

## REPORT OF THE CABINET

### A. LEICESTERSHIRE RURAL FRAMEWORK 2011-2014

#### Introduction

1. This report concerns the revised Leicestershire Rural Strategy 2011-14 which has been produced by the Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP).

#### Background

2. The Leicestershire Rural Framework (previously called the Rural Strategy) is identified in the Constitution as forming part of the Authority's Policy Framework and, therefore, is a matter which requires the approval of the County Council.
3. The Medium Term Delivery Plan identifies how the County Council will work to support rural communities. This includes better co-ordinated and integrated service planning, improvements to Leicestershire's rural economy and access to services, development of village parish council websites, good quality public and community transport provision, affordable rural housing, reduced rural isolation and support to develop community-led planning.
4. The Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP) supported by the County Council, co-ordinates the activities of a number of agencies delivering services in rural Leicestershire. This co-ordination takes place within the strategic framework provided by the Leicestershire Rural Strategy 2007-14, jointly prepared by the members of the LRP and formally approved by the County Council.
5. The LRP has a formal membership of 20 organisations. Established in 1993 the LRP works to co-ordinate, influence, advise and deliver for, and on behalf of, rural Leicestershire. The LRP is chaired by the County Council's Cabinet Lead Member – Mrs Lesley Pendleton CC. The County Council hosts the LRP and provides significant resources, including budgetary support, to help deliver rural priorities.
6. The previous version of the Leicestershire Rural Strategy, covering the period 2007-2014 was approved by the County Council at its meeting on 11 July 2007. The Strategy was subsequently published by the LRP and launched at its bi-annual Rural Conference in summer 2007.
7. The scheduled refresh of the Leicestershire Rural Strategy, renamed as the Leicestershire Rural Framework to reflect significant changes to the structure and content of the document, commenced in the autumn 2010, and has been undertaken to ensure the LRP's strategic priorities are fit-

for-purpose, taking into account a number of key recent policy developments. In particular this has included the emergence of the localism agenda, development of new public health responsibilities, development of the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership and the scheduled abolition of both the East Midlands Development Agency and Government Office for the East Midlands.

8. Having in place an updated Rural Framework will help to ensure that there is a shared understanding amongst key partners of priorities for action in rural Leicestershire and will help maximise future opportunities to access funding.
9. Alongside the refresh of the Framework, the LRP is conducting a peer review to ensure the continued effectiveness of the partnership.
10. A copy of the revised Leicestershire Rural Framework 2011-14 is attached as Appendix A to this report.

#### **Responses to the public consultation exercise on the draft Leicestershire Rural Framework**

11. The draft revised Rural Framework was open to a 9-week public consultation period launched on 18 April 2011.
12. In total 19 responses were received on the draft Framework. Of these 7 responses were received from parish councils, 3 from district councils and 3 from other LRP partner organisations. The draft Framework was also considered by the Scrutiny Commission on 8 June 2011 and the Leicestershire Rural Partnership on 14 July 2011.
13. Key comments made during the consultation period included:
  - In general there was support for the Framework and it was welcomed. There was also appreciation for the success that the LRP has had in securing external funding and championing rural issues. There is an on-going need to identify new funding opportunities.
  - The structure of the document was supported although there is a need to prioritise activity to reflect future financial and staffing pressures. Effort has been made to prioritise the Vision statements and the number of priorities have been reduced to 7.
  - The document would benefit from fewer and measurable 'deliverables'. This would enable members easily to revisit the document and assess progress made against targets.
  - There was a need for greater clarity on the geographical locations within which the LRP will prioritise its resources.

- Need to more explicitly reference localism, the Big Society and neighbourhood planning.
  - Super-fast broadband deployment was identified as of particular importance for rural locations and should be identified as such in the Framework.
  - Expressed need to ensure that economic development is advanced alongside priorities for environmental sustainability. Future opportunities for economic growth and community development through the “green economy” should be supported.
  - Affordable housing should be encouraged alongside entry-level market housing. Affordable housing development should not just be considered in sustainable locations but it should help ensure the future sustainability of rural communities.
  - Continued need to ensure effective integration between different transport modes.
  - Community and public transport provision should prioritise those in greatest need, including the young, the elderly and vulnerable people.
  - There was concern that greater effort should have been undertaken to consult through the network of Community Forums.
14. These comments have been taken into account in producing the revised Rural Framework.
15. In addition a number of specific actions were recommended. These have been recorded and will be considered as part of the LRP’s future action planning process.

#### **The Leicestershire Rural Framework 2011-14**

16. The Rural Framework sets out a vision for Rural Leicestershire to 2026 and sets out the evidence which underpins the thematic chapters and the rural priorities within the document. The Strategy also includes a section detailing the LRP’s on-going relationship and interaction with Leicestershire Together. This will be further developed through a peer review of the LRP which has been initiated.
17. Within the Framework the revised 2026 Vision sets out a statement that Leicestershire will be made up of thriving, cohesive and safe communities, which have access to a choice of high quality and sustainable employment opportunities, mix of housing and essential local services.

18. The LRP has significantly reduced the number of priority outcomes from 31 to 7. These are the Big 7 – 7 key priorities which we consider that the LRP can lead delivery of to 2014. These include:
  - i) Active, inclusive and empowered parish councils and meetings able to represent and support rural communities and lead innovative service delivery at the local level;
  - ii) Increased availability of affordable, well-designed and suitable rural housing for local residents to help ensure the future sustainability of rural communities (including social and entry-level market housing);
  - iii) Sustainable growth, high quality employment opportunities and increased vocational training in rural priority sectors including land-based, food and drink, equestrian, visitor economy, creative and knowledge-based;
  - iv) Retaining good access to essential services within rural areas to meet the needs of local residents and ensure sustainable communities, and working to retain the “Last Service in the Village” within remote rural areas;
  - v) Deployment of super-fast broadband connectivity across rural areas to support community, education and business needs as supporting increased access to a range of digital services;
  - vi) Effective and integrated public and community transport provision including targeted and innovative travel solutions which meet specific needs, especially for older and young people;
  - vii) Rural communities and businesses take responsibility for reducing their carbon footprint.
19. In addition the LRP will support other organisations and delivery bodies through Leicestershire Together's co-ordinated delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) - helping the partnership and its Commissioning Hubs to "Think Rural". Within the Framework a number of key SCS priorities have been identified.
20. Supporting evidence and further information has been included within a separate ancillary report. Both the Framework and supporting document is available at [www.oakleaves.org.uk/framework](http://www.oakleaves.org.uk/framework).
21. The revised Rural Framework will be launched at the LRP's Rural Conference in February 2012.

### **Resources Implications**

22. There are no direct resource implications. The Rural Framework will, however, set the policy framework within which the LRP will operate over the next three years. This strategic framework will influence LRP project activity and funding allocations.
23. The County Council provides significant funding and resources to support the work of the LRP and the allocation of this funding to projects and initiatives will be made within the policy framework provided by the Medium Term Delivery Plan, the Leicestershire Sustainable Community Strategy, the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership and the revised Rural Framework.

### **Equal Opportunities Implications**

24. There are no specific equal opportunities implications. However, the consultation process sought to engage those who are considered 'hard to reach' and isolated in rural Leicestershire. The document will be made available in a wide variety of formats to involve those with reading difficulties or without access to a computer.

### **Consideration by Cabinet and Scrutiny**

25. The matter was considered by the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 8 June 2011. The Commission noted the draft Leicestershire Rural Framework with support subject to a number of comments. These comments have been taken into account in producing the revised Framework.
26. The Cabinet considered the matter at its meeting on 13 September and agreed to recommend the County Council to approve the revised strategy.

### **(Motion to be moved:-**

**That the Leicestershire Rural Framework 2011-14, as referred to in Section A of the report of the Cabinet, be approved.)**