

**CABINET –11 FEBRUARY 2022****LEICESTERSHIRE RURAL FRAMEWORK 2022-2030****REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the Cabinet's approval of a revised Leicestershire Rural Framework 2022-2030.
2. The Framework forms a basis for the work of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP), which brings together public, private and voluntary stakeholders to improve services and to support rural communities and businesses in the County.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that the Leicestershire Rural Framework 2022-2030 be approved.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. To provide a revised framework which outlines the key priorities for rural Leicestershire. The Framework does not seek to duplicate existing countywide strategies, but instead complements and supports their delivery from a rural perspective.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

5. The draft Framework was approved by the LRP Board at its meeting on the 12 January 2022.
6. Subject to approval by the Cabinet, the Framework will be launched by the LRP in March 2022, supported by an Action Plan which will set out how the priorities identified within the Framework will be delivered.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

7. The previous version of the Leicestershire Rural Framework, covering the period 2014-2020 was approved by the Cabinet in October 2014.

8. The Council's Strategic Plan (2022-26), which is currently out for consultation until 18th February, outlines its long-term vision for the people and place of Leicestershire through five strategic outcomes. The needs of rural communities are addressed throughout the Plan however the outcome with the strongest link is the 'Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure' outcome which includes several references to the specific priorities of rural communities in areas such as agriculture, public transport, digital connectivity and housing.
9. The Communities Approach (2022-26) which is also out for public consultation until 18th February emphasises the importance of working with all communities, including those living in rural areas.
10. The LRP were heavily involved in the production of the Economic Growth Strategy which was co-ordinated by the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP). The Rural evidence base was submitted together with comments from the LRP Management Board on the draft Strategy, to ensure that the rural perspective was included.

Resource Implications

11. There are no direct resource implications arising from the contents of this report; however, the revised Rural Framework will set the policy framework within which the LRP will operate in the next eight years. It will influence LRP project and partnership activity, including joint working with the LLEP or its replacement and the deployment of any associated rural funding.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

12. A copy of this report will be circulated to all members of the County Council.

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PART B

Background

13. The Leicestershire Rural Framework sets out a shared understanding of the County's rural priorities and provides a platform to help maximise opportunities for partnership working whilst having potential to secure further investment for rural areas.
14. The Framework will provide a basis for the work of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP), which brings together public, private and voluntary stakeholders to improve services and to support rural communities and businesses in the County.
15. Membership of the LRP Board includes; Leicestershire County Council (chair), district councils, Leicestershire and Rutland Association for Local Councils, Rural Community Council (Leicestershire and Rutland), Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership, National Farmers Union, Federation of Small Businesses, East Midlands Chamber, National Forest Company and rural business champions. The Partnership also draws upon specialist expertise through the other groups and partnerships that it works with.

Development of the Revised Framework

16. The Rural Framework (2022-2030), has been developed in line with the following Vision;

“ Rural Leicestershire will be made up of thriving, inclusive, digitally well connected and healthy communities and businesses that are adapting to the challenges posed by climate change to become resilient and maximising the opportunities offered by a net zero carbon future. “

17. As a result of the pandemic, the LLEP co-ordinated the production of a short term Economic Recovery Action Plan, which contained initiatives to support businesses adversely affected by the pandemic and the LRP Management Board regularly fed back intelligence received from businesses in rural areas.
18. LRP Board members have utilised their joint skills to commission a Rural Evidence Base to assist with funding applications and the LRP have led on the production of a Natural Capital Evidence Base.
19. To assist businesses with their longer term recovery the LLEP co-ordinated the production of the Economic Growth Strategy 2022-2030. The LRP Board fed information into the production of this strategy from rural businesses, including the Rural Evidence Base. The priorities identified as part of the work above have helped to form the Rural Framework 2022-2030.
20. Further work was undertaken by the County Council to work with stakeholders to establish a set of principles and priorities on which to base the Framework. An initial workshop was held in April 2019 to re-assess the previous Framework's

priorities and develop a revised approach. This was necessary as existing funding for rural areas was through the LEADER and EAFRD grant schemes, both of which were fully committed and at that point no new funding sources had been identified. LEADER and EAFRD funding was European funding, the former was a local allocation and the latter a national allocation.

21. Following the workshop, a draft Framework was developed which was then subject to further review at meetings of the LRP Board in March, June and October 2021.

The Revised Framework

22. The Framework, a copy of which is included as the Appendix to the report, consists of three overarching principles which are as follows;
- Understand needs - Develop a single voice for the rural businesses and residents of Leicestershire through shared intelligence and evidence to highlight issues that require intervention.
 - Shape policy - Work collectively to influence national / local policy, and funding, including through joint responses to consultations where appropriate.
 - Support and facilitate - Support the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership to effectively respond to the needs of the rural economy and help facilitate robust business cases for funding to implement solutions on an on-going basis.
23. In line with the three principles, the Framework consists of seven priorities which are set out below, grouped by the five outcomes set out in the County Council's draft Strategic Plan:

Clean, Green Future

1. Support work on climate change and the environment – The LRP will work with rural businesses to identify any potential initiatives they can utilise to reduce their carbon footprint.

Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure

2. Support rural inclusion and skills including supporting those furthest from the labour market to move closer to work – This includes working on initiatives including pop up Work Clubs in rural areas, to assist any out of work person with interview skills, CV writing and job searching.
3. Support small and micro businesses in rural areas to expand, diversify and grow- this will include developing new grant schemes should new funding sources become available.
4. Support sectors of significant importance to rural areas eg Tourism, Food and Drink, Professional and technical services and land based businesses – this could be through grant funding or digital support.
5. Improve physical and digital connectivity- Rural areas suffer with poor public transport networks and the LRP will work with providers to increase coverage. Rural areas also suffer with poor digital connectivity and the LRP works

closely with the Superfast Leicestershire Broadband Programme to increase coverage.

6. Town Centre Re-generation –Support initiatives, including seeking funding for town centre regeneration programmes.

Great Communities

7. Support the progress towards Resilient Communities and Places - work closely with Leicestershire County Council Communities Team to ensure issues in rural communities are fed into any initiatives.
24. To support the implementation of the Framework, an Action Plan will be developed which will set out how and when actions associated with the priorities will be delivered. The Action Plan will also be used to monitor the Framework's progress.
25. The Framework will be kept under review in order to ensure it remains current and in line with the County Council's rural priorities, particularly those in relation to the environment.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

26. There are no Equality and Human Rights Implications directly arising from this report. An EHRIA was completed for the last two frameworks and should new projects come forward within this Framework then an EHRIA will be undertaken.

Risk Assessment

27. The LRP currently does not lead on any project or programme identified in the proposed Framework. Should funding be found for a particular project in the future then a risk assessment will be undertaken to ensure that any risk to the County Council is appropriately managed.

Environmental Impact

28. There may be positive environmental implications resulting from the Rural Framework, if funding can be obtained to assist rural businesses with environmental initiatives.

.Background papers

Draft County Council Strategic Plan

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/10/29/Draft-Strategic-Plan-2022-26.pdf>

Draft Communities Strategy (Communities Approach)

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/11/26/draft-communities-approach-2022-26.pdf>

The LLEP's Economic Growth Strategy

<https://llep.org.uk/economic-growth-strategies/economic-growth-strategy/>

Report to the Cabinet – 13 October 2014 – Leicestershire Rural Framework 2014 –2020

<https://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s96230/9.LRP%20FRAMEWORK%202014%20-%202020.pdf>

Appendix

Leicestershire Rural Framework 2022 – 2030