ensure that there are adequate incentives to encourage private sector investment in modern infrastructure in rural areas
- Rural transport requires a wide range of solutions including improved community and public transport, but must also recognise the continued need for private transport

### Challenges

Modern physical infrastructure is essential to the success of any area. It is, however, not only the numbers of houses and buildings to accommodate everything from schools to offices which is important, but also how these buildings are connected, serviced and used which matters. New buildings also need to be developed within a green infrastructure which both supports the building itself e.g. by using planting to reduce the urban heat island effect and which provide an attractive and healthy environment for people to live and work within.

Rural buildings have to be fit for purpose and in an environment which is changing quickly due to new technology, new family structures and pressures to make buildings more sustainable, it is vital that rural buildings can accommodate a changing set of needs.

Most of the buildings which will meet rural housing or business and community needs in the next 20 years already exist and it is important to recognise that existing rural buildings will have to be refurbished to meet changed needs and planning policy should support this natural evolution in building use to continue.

#### **Case study: At Ringland in Norfolk, Wherry Housing Association commissioned SEAarch**

Architecture<sup>xxxiii</sup> to undertake a pilot project to look at how an existing 3 bedroom house built in the 1930s could be refurbished to deliver performance as good as a modern house built to current building standards. The project was completed in 2009 and included modifying the windows to increase those which were south facing as well as reducing those facing north to maximise solar gain. The scheme also included increasing insulation, adding solar water heating and photovoltaic cells as well as rain water harvesting and under-floor heating. The result was an old house with the same performance as modern construction with heating costs reduced by 85% and carbon emissions by over 90%, which was well in excess of the original target of a 60% reduction set for the project.

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Buildings are a major source of carbon emissions, with most reports suggesting that they account for nearly half of total emissions split roughly 50/50 between domestic housing and commercial and public buildings<sup>xxxiv</sup>, with remote rural areas containing a disproportionate level of poorer housing and households in fuel poverty, with areas such as the Fens being particularly badly affected due to a reliance on older houses and a lack of gas grid connections. Renewables East have estimated that the lack of gas grid connection applies to over 250 mainly rural communities in the East of England and that many of the properties in these communities are also old and poorly insulated.

This presents a major challenge for refurbishment and there is a need to upgrade private and public housing stock accordingly. By upgrading housing, as illustrated in the Ringland case study above, not only are residents provided with higher quality housing, but the cost of fuel and energy are substantially reduced, in many cases lifting residents out of fuel poverty.

It is also believed that affordable housing supply could be increased rapidly through a targeted programme to reduce empty property in rural areas, but VAT rates currently act as a disincentive for refurbishment (CPRE/NHF 2008). Refurbishment is also an efficient way to address fuel poverty and achieve zero carbon homes and research shows that refurbishment creates lower carbon emissions than new build.

Rural communities are diverse and need a range of different housing provision. Despite the recession, the population of the East of England is still expected to grow to 6.2million by 2021. Housing delivery is failing to meet demand and new homes must be planned so first-time buyers, young families and others can buy or rent at an affordable price (EERA 2008).

These problems are arguably even more acute in rural areas, where severe restrictions on new housing and the increasing attractiveness of many areas for second homes has led to local people, particularly younger families being priced out of their own communities. Up to 45% of new households (16 – 35 years) cannot afford to live in their home village (NHF 2010). The Taylor Review (2008) highlighted that people who work in the countryside increasingly cannot afford to live there, while people who can afford to live there increasingly do not work there.

It is not the arrival of new residents or even second homes, however, that is most damaging and it can be argued that the incomers should be welcomed for the new wealth and ideas they bring. The real problem is the lack of new affordable housing being built in villages to accommodate the needs of local residents. In delivering new affordable housing greater use should be made of exception sites and community land trusts and similar new community focused approaches.

The ageing population poses one of the greatest housing challenges. By 2026 older people will account for 48% of the increase in households (Lifetime Homes/ Neighbourhoods Strategy 2008)<sup>xxxv</sup>. In rural parts of the region this percentage will be even higher as a consequence of immigration at retirement, with the retired over-represented in the demographic mix of the region's rural areas. The strategy talks about "*Lifetime Neighbourhoods...where transport, good shops, green spaces, decent toilets and benches are consciously planned for people of all ages and conditions in mind*". Without a balanced and sustainable population in terms of ages and socio-economic mix, lifetime neighbourhoods cannot be achieved.

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Small businesses are the fastest growing sector of the economy, but in many rural areas access to small start up units at affordable rents and on flexible terms (to allow growth) is constrained. New businesses typically need workspace close to home and a number of councils are running schemes to help this process. For example Babergh Council in South Suffolk has a small grants programme to help convert existing redundant buildings into units for new businesses<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Across the country there is a range of work which has been conducted on developing new rural workspace. All these reports show a strong local demand for rented workspace and in 2006, 26% of total new rural commercial lets were in the East of England<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Work in the Haven Gateway identified a wide range of redundant farm buildings amounting to 700,000 sqft, with much of this available for re-use quickly if the planning system was supportive.

In Staffordshire, there is a Rural Workspace programme (partnership between the rural forum & CLA, NFU and Councils) which found that over half of the demand was from creative industries and business services, both of which are seeing continued growth. Key success factors were engaging the right partners early in the programme and funding flexibility.

Rural access to services and employment rely heavily on effective transport, both public and private and appropriate infrastructure provision. Sadiq Khan, the former Transport Minister (2009) said that: *“Good transport links are an essential lifeline for rural communities and it’s not just a question of the number of bus services, but about going to the right places at the right times”*.

However, most rural journeys cannot be made using public transport and previous government taxation policy that sought to encourage public transport use at the expense of private transport impacted disproportionately in rural areas. Many rural areas in the East of England lack a bus service and some areas, particularly in the North of the region, are over 20 miles from the nearest train station.

Across rural East of England:

- 86,325 rural households have no car or van, 19.5% of the total across East of England.
- 382,975 households are more than 10km from principal job centres.
- Of the 90,975 people in East of England travelling more than 10km to work, 36,870 (40.5% of the total) live in rural areas. By comparison, there are 99,600 people working from home in rural areas (40.9% of the total).

For many rural inhabitants a car is therefore essential. The FSB (2009) have also argued that in rural market towns parking charges should be set so that they encourage tourists and shoppers and not set at higher levels to maximise short term revenue generation for the Council.

In addition to the role of road transport, more flexible public or community transport such as dial-a-ride, community transport schemes, car share or motorbike loan schemes should be encouraged. There are good examples of innovative local schemes for those without transport, as well as innovative ways to help young people to become mobile including the Wheels to Work programme.

## **Case study: Wheels to Work**

A number of Wheels to Work (W2W) programmes have been established in rural areas in the East of England. The objective of W2W is to break the cycle of no transport, no training, no job, no money which affects many young people living in rural areas which are not served by public transport. This cycle is broken by providing personal transport and the schemes have been shown to help young people find work or training. The schemes provide a motor bike or scooter on loan, full training and safety awareness and full protective equipment.

The benefits of the schemes extend beyond the young people who are directly supported and include benefits to employers through being able to find new young recruits and to the taxpayer by reducing the numbers of young people out of work and on benefits. In the East of England, W2W initiatives include a range of local programmes such as 'Kickstart' programmes in Norfolk and Suffolk, ScooTS in Hertfordshire and Z-Bikes in Essex. The largest of these, Kickstart in Norfolk has a fleet of over 200 motorbikes which has been used to support over 1,000 people to find work since 2001 and a further 400 to find training.

## **Key Objectives**

The delivery of modern infrastructure in rural areas requires action to be taken on housing provision, workspace and transport.

The key objectives for delivering modern infrastructure in the rural East of England are to:

- a) Increase the sustainability of existing buildings, including water, waste, heat and energy services;
- b) Increase the supply of high quality, sustainable affordable housing to meet the needs of the rural population;
- c) Utilise existing redundant buildings to provide workspace, community facilities or housing, sensitive to community requirements;
- d) Deliver new rural transport solutions, which whilst emphasising the need to reduce carbon, include private vehicle use alongside action to increase public and community transport;
- e) Take positive action to provide more rural workspace for SMEs and home-working.

## **What Needs to Happen?**

The challenges on physical infrastructure are large and rural areas will undoubtedly compete with urban areas for investment funds. At a time of public spending restraint it is likely that most investment in housing and workspace will have to be made by the private sector, but continued public sector investment in strategic transport provision is essential.

To enable this to happen a number of key actions need to be taken:

- **Community sustainability** - the physical growth of smaller rural communities through the provision of new houses and workspace to assist their sustainability and by looking at how local needs will evolve by including businesses and young people in parish planning exercises so that their future needs are recognised.

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- **Housing** - more houses are needed in rural areas to meet the needs of the existing and future rural population and particular emphasis needs to be placed on:
  - Increasing the supply of affordable housing by both the third sector (e.g. Housing Associations) and private sector, but because of the commercial challenge in building only affordable housing, planners must be more receptive to proposals for mixed affordable and market housing developments;
  - Creating affordable housing by increasing the supply of land, making more use of exception sites and through using new public and private finance including housing provision by community land trusts and private landowners who are prepared to commit to housing which remains affordable in perpetuity;
- **Workspace** - more rural workspace is needed to support the growth of the rural economy through meeting the needs of existing and new businesses to reduce the need for rural residents and entrepreneurs to commute or relocate;
- **Building sustainability** - needs to be increased by providing more support for rural building owners to increase sustainability by:
  - Improving incentives for water, waste, heat and energy improvements;
  - Addressing current disincentives such as VAT treatment which act to restrict the incentive for refurbishment;
  - Focusing on how refurbishment can help to address poor health and social conditions by creating better living conditions;
- **Green infrastructure** - needs to be integrated into all development schemes to ensure that communities have access to green and accessible natural environments which can confer health benefits whilst also delivering attractive landscapes and supporting biodiversity
- **Transport** - national transport policy needs to recognise that rural transport is likely to remain focused on private transport given the nature of rural areas. However new transport solutions should be promoted for example through a framework to help social enterprise in the transport sector to move forward<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

## Recommendation 5

Economic development policy must encourage the creation of more rural workspace to facilitate an increase in rural jobs

## Recommendation 6

The government should review the VAT treatment of refurbishment to encourage more rural properties to be brought back into commercial, community or residential use

## Recommendation 7

The provisions of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 should be used to designate all rural settlements as 'protected' to increase the supply of rural affordable housing in perpetuity

## Chapter 4 - Embracing the Digital Age

### Summary

- The East of England's rural areas suffer from poorer access to broadband than urban areas and this is restricting economic and social progress whilst increasing environmental costs through increased transport
- Other countries have adopted a wide range of alternative broadband technologies, with many seeing rural broadband as an essential utility
- Increasing numbers of consumers have no fixed line connection and mobile telephone and broadband coverage has to be improved to allow them to participate fully in society
- Solving rural access to digital communications would deliver substantial economic and social benefits, whilst helping the government to reduce the costs of service delivery

### Challenges

Access to modern digital communications is increasingly recognised as both a key enabler of rural progress, but also one of the major constraints which many rural communities are currently experiencing. In the development of this paper, Rural Forum members themselves identified the lack of adequate broadband as the most critical issue facing rural areas.

Digital technology has the potential to bring benefits to rural areas by improving access to services, creating more flexible labour markets, helping rural residents to access skills provision, whilst also helping address climate change and aiding economic recovery. As well as the internet, digital technology includes digital television, radio and mobile phones and it is important to look at all of these when considering digitally enabled communities. Consideration must be given to rural reception to ensure rural communities are not disadvantaged particularly after the switchover to digital TV in the East of England in 2011.

An estimated 90% of public services are now available online, with some exclusively online<sup>xxxix</sup>. There are potentially reduced costs for businesses in complying with legislation, e.g. the Whole Farm Approach reduces form filling by 15% and is estimated to save the industry £16.5m per year<sup>xl</sup>.

Digital technology has an increasingly important role in learning and skills. As well as providing opportunities for distance e-learning and qualifications at all levels, there is a vast range of online resources which can be accessed anywhere with an internet connection, although the complexity of many of the learning materials means that faster speeds are increasingly needed. To enable learners of all ages to access these resources ICT skills are of growing importance.

In Suffolk a DCSF Home Access Programme trial found that providing a child with broadband access at home to enable them to do their homework increased their GCSE points score by 10 points, but that if a connection was removed the score fell by 20 points.

One interesting possibility is to use the broadband connections which are being installed in schools and other public sector buildings to offer faster speeds to rural communities. This approach is, however, not without problems as most of these systems place significant restrictions on how these connections can be used. Despite this, a few trials are taking place e.g. Cybermoor<sup>xli</sup> in Alston which

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is experimenting with a trial based on the connection in the local hospital. Amongst other services, Cybermoor provides wireless connections in very remote and sparsely populated areas of Cumbria and Northumbria to properties which are too remote to access fixed line higher speed connections.

Businesses are increasingly reliant on the internet and most businesses have to file their returns for PAYE and VAT online from April 2010<sup>xlii</sup>. The Federation of Small Business (FSB) has estimated that by 2012, £1 in every £5 will come from online commerce and stated that most small businesses want a minimum speed of 8Mbps<sup>xliii</sup>. FSB research in 2008 found that 72% of small businesses operate a website and there is a need to make sure they have access to effective broadband to meet the demands of customers and clients<sup>xliv</sup>.

## **Case study: Cornwall plan for 100-200Mbps<sup>xlv</sup>, <sup>xlvi</sup>**

Cornwall is working on an ambitious £100m plan to develop superfast broadband access for the whole county by 2013 using a combination of ERDF (70%) and RDA funding. The project will target speeds of 100Mbps or more.

It aims to create 4,000 jobs and to add £250m to the Cornish economy. Although contracts have yet to be awarded it is anticipated that a variety of both fixed line and satellite technology will be used to allow all areas of the county to have access to next generation speeds by 2013.

In early 2009, 65% of UK households had a fixed broadband connection, compared to just 4% of UK households in 2002.<sup>xlvii</sup> However, rural broadband speed is not keeping pace with urban provision and the current 2017 80% target for high speed broadband is seen by many as too little too late<sup>xlviii</sup>. An FSB report<sup>xlix</sup> concluded that the key reason for the lack of take-up of new internet tools could be the lack of high-speed broadband, as only 37% of businesses had access to broadband over 4Mbps.

## **Case Study: Lyddington, Rutland<sup>l</sup>**

In April 2010 Lyddington in Rutland launched a new high speed broadband service with Rutland Telecom which has raised average download speeds from 0.5Mbps to 25Mbps. The new service provides fast broadband as well as telephone and TV.

The technology used is based on 'sub-loop unbundling' where a new box was installed in the village to substantially reduce the distance to each home connection, thus allowing a big increase in speeds to be achieved. To facilitate the scheme the village raised £37,000 and identified enough local interest in accessing the new services to convince the providers and investors that sufficient demand existed to make the development commercially viable.

The FSB also found that there were strong links between educational level, owner's age and internet adoption with some companies relocating to urban areas to remain competitive. Lack of broadband speed hinders home workers (Green Futures 2009), to whom upload speeds are critical as they enable the exchange of data with remote networks, but most ISPs prioritise download speeds<sup>li</sup>.

Advertised download speeds are expected to rise quickly in a few years to 100Mbps – 200Mbps, to allow rapid file downloading, video and improved uploading (Broadband Genie 2010). Although any Government commitment to ensuring that every household will have access to 2Mbps by 2012 is encouraging, if content develops which needs speeds in excess of this (as most video already does), this will still not be fast enough for many applications. At the present time over 42% of rural

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households don't reach 2Mbps<sup>lii</sup>, 160,000 households cannot access broadband services at all and another 1.5 million cannot download at more than 0.5Mbps (500kbps).<sup>liii</sup>.

## **Case Study: Broadband in rural Sweden**

Sweden is a world leader in broadband – always appearing near the top of any OECD tables despite its sparse population. Some 85% of the broadband projects are owned by regional utility companies and the municipalities. The 2009 Broadband Quality Study<sup>liv</sup> found that Sweden had the highest quality broadband in Europe and is also closing the broadband quality gap within its own country: with residents outside the most populated cities enjoying better quality than those in the cities.

Rural areas such as those of the Nordic countries are often targets for fibre roll outs as traditional broadband cannot reach these areas and provide an acceptable level of service.<sup>lv</sup> Åsa Torstensson, Sweden's Infrastructure Minister, has pledged that by 2020, 90% of Swedish households will have access to broadband at speeds of at least 100Mbps, with at least 40% achieving this by 2015<sup>lvi</sup>.

Skellefteå is a community of around 70,000 people in the rural north of Sweden. With just 10 people per square kilometre, the area is more sparsely populated than England's most sparsely populated areas, yet 80% of the households are connected to a fibre-based service. The project is a partnership between the community and SkeKraft; one of the largest energy companies in Sweden.

One of the key factors in the success of the project is a sharing of the work between SkeKraft and the community. This structure has kept the cost of connecting a home to around £2,500 – while still more than an urban norm, it is considerably less than the costs of a traditional network. Customers pay an initial installation fee of £450 and a monthly subscription of £10 per month for a 10 Mbps broadband service and £13 for a telephony and internet service. There is also a mechanism for recognising contributions both in kind and financially. Members of the community that are in a position to, for example, dig the trenches for their neighbours, are rewarded, encouraging active community engagement in the project with a safeguard against volunteer fatigue.<sup>lvii</sup>

The costs of installing fibre optic cable to remote rural areas means that other technology options to provide broadband in rural 'not spots' need to be considered in the short term:

- Satellite broadband could be a viable option in rural areas, e.g. companies such as Eutelsat already offers speeds of 3.6Mbps with 10Mbps available later in 2010 and the Irish Government is already using this technology to provide broadband in rural areas<sup>lviii</sup> whilst the Scottish Executive have used a range of solutions to meet rural needs;
- Mobile broadband is viable in some areas, however, 3G coverage varies across the country and according to provider and current maps indicate that coverage is far from guaranteed in rural East of England<sup>lix</sup>.

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## **Case study: Digiweb, Ireland<sup>ix</sup>**

Digiweb the national telecommunications and managed services provider in Ireland undertook a comprehensive nationwide survey of Irish businesses which identified more than 8,000 businesses and organisations that are located in broadband 'black spot' areas.

The 8,169 organisations highlighted by the research are mainly small businesses in rural areas. Many of those identified are involved in the retail, tourism and agribusiness sectors. Satellite broadband technology is now seen as an integral part of the overall digital strategy as it potentially allows 100% coverage of even very remote rural areas.

In May 2009, Digiweb launched a satellite broadband service 'Digiweb Tooway', which offers download speeds of up to 3.6Mbps to all customers and after a satellite infrastructure upgrade program, Digiweb will increase the speeds to 10Mbps throughout all areas of Ireland later in 2010.

The business has reported that *"demand for satellite broadband has been phenomenal so far, particularly from organisations and residents in rural areas with restricted or no internet access. With our research showing that more than 8,000 small businesses are currently under served, we expect the market for satellite technology to continue its high growth rate"*

## **Key Objectives**

The delivery of digital inclusion in rural areas would bring economic and social benefits whilst also ensuring that the cost of providing public services in these areas could be reduced.

The key objectives which a digital rural programme in the East of England needs to include are:

- a) The need for all rural areas to have access to affordable next generation digital technology by 2013 at 10Mbps or faster (in line with EU Commission proposals), by using all available technologies;
- b) To ensure that next generation access (super-fast) broadband is seen as an essential utility (Green Futures 2009);
- c) To ensure access to mobile broadband is improved so that the 20% (mainly young people) who now have no fixed line can access broadband services<sup>ixi</sup>;
- d) The stimulation of broadband demand in rural "not spots" to create commercially viable demand by pooling the purchasing power of public sector, domestic and business users (Green Futures 2009);
- e) Ensure that there is a willingness amongst all sectors of the rural population and workforce to adopt new technology, matched with appropriate training provision.

## **What Needs to Happen?**

Delivering effective broadband to rural areas in the East of England is not easy given the diversity of areas which need to be served, the growth in people without a fixed line connection and significant cost issues associated with whichever technology is adopted. However, other countries have made more progress and in many cases already have access speeds in excess of existing UK targets for

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2012. Unless this area is addressed as a matter of urgency rural areas will lag behind economically and socially whilst imposing higher environmental costs than are desirable.

The main areas where action is needed are:

- **Fixed line/fixed point connection** - fibre, wireless and satellite need to be used as appropriate so that rural areas are not disadvantaged by a slow roll out of fibre which will leave many rural areas lagging significantly for at least the next 10 years. A target to deliver a minimum of 10Mbps all areas by 2013 by using all available technologies should be adopted;
- **Mobile broadband and telephony** - work is needed to close the gaps in mobile coverage through greater co-operation between service providers and to meet the needs of the growing percentage of the population who have no fixed line connection - this would deliver benefits for rural residents but also allow government and other businesses to move faster in delivering services online, thus reducing costs and improving efficiency;
- **Co-ordinating demand** - work to demonstrate demand in "not spots" for commercially viable broadband solutions is needed and public sector bodies could pool purchasing power and work together to aggregate demand for broadband and then take a realistic commercial case to the private sector (Green Futures 2009). In addition the needs of individuals, households, businesses and the public sector must be coordinated by ensuring that as many households and businesses as possible identify their online needs on the region's demand broadband website ([www.Erebusonline.org.uk](http://www.Erebusonline.org.uk));
- **Training and uptake** - there needs to be a willingness amongst all sectors of the rural population to adopt new technology and appropriate training for all sectors of the rural population will provide the skills to make full use of available technology and stimulate demand - this includes engaging "Hearts and Minds" and is particularly significant in relation to healthcare, the ageing workforce in the NHS and other parts of the public sector

## Recommendation 8

Effective broadband should be seen as an essential utility in rural areas and Government should work with rural communities to ensure all areas have access to a minimum 10Mbps by 2013

## Recommendation 9

Broadband delivery must be future proofed by using all available technologies so that today's roll out recognises tomorrow's changing user needs and applies new technology to provide universal next generation broadband

## Chapter 5 - A Living Environment

### Summary

- A living environment is a key public good in its own right, but can also deliver substantive economic and community benefits
- New ideas and collaborative approaches to managing the environment which include land managers, the community and support bodies are needed
- The range of issues which need action includes land management, water resource and flooding risk, public access and heritage
- The East of England needs to explore new approaches to land management decisions such as ecosystem services which can help to balance conflicting pressures on the environment

### Challenges

The East of England's landscape has many contrasts. The shape of the countryside has been formed and influenced by land management practices which have had both positive and negative impacts on the landscape. In particular, there has been a steady decline in distinctiveness both within and between recently published national character areas (NCAs). This is due to changes to agricultural practices, the impact of development, roads and infrastructure, recreational and tourism activity<sup>lxii</sup>. 23% of the region's SSSIs were in unfavourable condition (2008) due to coastal squeeze, water pollution and abstraction. Recent changes in farming have been beneficial for the natural environment particularly in Environmental Stewardship target areas. However, biodiversity in the wider countryside remains in a fragile state and appears to be in poorer condition than within SSSIs. Farmland bird numbers are 52% lower than in 1966 and were adversely affected by changes in farming in the 1970s and 1980s<sup>lxiii</sup>. This decline continues with for example the turtle dove falling in numbers by 66% between 1995 and 2007. Only 25% of the region's 6,641 local wildlife sites are reported as being in positive conservation management<sup>lxiv</sup>.

Protecting and enhancing the region's environment requires us to care not just for nationally designated sites (e.g. the Broads, AONBs and SSSIs) but also to consider the wider environment. Organisations including the Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, National Trust and Natural England are working on ambitious projects such as the Great Fen to help join up existing wildlife sites as well creating new habitat. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) proposes ambitious targets to create new wildlife habitats and restore species populations, with the East of England having the ability to achieve this. The East of England Biodiversity Forum has identified seven tasks that oversee the delivery of the regional action plan<sup>lxv</sup>. Opportunities for achieving the BAP targets may arise with development proposals and as a result of climate change (e.g. wetland and woodland creation, salt-marsh creation, heathland restoration). Such schemes can provide accessible and attractive green spaces for local communities and visitors (GO East 2008). All of these issues feed into the work to pilot the valuing ecosystems services approach which is underway in 2010.

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## **Case Study: The Great Fen Project**

This habitat restoration project will create a 3,700ha wetland between Huntingdon and Peterborough. It will connect two important nature reserves, Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen. Its primary management aim will be for wildlife conservation. It will however also create the new green space that is needed as the region's population continues to expand. The site will also provide recreational and tourism opportunities alongside educational material for children and adults. Business opportunities in the form of "organic" meat production from the animals used to graze the site and reed and sedge harvesting are being investigated.

This project is a partnership of the Environment Agency, Huntingdonshire District Council, Middle Level Commissioners, Natural England and the local Wildlife Trust who jointly recognise that agriculture and urban growth have resulted in the loss of sites of conservation value across lowland Britain. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Fens where, since 1600, over 99% of traditional fen wetland has been lost. Recent research by the Open University (Great Fen 2008) has shown that the Great Fen project has the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from land (although careful management of methane emissions is required)<sup>lxvi</sup>. It will also provide wetland habitats for wildlife to adapt to climate change as summers become hotter and winters wetter. Climate change will increase the number of storm events, increasing the risk of flooding. The project is currently identifying the best locations to store flood water, providing protection for surrounding land and property.

The value of tourism in the protected landscapes of the East of England was over £844 million in 2006, which accounted for 16% of the total value of tourism to the region (Natural England 2009)<sup>lxvii</sup>.

More broadly, there is growing awareness of the importance of countryside and green space access to health and wellbeing and various initiatives (for example Natural England's Walking for Health Initiative) are attempting to get more people into the green gym on their doorstep. Research shows that this not only improves physical wellbeing but also delivers improvements in mental health. The natural environment also provides a significant opportunity for volunteering with the region's five Wildlife Trusts alone having 5,500 volunteers.

## **Case study: Walking for Health in Norfolk**

The Walking for Health programme in Norfolk began in 2007 when funding from Lloyds Pharmacy and the National Sports Foundation allowed the walks programme to be expanded to cover the whole of Norfolk, with current funding coming from the NHS and councils. There are now 5,462 registered walkers who take part in about 170 walks per month of varying lengths up to 8 miles.

The walking groups have also been supported to develop other activities including badminton, aerobics, dancing, bowls and tai-chi, with the intention that local groups become self managed and funded by the participants. Already a badminton club, aqua-fit group and bowls group have made this transition. Many of these depend on a local village hall, owned and managed by the community.

The East of England has a wealth of historic buildings and distinctive landscape features, with rural and coastal areas particularly rich in these features. There are over 1,500 Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the region and the historic buildings found in the region's villages are of significant

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value as they add to the character, social and economic value of the area. However, significant numbers of historic buildings and sites are at risk of deterioration and English Heritage<sup>lxviii</sup> has identified the need to secure the future of redundant buildings by encouraging adaptive re-use. Coastal management policies must also take account of the historic environment. There is a recognised skills shortage in the maintenance of historic buildings but also potential to link the restoration of vernacular buildings to habitat restoration (e.g. the recreation of fenland to provide reeds and sedge for thatching).

Water quality in rivers has improved considerably over the last decade due to tighter regulation and uptake of best practice by land managers, although many sites still suffer from point-source pollution. Diffuse pollution, however, continues to be an issue due to some farming methods and the region will fail to meet the requirements of the European Water Framework Directive by a wide margin<sup>lxix</sup>. In the region, Defra has identified 12 Catchment Sensitive Farming Priority catchments where farmers are eligible for support and grant aid to help mitigate this issue<sup>lxx</sup>.

The two key issues in the East of England relating to water quantity are the twin fears of flood and drought. The East of England is the driest region in England and one of the fastest growing. Water resources are limited and there are already supply-demand issues in the southern parts of the region. Key wetlands in the region are drying out and the challenge is to ensure enough clean water for wildlife. Agriculture uses a higher percentage of water than the national average (5% versus 1%) but this can rise on occasional days to over 60% (for irrigation)<sup>lxxi</sup>. In some catchments, abstraction is not reliable during dry winters. In some catchments, there is a significant amount of over abstraction<sup>lxxii</sup>. Under predicted climate change scenarios more frequent drought conditions are expected, leading to increased pressure on water resources<sup>lxxiii</sup>.

The region contains many low-lying areas at risk from flooding. These areas contain approximately 250,000 households, around 8%, of properties that are at risk from flooding from either rivers or the sea in this region<sup>lxxiv</sup>. The coastline is also at significant risk from coastal flooding, including inland from the Wash. The region's vulnerability (due to the impact of climate change) to flooding is increasing and in parts of the region a policy of managed realignment may be both needed and beneficial to the management of flood risk by enabling development to be safeguarded and new habitats, such as salt-marsh, to be created.

Valuing ecosystem services is a new methodology which is currently being piloted in the region. This aims to provide objective, quantitative data on the (financial) value of land and the multiple pressures for its use and an aid for land management decisions. Whilst still in development, it has the potential to help rural communities and planners with some of the more complex decisions they have to make on which land uses are most appropriate in particular locations. Given the need for rural land to provide multiple benefits (e.g. food, fuel, environmental, cultural and social functions), this approach is to be welcomed.

### Key Objectives

Achieving a healthy living environment would be challenging anywhere, but as a growing region the major challenge facing the East of England's rural areas is how to manage the expected growth without adversely impacting on the rural environment.

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The key objectives for the living environment are to:

- a) Increase the positive and reduce the negative impacts of agricultural systems on wildlife and the environment;
- b) Deliver the Region's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) to reverse the decline in farmland birds, ensure all SSSIs in the region are in favourable or recovering condition and to increase the number of local wildlife sites in positive conservation management;
- c) Improve the management of water by implementing the Water Framework Directive, managing flood risk, increasing water storage capacity and by improving water quality in the region's rivers and catchments;
- d) Promote the role of the landscape, heritage and the historic built environment in supporting economic and community development including health and wellbeing;
- e) Engage in the process to develop the valuing ecosystem services approach.

## What Needs to Happen?

To deliver a continued focus on a healthy living environment, action needs to be taken in a range of areas by communities, individuals, landowners and businesses as well as the public sector.

Many of the issues are complex and cross spatial and political boundaries. They therefore demand collaborative solutions. The complexity of many of the issues also demands the use of research and development to develop new approaches to land management to produce long term environmental benefits. Ideally, new models of working would create innovative, practical solutions that complement the existing legislative and policy framework. The main areas in which action is needed are:

- **Agriculture and land management practices** – improvements to the sustainability of land management would improve farm profitability whilst reducing diffuse pollution, buffering and extending key habitats and strengthening the distinctive landscape character across the region.
- **Access** - further efforts to promote access to the natural environment should be developed, for physical and mental health reasons and to promote community cohesion through engagement in environmental enjoyment and management activities;
- **Water resources** - promoting more sustainable management of water resources by increasing water storage capacity, water efficiency, water harvesting and collaborative irrigation schemes;
- **Flood risk** - promoting sustainable drainage, innovative approaches to manage coastal flooding and 'soft' engineering solutions for river flooding;
- **Coast** –working to preserve the internationally-recognised but threatened complexes of salt marshes, grazing marsh and intertidal habitats that fringe the coast;
- **Heritage** - promoting the role of heritage and the historic built environment in supporting economic and community development;
- **Ecosystem Services** - supporting further work to develop models to apply the concept of Ecosystem Services so that it can be used to help determine how land use is planned.

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## **Recommendation 10**

Research and development should be undertaken into new models of sustainable rural land and water management systems

## **Recommendation 11**

Environmental management schemes should to be developed so that they deliver greater community engagement and increased social and environmental outcomes

## Chapter 6 - Dealing with Climate Change

### Summary

- Climate change is a particular threat to the East of England given its low lying topography and extensive coastline, with rural areas in the frontline
- Future projections suggest the region will be more severely affected than other regions, with particular issues arising from increased temperature, water scarcity/excess and sea level rise
- Action is needed to adapt to climate change, as well as finding ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate future climate change
- Innovation is needed to ensure that people in the East of England's rural areas work, travel and manage their buildings more sustainably in order to adapt to climate change

### Challenges

Due to its economy and topography the region is at severe risk from the effects of climate change<sup>lxxv</sup>. The main impacts will be: increased risk of coastal and fluvial flooding; more extreme events; an increase in demand for water; changes in biodiversity resulting from the loss of habitats; impacts on the region's distinctive landscapes; and, a longer growing season for crops and trees but reduced availability of water for irrigation<sup>lxxvi</sup>. Health service provision, pollution control, leisure and tourism and conservation of the natural and historic environment and water supply will also be severely affected.

Work carried out on behalf of Defra by UK Climate Projections in 2009<sup>lxxvii</sup> has identified projected changes for the 2020s, 2050s and 2080s under the high, medium and low emission scenarios across the country and region by region. The key headlines from this work are:

- Sea level around the UK rose by about 1mm per annum in the 20th century, but the rate for the 1990s and 2000s has been higher than this;
- Average temperature across the UK has risen since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century by between 1.0 and 1.7 °C, with the increase largest in the South and East of England and smallest in Scotland.

The key challenge for rural communities is to respond to the twin challenges of:

- Adapting to climate change impacts by understanding, accepting and responding proactively to the risks and benefits which may result;
- Mitigating climate change by adopting lower carbon lifestyles.

In the East of England the biggest adaptation issues are connected to water resources, as was explored earlier in Chapter 5. Managing the risks of coastal or fluvial flooding and measures to secure adequate water supplies will therefore be essential. Rural areas have a major role to play within this as they are both in the frontline of coastal or river flooding, but can also potentially provide a home for new reservoirs or flood meadows to capture and store water at times of peak flow.

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To play its part in helping to mitigate the effects of climate change the East of England must reduce greenhouse gases as proposed by Stern<sup>lxxviii</sup>, which equates to a 2031 target for a 60% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. To achieve this reduction, new building designs and improved infrastructure, as well as changes to consumer products and transport and planning systems will be required.

Agriculture and the natural environment are very exposed to these changes and will need to adopt new land management systems to address the need for new crops and sustainable coastal management<sup>lxxix</sup>. Particular challenges exist in relation to sustainable soil management (e.g. retaining organic matters levels in soils, avoiding soil compaction in seasonally-waterlogged soils). Agriculture and land management can, however, also contribute to climate change mitigation as soils in particular are a very large carbon sink and approaches such as reduced tillage, increases in permanent crops such as woodland or grassland, or new technology such as biochar (a form of charcoal generated in some renewable energy plants) being shown to have the ability to increase soil carbon. The Forestry Commission (Read 2009)<sup>lxxx</sup> have proposed that woodland can play an important role in climate change response and the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan has also recommended increasing woodland by 10,000hectares per annum to aid emissions reduction.

In rural areas, some communities are experimenting with how to become carbon neutral<sup>lxxxi</sup>. In Suffolk, for example, the business East Green Energy Farm who supply a range of energy saving products are working with local community groups to help reduce their energy costs. This includes installing products such as solar panels and heat pumps. In areas where dependency on private car usage is high and there are limited local services, changes in behaviour and service delivery methods are needed to reduce carbon emissions.

Community participation and behaviour change will also be needed, along with planning for sustainable lifestyles. We believe an increase in home working and a more devolved model of economic development (as proposed in Chapter 2) would help to reduce the need for commuting and thus contribute to delivering substantial carbon saving benefits.

The region's climate change partnership has developed an understanding of existing activity on adaptation and mitigation and produced a climate change action plan<sup>lxxxii</sup>.

### **Case Study: Town off the Grid: Güssing – Austria**<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

In 1992 the Austrian town of Güssing, with 4,000 people, was struggling to pay its electricity bill. Public buildings were ordered not to use fossil fuels and an alternative energy industry developed. Since then, over 50 companies and 1,000 jobs have been created in the town in the renewable energy sector and since 1995, Güssing has reduced its carbon dioxide emissions by 93%. This was achieved by identifying how the town could benefit from the surrounding natural resources.

The town now has 2.5MWe/ 4.5MWth wood gasification biomass power plant with 12km of district energy pipelines serving local homes (drawing wood from a 30 mile radius); a biodiesel plant producing 81 million litres per annum, a solar plant and a regional energy plan. The town's energy plants generate a surplus of 500,000 Euros per annum for the community.

One of the key reasons for the town's success was the drive and determination of the mayor who was able to unite environmental, economic and security of supply interests.

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As the East of England population increases, energy demand will continue to rise. It will be important that new houses are built to high energy efficiency standards. Current distribution network capacity is problematic in several rural areas and careful planning is needed to ensure development in rural areas is not disadvantaged or halted through poor infrastructure<sup>lxxxiv</sup>. More flexibility will be needed to match the demand and supply from the national grid or embedded local generation.

### **Case study: Villagers build their own Power Station**<sup>lxxxv</sup>

It is possible through community ownership to help sustain the local economy and simultaneously provide payback through economic, social and environmental benefits. With an increased number of dispersed renewable energy schemes, it is essential to engage local communities so that they feel involved, consulted and supportive of new initiatives. Community involvement schemes tend to be less contentious and more beneficial as ownership provides a steady stream of income to invest locally.

The villagers of Kentmere in Cumbria hope to build their own £1.25million hydroelectricity scheme to raise money for the community. The scheme will earn an annual profit of up to £100,000 by feeding the National Grid - and the profits will go to charitable causes in the village. The project will provide power for 300 average homes and subject to approval is likely to be running by the end of 2012. This community-owned scheme was suggested at a parish meeting two years ago and is run by a charitable trust.

The Housing Green Paper (2007) set targets for all new homes to be zero carbon by 2016. In order to meet these targets, efficiency must be improved combined with increased use of local renewable generation (GO East 2008). This will also help combat fuel poverty, which affected 9.8% of the region's households in 2006, a figure which will increase if action is not taken<sup>lxxxvi</sup>. Over 60 and single person households and off-grid rural areas like the Fens, have the highest levels of fuel poverty.

The East of England is the leading English region for renewable electricity, currently producing 8.9% of its electricity from renewable energy. The Renewables East 2008 Strategy<sup>lxxxvii</sup> has identified a road map to achieving the UK's 2020 objectives in the East of England that links to the national strategy and sets out the role that individuals, communities and businesses have to play in promoting renewable energy.

The key forms of renewable energy are on/off shore wind, biomass, farm waste and landfill gas. In a report in December 2009 Renewables East<sup>lxxxviii</sup> estimated that landfill gas represented 29% of all installed renewable energy capacity in the region (including offshore wind) and 44% if offshore sources were not included. As new installations are developed and as landfill gas production peaks and then falls, the pressure for new renewable sources will be maintained and whilst the largest projected increases are proposed from offshore wind, the region is also planning to substantially increase renewable energy production from biomass and other land based sources. As some of these sources are intermittent in nature, they impose technical challenges in power system operation and hence, the proposals for an intelligent national grid.

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The key issues for rural areas in responding to the challenge of climate change are to:

- a) Mitigate climate change by adopting lower carbon lifestyles and embracing new technologies;
- b) Adapt to the challenges of climate change by making buildings, transport systems, communities and vital services less susceptible to the risks created by climate change.

## Key Objectives

Climate change will affect all areas of the rural East of England. Whilst some impacts (notably flooding risk) are dependent on location and topography, others such as temperatures, water shortage and threat of storms will impact across the whole region.

The key objectives for living with climate change are to:

- a) Integrate and embed actions that will mitigate climate change into East of England rural residents' day-to-day life and work style;
- b) Ensure spatial, economic and environmental policy promotes low-carbon models of rural development;
- c) Ensure rural communities are prepared for the consequences of climate change and take appropriate proactive action to manage its impact on their lives and the wider environment.

## What Needs to Happen?

Climate change is a significant long-term challenge for the rural East of England, which will require action by a wide range of bodies and individuals over an extended period of time.

The key actions for rural areas in responding to the challenge of climate change are to:

- **Plan for climate change in spatial and physical development** - by ensuring the planning system promotes low-carbon growth by supporting proposals for devolved models of economic development to reduce the need for commuting (including home working), by promoting the use of low-carbon local products and renewable energy schemes and by identifying areas for woodland creation;
- **Plan for climatic extremes** - by putting in place contingency plans for severe weather e.g. floods, storms, heat or cold;
- **Reward communities, businesses and individuals for providing climate change adaptation resources** - by rewarding actions which contribute to climate change management, e.g. by providing flood meadows to reduce urban flooding;
- **Reduce carbon emissions** - by adopting lower carbon lifestyles, embracing new technologies, improving resource management and promoting local renewable energy generation by making the licensing, regulatory and incentives regimes for renewable energy easier to use;
- **Demonstrate community leadership in climate action** - by promoting innovation, engaging with local champions to drive forward solutions and by focusing on the young. Community cohesion is particularly important in enabling local people to show resilience to the impacts of climate change<sup>lxxxix</sup>.

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## Recommendation 12

The East of England Climate Change Action Plan should promote innovative ways for rural communities to mitigate carbon emissions by changing behaviour, by reducing the need for transport and through low carbon models of development

## Recommendation 13

The delivery of the East of England plan for climate change adaptation should promote innovative ways in which rural communities can prepare for climate change impacts

## Chapter 7 - Living well

### Summary

- Living well is about more than access to services and must be seen as a holistic concept where education, employment, housing, health, access to leisure and culture, service provision and community cohesion collectively determine people's wellbeing
- The way services are provided is changing due to reorganisation, new technology and financial constraints and it is important for rural areas that these changes produce beneficial outcomes for rural communities, through innovation and the positive engagement of rural people
- Rural areas are safe places to live, but there are still opportunities to reduce the incidence of crime and to increase rural residents' perception that they do live in a safe place
- Addressing health and social care provision will be increasingly important as the rural population ages, although it is vital to still take account of the needs of the whole population in developing new ways of meeting complex needs

### Challenges

Many of our rural areas are faced with declining or threatened local services. Unless a community has a range of households, the demand for services will be hard to sustain<sup>xc</sup>. Evidence suggests that rural areas which don't sustain a range of employment will struggle with service provision as they lack a daytime population to access services close to where they work. Home working and internet based enterprise can help to address this issue<sup>xci</sup>. The last spatial strategy for the East of England stressed that new houses must be aligned with new jobs, but whilst this is normally assumed to mean urban employment, new ways of working and technologies such as broadband can allow this to occur in rural areas.

#### **Case Study: Stutton Community Shop, Suffolk<sup>xcii</sup>**

This is an example of community action to provide local services following the closure of the village shop and post office. The new Stutton Community Shop, next to the Community Hall opened at the end of 2008 with the full cooperation of the Parish Council and the Community Hall Committee. It is registered as a Community Interest Company (CIC) and has a voluntary committee, a shop manager and a team of volunteers who staff the shop.

The shop stocks a wide range of products including freshly baked bread and will deliver to homes in the community for a charge of £1. In addition the shop acts as a meeting place for residents, serving tea, coffee and hot chocolate and a Fish Van is located outside the shop on Thursday afternoons. The shop is open 7 days a week and is increasing the range of products that it stocks according to customer requirements/requests.

FSB (2009) highlights that there are 4,750 rural post offices in England and has called for a new Post Bank. The report highlights a failure to modernise services to keep up with those introduced by other providers as a key issue. The broader principle of extending the range of services offered in one outlet is widely recognised as a key way in which smaller communities can access more services

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and make existing services more viable by reducing overheads. However, as both the Aylsham case study below and the Brandon case study in Chapter 8 demonstrate, it is essential to promote effective cross organisational working and good community engagement to ensure that shared facilities meet real needs.

For more affluent rural residents, broadband is allowing improved access to retail and other services. However, many rural households lack broadband, do not have the income or skills to utilise online services and are dependent on local provision. In many areas, local shops, pubs and other outlets are closing and broadband is accelerating this as those with access to the internet take business away.

A report by Action with Rural Communities in Rural England (ACRE) on community building usage identified a trebling in use since 1988<sup>xciii</sup>, in buildings with a value of over £3bn and which form a crucial but largely ignored aspect of community engagement. This report suggests that these facilities have supported an increasingly wide range of outcomes for the community, but only 3% receive regular funding from their local authority and many struggle with viability, maintenance and repairs.

Community safety, as measured by crime rates, shows that crime in rural areas is lower than in urban areas, however the perception of rising crime levels causes concern to rural residents. Action to reassure residents and address criminal behaviour that has an impact on the life of those living in rural communities can do much to allay the fear of crime in rural areas, although the action taken needs to be well publicised to achieve this. The development of Neighbourhood Policing teams which actively engage the community in helping to set priorities (usually around anti-social behaviour) is also helping to ensure community support for the actions which are taken.

It is widely assumed that rural populations are healthier and mortality is lower in rural areas. However, a number of studies have challenged this and found that differences in socio-economic circumstances largely explain most of the differences<sup>xciv</sup>. Rural communities across the region are diverse and those in poverty and thus at risk of poor health, are dispersed amongst the affluent, masking their needs. There are also marginalised groups (e.g. travellers and migrants), whose needs are often not apparent in routine NHS monitoring.

Across rural East of England:

- 127,720 people in rural areas report themselves as having a limiting long-term illness. This represents 28.9% of all people with a limiting long-term illness across East of England.
- Of these, 40,675 working age adults classify themselves as permanently sick and/or disabled.
- DWP health benefit data shows that 59,580 people in rural areas receive Disability Living Allowance (26.7% of all such claimants across East of England).
- 51,190 older people in rural areas receive Attendance Allowance (31.3% of claimants in East of England).

The demographics of rural areas are also changing, with the elderly choosing to live in rural areas, whilst the young migrate out. In fact the latest research shows that the East of England's elderly rural population is increasing faster than any other region except the SE, with the number of residents over the age of 60 increasing by 135,000 between 2001-08<sup>xcv</sup>.

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## **Case study: St Michael's Care Complex, Aylsham, Norfolk** <sup>xcvi</sup>

This is an innovative project which, when completed in 2011, will provide a state of the art health centre, sheltered housing, care home with nursing and community centre for local people through a partnership between the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The development partnership includes NHS Norfolk, Aylsham Care Trust, Runwood Homes and Circle Anglia, with Aylsham Town Council, Norfolk County Council, Norfolk Community Health and Care and the Hungate Street Medical Practice all involved in the planning process. Local residents were also involved in the planning process through a survey commissioned by NHS Norfolk and carried out by Ipsos MORI, with the support from the Community Involvement Panel (CIP).

The opening of a new 24-bed dedicated stroke rehabilitation unit at Norwich Community Hospital has formed a crucial part of the planning of future care in Aylsham as it means fewer community beds are required at Aylsham, whilst stroke care and rehabilitation, although centralised has been considerably improved for patients.

Together with longer, but not always healthier life spans, these changes increase the demand for services. Rurality also increases the risk of isolation, mental and physical ill health e.g. suicide rates in males are 11% higher in rural areas than urban after allowing for deprivation (HSQ 2008) and evidence suggests rural patients approach their GPs with health problems later than those in urban areas, which can affect outcomes e.g. cancers.

Rural residents are likely to spend more time in the car compared to urban residents. There is increasing evidence of the physical, mental and emotional benefits of time spent in green space<sup>xcvii</sup> and the Walking for Health initiative (see case study in Chapter 5) has been shown to have real health and economic benefits<sup>xcviii</sup>. All ages can benefit from the natural environment for recreation and in areas where formal facilities such as leisure centres or playgrounds are not provided, this access to natural green space and informal recreational facilities is even more important.

## **Key Objectives**

To support rural residents in living well it is important to ensure that community, economic and social infrastructure supports healthy vibrant communities. Rural residents need to be supported so they can easily access appropriate services as well as focusing on proactive and preventative action to stop problems arising in the first place.

The key objectives for delivering a living well agenda in rural areas are to:

- a) Ensure rural people have access to education, training and jobs which allows them to fulfil their economic and social potential;
- b) Ensure rural residents have access to housing that is affordable, built or refurbished to 'decent homes standards' and appropriate to their family's needs;
- c) Ensure rural people have access to appropriate formal and informal recreational, sporting and leisure facilities, with this provision linked closely to health services to help rural residents maintain healthy lifestyles;
- d) Provide an appropriate mix of service provision relevant to all ages and needs;

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- e) Ensure that transport solutions are appropriate, timely and responsive to rural needs;
- f) Make rural areas “safe” places to live and work in terms of both the reality and the perception - as measured by fear of crime and the confidence that rural communities have in their local authority and police to tackle crime effectively;
- g) Ensure that health and social care provision is ‘the right care, in the right place at the right time’<sup>xcix</sup>.

## What Needs to Happen?

Ensuring that people in the rural East of England live well is not simply about access to services and health provision. Evidence shows that economic and social deprivation are determinants of poor health and wellbeing and therefore to ensure people live well it is important to address housing, employment, skills, health and access to services in a holistic way.

The main areas where action is needed are:

- **Services** - to ensure all rural residents regardless of age, needs or location can access the services they need to live well by:
  - Encouraging the provision of more services in market towns and larger villages which are accessible to local rural residents;
  - Facilitating community ownership approaches to services and delivering public services in new ways by making more use of community buildings<sup>c</sup> and by promoting partnerships with the private sector, e.g. in village or farm shops;
  - Promoting remote access to services through improving broadband and mobile phone coverage as explored in more detail in Chapter 4;
  - Promoting multi-use facilities and shared service outlets so that a wider range of services can be sustained.
- **Community Safety** - better promotion of actions which are being taken is needed to reassure residents as well as targeted new programmes to deal with specific issues such as preventing anti-social behaviour by delivering effective local youth services.
- **Health and social care** - by providing appropriate health and social care locally in new and flexible ways<sup>ci</sup>, whilst balancing local and specialist centralised provision to take account of the diverse nature of the rural population. Care provision also needs to be imaginative and accessible and this should include creative and effective ways of engaging people in NHS preventative services and health promotion activity.

In addition, action in relation to living well links to other Chapters dealing with:

- **Employment and skills** - to match housing growth with appropriate growth in a range of employment and skills opportunities to help rural residents fulfil their potential as explored in more detail in Chapter 2;
- **Housing** - where both appropriate and high quality housing is provided as explored in more detail in Chapter 3;

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- **Transport** - where improving transport provision allows rural people to access the services they need as explored in more detail in Chapter 3;
- **Living Environment** - where an attractive and healthy local natural environment aids people's wellbeing as explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

## Recommendation 14

New creative solutions are needed to provide constructive activities for rural young people (particularly 14-17 year olds), to help them fulfil their potential

## Recommendation 15

The provision of rural services in villages and market towns should be increased through multi-agency approaches, whilst recognising that in some circumstances it is better to provide transport to access centralised specialist provision (e.g. complex health needs)

## Recommendation 16

Preventative health care in rural areas needs to take account of the different needs of rural communities

## Chapter 8 - Engaged Communities

### Summary

- To deliver change in rural communities it is essential to engage and empower local people
- Rural areas have strong established communities compared to many urban areas, but it is widely recognised that even in rural areas community engagement is difficult, particularly in remote locations where connections from these communities to public sector structures are weak
- Rural communities have witnessed rapid demographic change and this has led to both newer groups (e.g. migrants) and some established groups becoming marginalised
- Engagement overload, the need to co-ordinate action and new ways to communicate with residents are all key issues which need to be addressed

### Challenges

Change only happens with engaged and empowered people and communities to champion and drive forward action and genuine empowerment comes from people taking responsibility for making things happen<sup>cii</sup>.

However, community engagement has a difficult balance to strike. As argued in earlier chapters, rural areas need to be encouraged to grow economically and socially to allow them to be more sustainable. Too often, community engagement only occurs when campaigns are mounted to oppose new developments. What is needed is more and earlier community engagement which takes as its starting point how growth which will increase community sustainability can be accommodated. Critical areas include the need for more rural employment (implying new workspace) and affordable housing, where community engagement must focus on finding acceptable solutions to meet these needs, rather than opposing all development and causing rural areas to stagnate and decline.

Since April 2009 all Councils have had a "Duty to Involve". However, a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008)<sup>ciii</sup> found that services are delivered by an increasingly diverse range of providers, with corresponding issues for user and community involvement. The research suggests that clearer links are needed between strategic partnerships at ward level and those at local authority level.

Previous research on policies promoting local decision-making has identified an 'implementation gap' when policy is put into practice. The Joseph Rowntree study concludes that it is possible to achieve community empowerment but that it will need to be designed into policies and actively resourced and promoted by government. The emerging policy of 'Big Society' offers encouragement that this is starting to happen. Community empowerment actions also need to allow for local practice that reflects the social and geographical characteristics of diverse rural areas.

Community led planning can help to address the problems of how to ensure local people are able to guide the development of local services and provision as shown in the case study on Brandon below. However, it is important to ensure community led plans are holistic in covering a wide range of areas from the economy and skills to community facilities and services and reflect the needs of the whole

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community and not just those who are already engaged. Statutory and area level planning processes, e.g. LDFs, should also take more account of local people's wishes expressed through community planning exercises.

## **Case study: Connected Care in Brandon, Suffolk**

Connected Care is a project running in Brandon which has brought together providers in health, social care, housing and third sector to develop new ways to deliver public services which better meet the needs of local people.

Central to the project has been active community engagement based on methodology developed by the charity Turning Point<sup>civ</sup>. The main aim of the project has been to bring providers of a range of services together to jointly engage with the community to understand their needs and to then develop shared delivery. One interesting approach has been to use people from Brandon as researchers to enable the review of local needs to get into all parts of the community. These local researchers have then also been involved in helping to design the solutions developed so that the services truly address local needs and aspirations.

The project is now moving forward with some major changes to service delivery planned, including a 'Community Health and Well Being Centre' which will provide a range of services under one roof. There is also work being undertaken to assess how transport issues between Brandon and Thetford can be addressed to help residents to access health provision as a result of the community consultation undertaken.

Historically, most people in rural areas were marginalised from political activity and had limited opportunities (or aspirations) to engage or to seek to influence the policies affecting their lives<sup>cv</sup>

Historically communities in rural areas have been self supporting but due to demographic and social trends this is changing. In rural areas the ability to engage effectively is compounded by access issues and incomers such as migrants are particularly at risk of not having their views heard effectively.

E-communication channels are potentially useful to target hard to reach groups, but so far have only been used in limited situations. The Local Government Information Unit (2009) has urged councils to use social networking to boost youth participation<sup>cvi</sup> and mobile phones also provide a route to these communities. In rural areas where many people live remotely from the communities in which they seek services, this move to e-communications could help to overcome one of the barriers many rural residents face, but problems with mobile phone and broadband coverage as outlined in Chapter 4 are obvious issues in delivering this. Some care homes are using Nintendo Wii to keep the elderly fit. The Wii console has a built in web browser and councils could improve website access for this audience via this route. Digital television also offers the potential to engage with people who don't access the internet<sup>cvii</sup>.

The Rural Community Action Network<sup>cviii</sup> has found that the principles of good engagement may be helped by simpler governance structures, however many rural communities have expressed concerns that unitary structures based on large urban areas risk marginalising them. They also found that in order to increase the rural voice some parish and town councils have introduced "clustering", to

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address common issues across multiple communities. Clustering has also been used effectively by the Police.

ACRE<sup>ciX</sup> has identified that in order to engage all members of a community, it is important to use creative approaches through, for example, the involvement of existing local groups. The extended dialogue increases local people's understanding of the needs of all residents, particularly those disadvantaged by lack of mobility, lack of employment or marginalised for other reasons.

The importance of volunteering to rural community life is vital in improving community cohesion. Where there is a thriving and well-supported voluntary and community sector, including infrastructure, community owned assets, anchor organisations and social enterprises, communities tend to be empowered. It is recognised that volunteers need skills, but can also use volunteering to develop life and work skills and greater alignment between volunteer groups and skills providers should be promoted. Learning Champions within the community also have a potentially significant role to play.

## **Case study: St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Youth Forum and Vision 2025<sup>cx</sup>**

What will you be doing in 20 years time? What will your area be like? What should the council be doing to plan for the future? These are questions which St Edmundsbury Borough Council, along with its partners, asked as part of its Vision 2025 project.

The 2025 Project was developed in order to establish a long-term vision that cuts across all of the council and partner organisations. The existing strategies such as the Community Plan and Local Plan help shape short term aims, but are less focused on longer term issues such as the growth of the M11-Stansted corridor, expansion of the Cambridge region and pressure for more housing and improved transport links.

The process involved thematic meetings as well as more general round table events and discussions with particular groups. As part of the Vision 2025 project, the council worked with students from upper schools and colleges in the borough to generate actions that will make the vision a reality. Work on the Vision was the catalyst for a new Youth Forum.

Effective community engagement is never easy, is resource intensive and time consuming. In rural areas these issues are compounded by the distance from homes to service centres and the tradition of self sufficiency. With rapid changes in demographics in rural areas, there is a particular need to engage with new groups in society and those who are under-represented e.g. young families, to ensure that their particular needs are understood and addressed.

## **Key Objectives**

To deliver effective community engagement, actions need to find ways to engage more people, ensure all sections of society are included and help people who want to participate to do so.

The key objectives for strengthening community engagement are the need to:

- a) Develop Council and local rural democracy structures to improve their interaction with community action;

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- b) Share consultation across all delivery bodies to make it easier for views to be heard and to stop residents becoming disengaged by consultation overload<sup>Cxi</sup>;
- c) Support the role of volunteers in delivering rural community capacity and services;
- d) Achieve meaningful engagement of all parts of the rural community, including the young, so that community strategies truly reflect the needs of all parts of the community and not simply those who are already engaged or who shout the loudest

## What Needs to Happen?

Delivering community engagement will depend on ensuring that rural residents, across all groups in society, feel they have a role and route by which to participate in local decision making and action.

**The main areas in which action is needed are:**

- **Rationalising local community structures and consultation routes** - so that rural residents have a clearer understanding of local service provision and organisations and how to interact with them and local service providers have a better route to obtain feedback from across the community by sharing consultation across all delivery bodies (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2008). Consideration needs to be given to more inclusive and representative community consultation by using targeted market research and new technology;
- **Community led planning** - by improving the connection between very local level plans (e.g. Parish Plans) and LSP and LDF processes to ensure that all planning processes are clearly linked and holistic across the community (e.g. services), economic (e.g. jobs growth) and environmental agendas;
- **Young people** - more effort needs to be directed at finding ways to both understand young people's needs as well as ways to address their problems by working with the East of England Youth Parliament on rural issues;
- **Community delivery** - through providing communities with more empowerment to deliver their own local community action plans primarily by ensuring that existing rural volunteers and activists are supported. Empower communities to work together at a local level to address key issues such as local transport and access plans and climate change

## Recommendation 17

The East of England Rural Forum should work with youth organisations to encourage debate on rural issues as they affect young people

## Recommendation 18

Community led planning needs to be strengthened so that they can deliver more holistic local statements of need which can be used to inform Local Development Frameworks

## Conclusions

The ranges of issues set out in this White Paper reflect the complexity of rural communities across the East of England, which are neither uniform nor are facing the same challenges.

Three issues, however, stand out from all the areas covered in the Rural White Paper. These all came through strongly in the consultation process and have resonance across many of the chapters above. These are:

**1. Digital inclusion** - rural areas are enthusiastic to embrace the opportunities provided by the digital revolution, but this is being jeopardised by the growing digital divide between urban and rural areas. Current plans for the delivery of high speed broadband are seen as too little too late by everyone who has been consulted and significantly, the UK targets place rural areas in particular at a substantial disadvantage compared to initiatives in other developed countries.

Addressing this would:

- Help to strengthen the East of England rural economy and create new jobs, therefore delivering big economic gains and benefits to the treasury through more wealth creation;
- Help to deliver social inclusion by allowing rural people to access more services remotely and therefore allow business and the public sector to reduce their delivery costs;
- Reduce the need for people to travel to access services thus saving rural residents money as well as reducing the carbon emissions associated with travel.

**2. Rural economic growth** - rural areas have enormous potential to substantially increase their economic contribution and delivering this would produce benefits to:

- Rural households and residents by broadening the range of jobs on offer and by increasing incomes to close the gap which currently exists;
- Communities by making them more sustainable as more local workers would help to justify investment in local services by both the private and public sector;
- The environment by reducing the need to travel thus leading to reduced carbon emissions and less congestion whilst also contributing to a reduction in stress.

**3. Demographic change** - rural areas are seeing significant demographic change with particular issues around both the under-representation of young people (and young families) and the rapid growth of the elderly population. This is creating social imbalance. Young people in particular are having to leave rural communities in response to a lack of affordable housing and urban centred employment opportunities and training provision. Solving this would:

- Create more vibrant and sustainable rural communities with a more viable demographic mix and reduce the number of families and communities which are ruptured by the young being forced to leave, thus making family structures more self sufficient;
- Create a virtuous circle for the rural economy by retaining intelligent and innovative young people within the community, thus allowing the economy to thrive and therefore providing more opportunity for future generations of rural young people.

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For older people, the population of whom has been growing rapidly due to both increased longevity and in-migration to rural areas at retirement, access to services (especially health services), transport and housing are key concerns. The elderly in rural areas are a heterogeneous group and whilst some are poor, others have large disposable incomes which can be used to buy local goods and services. Meeting the complex needs of the elderly requires innovation in service delivery, more flexible housing provision and 'lifetime neighbourhoods'. Meeting the needs of the elderly also requires young people to staff the services they require and the imbalanced demographics of rural areas is therefore an increasing issue. Tackling these issues would:

- Help to ensure the services older people need are provided in an appropriate and accessible way and help to retain elderly spending power in the local community;
- Increase the vitality of rural areas by creating new local career options for young people.

Addressing these three areas should be central to any plans to deliver the Rural White Paper in the East of England, but this in no way downplays the importance or significance of the other areas covered in the paper. This White Paper began by arguing that balanced and sustainable growth is essential to the future of our rural areas - balanced and sustainable in the sense of the mutually supportive relationship between urban and rural, but also in the sense of ensuring that the development of rural areas balances future growth in population with economic growth, community services and respect for the environment.

The delivery of the Rural White Paper will be achieved if the rural voice is central to all decision making on the future at the sub-regional and local level. To be effective rural views must be central to the initial drafting of proposals and in this regard, there is a need to find new ways to get more rural people engaged in their local democratic processes.

In line with the third over-arching issue above - demographic change - new ways must be used to get young people in particular engaged in helping to shape the future of rural communities. This generation does not in general attend meetings or consultation events but their views are essential to the future success of rural areas. Media such as social networking sites and other informal networks must be used to both understand their needs and to help them contribute more fully to rural society.

Rural areas can increase their contribution to the region and in developing this White Paper the Forum has been struck by the number of people who are passionate about how rural areas can become more sustainable, primarily by creating jobs so that more people can live and work in their rural communities and in so doing sustain local services. Indeed this desire to grow the rural economy, create new high value jobs and to embrace the digital age came through strongly both at the consultation event and in the ranking of issues which participants were asked to undertake.

Equally, everyone has recognised that alone they cannot hope to deliver the changes which are needed. The Forum therefore looks forward to working with rural communities and public and private sectors across the East of England to deliver the ideas and recommendations set out within this paper.

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## Acknowledgements

The Forum is indebted to the many individuals and organisations across the East of England who give their time freely to the Forum and who contributed to the consultation papers and events which led to this paper. Without their input this paper could not have been produced.

## Appendix 1: Ranking of issues from RWP consultation event

The rankings are based on the average score given to each potential issue by all the participants at the East of England Rural White Paper consultation event on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010.

Results were:

- 1<sup>st</sup> • Recognising broadband as an essential utility for rural areas
- 2<sup>nd</sup> = • Providing affordable housing in rural areas
  - Promoting sustainable water resource management
- 3<sup>rd</sup> = • Ensuring the planning system promotes rural economic growth
  - Promoting policies to drive rural employment growth
  - Providing more rural workspace & technology to support rural industries & jobs including home working
  - Engaging young people in local community activities
  - Improving links between Councils, local democracy structures & community action
- 4<sup>th</sup> = • Closing the gaps in rural education & skills attainment
  - Promoting local empowerment at ground level
- 5<sup>th</sup> = • Planning for climate change impacts
  - Embracing new low carbon technologies and land use
- 6<sup>th</sup> = • Developing enhanced public or community transport
  - Immediately creating at least 2MB universal broadband access by using satellite or wireless technology
- 7<sup>th</sup> = • Promoting local renewable energy generation
  - Adopting lower carbon lifestyles
- 8<sup>th</sup> = • Providing superfast (next generation 100-200MB per second) fixed line broadband to all rural areas by 2017
  - Supporting local volunteers
- 9<sup>th</sup> = • Developing better social, cultural and economic links between rural communities & the towns & cities which serve them
  - Enhancing mobile phone coverage and ensuring access to mobile broadband (20% & rising of population don't have landlines)
  - Promoting new measures to support community safety
  - Investing in community buildings (service & community cohesion)
  - Promoting better health outcomes by promoting service clustering in Market Towns & remote access to regional specialist centres
- 10<sup>th</sup> • Managing environmental and cultural assets to support community access and tourism development
- 11<sup>th</sup> = • Changing agricultural practice to improve environmental outcome
  - Focusing business support on new markets & businesses

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- 12<sup>th</sup> =
  - Enhancing the role of market towns
  - Ensuring policies supports the growth of all types of business
- 13<sup>th</sup>
  - Promoting new delivery methods to improve access to services
- 14<sup>th</sup>
  - Developing rural road infrastructure

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