

Draft Leicestershire Rural Strategy 2004 – 2009

February 2004

Members of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership include:

Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Parish & Local Councils

Blaby District Council

Business Link

Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Charnwood Borough Council

CVS Community Partnership

The Countryside Agency

EMDA

Government Office for the East Midlands

Harborough District Council

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Leicestershire Constabulary

Leicestershire County Council

Leicestershire Primary Care Trusts

Leicestershire Learning & Skills Council

Melton Borough Council

North West Leicestershire District Council

Oadby & Wigston Borough Council

Leicestershire and Rutland Rural Community Council

The production of this draft Strategy was co-ordinated by Leicestershire County Council on behalf of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership.



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Foreword

By Mrs Lesley Pendleton CC - Chairman of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership

I am proud to present to you this Strategy, which sets out the issues that members of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership feel are of the utmost importance to their work for the next 5 years. The publication of this latest revision to the Strategy comes within a year of my taking the chair of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership, and it gives me great pleasure to be able to establish, and communicate to you, a strategic position so soon.

This latest revision to the Leicestershire Rural Strategy comes at a time of great change to the policy context for rural areas. On the horizon are extensive changes to the Common Agricultural Policy, with a shift away from production subsidies and towards supporting environmental improvements and rural development. DEFRA support to rural areas is also due for a significant review following recommendations, made in Lord Haskins' review of DEFRA, to devolve responsibility for delivery to local organisations, such as the Leicestershire Rural Partnership.

The Rural Strategy will give Leicestershire an advantage when these changes are implemented, by establishing and outlining local concerns and priorities. It also demonstrates that organisations working in the county are able to work together to achieve beneficial outcomes for rural Leicestershire. This sets the county apart from most other shire counties, and I am proud that we are once again engaged in a strategic assessment of rural issues and solutions.

The LRP has a well proven track record of assisting rural Leicestershire, having been established over 10 years ago, in 1993. Since that date the LRP has adapted to tackle a number of challenges and opportunities, including the Foot & Mouth Crisis, organisational changes, funding opportunities that have been and gone, and much more. As Lead Member for Rural Issues at the County Council it gives me great pleasure to continue to provide County Council support for the work of the LRP, as we recognise that there is a great deal of activity that needs to be carried out jointly with other partners. The County Council also recognises that joint work in rural Leicestershire needs to be co-ordinated, and I am keen to ensure that the Council fulfils it's community leadership role by continuing to provide resources to facilitate this co-ordination

I am confident that this Strategy will provide a sound basis for our continued work together for the benefit of rural Leicestershire.

Introduction

What is the Leicestershire Rural Partnership?

The Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP) has a formal membership of 19 organisations working in rural Leicestershire, with working links to a further 44 organisations. A list of all partners is provided on the inside cover.

Partners work together in order to benefit from shared knowledge and resources and to jointly address issues of mutual concern. Residents, voluntary organisations and businesses in rural Leicestershire all benefit from increased co-ordination, efficiency and improved service delivery.

The Leicestershire Rural Partnership seeks to deliver better services and quality of life by **'doing'**, **'co-ordinating'**, **'influencing'** and **'advising'**.

In its key **'doing'** role the LRP works closely with other cross-cutting partnerships (including the Leicestershire LSP, the seven district LSPs and the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership), providing a trusted and proven delivery mechanism for their rural objectives. Ensuring that LRP activity complements rather than duplicates the work of others is a key principle for the Partnership.

To achieve its vision the LRP helps **'co-ordinate'** the activities of its member partners and works closely with other partnerships. Co-ordinating funding arrangements and helping partners to access funding are important aspects of this role. Providing effective networking arrangements to support joint working is another. The focus of LRP activity is, however, partner driven with the LRP adding value to the work partners already carry out.

The LRP's **'influencing and advising'** role includes shaping consideration of rural issues and policy development at national and regional level, including through its membership of the East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum. The LRP also seeks to influence and advise 'theme-based' groups and partnerships, such as ENABLE, the Early Years and Child Care Partnership, the Learning Partnership, and key sub-regional partnerships such as the LSEP.

To enable the LRP to effectively carry out these roles, it develops, implements and regularly reviews the Leicestershire Rural Strategy.

What is the Leicestershire Rural Strategy?

The Leicestershire Rural Strategy provides a strategic framework for the work of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership. It outlines the strategic priorities for rural Leicestershire and highlights the main issues these areas will face in the coming 5 years. These priorities will be informed by a series of international, national, regional and local policies affecting rural areas, which are described briefly on page 9 to provide an overview of the policy context for the Strategy.

The Strategy is also informed by the knowledge and experience of partners, who have contributed to its development during a number of consultation exercises. These include 2 partnership discussion events, termed Development Days, and a series of visioning workshops at the 2003 Annual Conference "Rural Leicestershire in the 21st Century".

The Strategy outlines how community and partner priorities will be addressed, by presenting a number of strategic objectives for work carried out through the LRP. The Rural Strategy focuses upon issues which can be best addressed through joint partnership working, it does not extend to identifying every issue of concern to rural Leicestershire. Many issues are being addressed by individual organisations and hence do not require the LRP to take additional action.

An Action Plan will be developed subsequent to the Strategy's publication, outlining how partners in the LRP will work together to identify and secure the necessary resources to turn strategic objectives into practical projects, and in turn into real outcomes.

LRP Vision

The Partnership's vision is that rural Leicestershire will be made up of thriving, inclusive and diverse rural communities, where:

- There is appropriate access for all to a range of services and facilities, and the opportunity to develop both existing and new facilities;
- The prosperity and competitiveness of the rural economy is strengthened to the benefit of the local community, particularly marginalised groups and individuals; and
- The natural environment is protected and enhanced.

LRP Principles

The following principles outline how the LRP works. The action the LRP will take to address specific issues is described in the section on "Strategic Objectives" (page 14).

Through its work, the LRP will:

- **Add value** to the work of individual partners.
 - This involves **focusing activity** solely on those issues where the LRP is best placed to intervene (when a partnership mechanism is the most appropriate to deliver results) and recognising the roles and responsibilities of other organisations.
 - It requires the LRP to **co-ordinate** activity in rural Leicestershire to avoid duplication and ensure that priorities are effectively addressed.
 - It also involves the use of LRP networks to act as a **broker** between Partners, external bodies and local communities.
- Provide **access to funding** from Partners or external funding sources to develop initiatives that benefit rural Leicestershire – acting as an enabler
- Address the inherent sustainability issues.
 - This involves demonstrating and promoting **environmental sustainability** and seeking **financial and organisational sustainability** in initiatives funded through, and supported by, the LRP.
 - It requires the promotion of **social inclusion** through our work, with an expectation of increasing inclusion where possible.
 - It may also involve promoting and lobbying for a sustainable balance of activity outside the direct interest of the LRP.
- Operate as an accessible **information hub** on all issues relating to rural Leicestershire. This will require effective internal and external communication's structures that facilitate the discussion of issues and the sharing of knowledge, good practice and information.
- **Engage effectively** with rural communities to develop social capital and support local activity in response to, or anticipation of, the needs and aspirations of those communities.
- Act in an **open & transparent** manner. This requires clarity over the LRP's role and the contribution and expectations of Partners. Partners need to feel an ownership over the work of the LRP, that they are given the opportunity to contribute to and shape that work, and that their contributions are valued.

- Provide Partners and rural communities with an effective, well connected and respected **mouthpiece** to speak on their behalf, on issues where there is consensus, whilst recognising that Partners will already have their own communications structures or protocols.
- Be **proactive** in carrying out strategic planning that anticipates the future needs & aspirations of rural Leicestershire and responding with appropriate measures.
- Develop **innovative and pioneering** responses to local issues and explore alternatives to traditional methods of service delivery, whilst recognising the need for sustainability and the merits of approaches that have proven successful.
- Recognise, support and strengthen the established settlement hierarchy, whereby **Market Towns & Rural Service Centres** deliver to, and have a significant effect on, the surrounding rural hinterlands.
- Undertake a rolling programme of **monitoring and review** to ensure that current principles and objectives are properly guiding the work of the LRP, and ensure that there is sufficient **flexibility** within organisational structures to adapt in response to internal decisions or external influences.

LRP Structure

The structure of the LRP* is as follows:

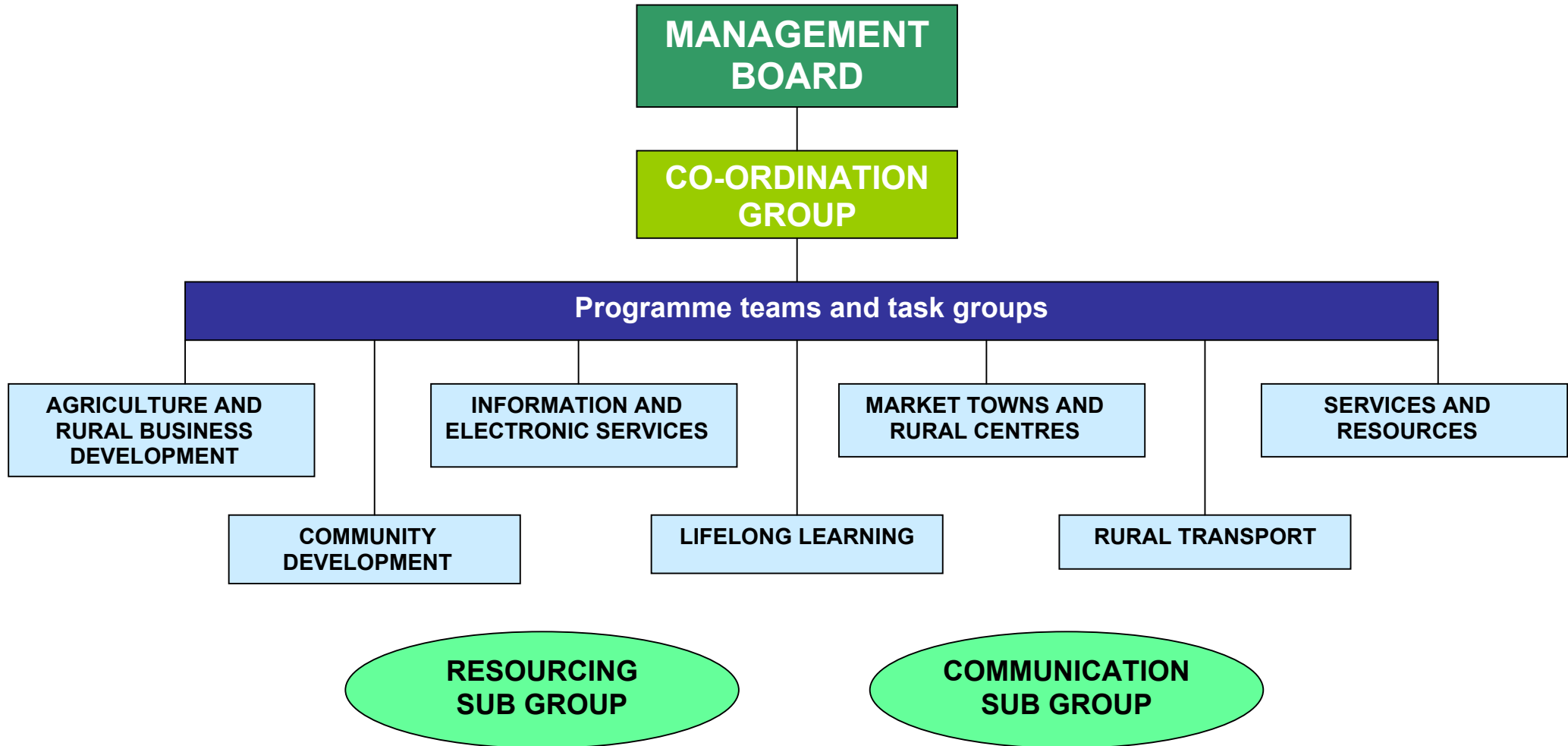
- a **Management Board**, responsible for:
determining the strategic direction of the LRP; monitoring/evaluating the work of Programme Teams; and liaison with other key partnerships.
- a **Co-ordination Group**, responsible for:
the operational level of the LRP and processes such as project appraisal, plus co-ordinating the work of the Programme Teams and ensuring that effective linkages are made between Teams and with other partners;
- several **Programme Teams**, responsible for:
the development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of projects - many Programme Teams operate through **Task Groups**, which often relate to specific projects, and are established to focus upon specific areas in more depth;
- two cross-cutting Sub Groups:
 - a **Resources Sub Group**, responsible for identifying potential sources of funding and co-ordinating bids to support the LRP programme and:
 - a **Communications Sub Group**, responsible for supporting the work of the Communications Officer and for projects such as the website, conference, Annual Report, newsletter and other events/publications;

*See also Figure 1: LRP structure (page 5).

Projects are delivered by various partner organisations, with different organisations taking the lead and employing staff to suit their specialism.

Leicestershire County Council has established a support structure for the LRP by providing staff to co-ordinate, administer and communicate the work of the LRP. County Council staff also chair many, but not all, of the Programme Teams. Over the duration of the LRP's existence, the County Council has been the most significant single source of funds to support projects delivered through the LRP.

Figure 1: LRP structure



About rural Leicestershire

Leicestershire is a predominately rural county, with 55% of the population living in just over 210 rural parishes. The county has over 300 settlements with a population under 10,000, which is a widely used definition of rurality. The majority of these settlements are very small, nearly half having a population of under 250. There is a clear pattern to the distribution of rural settlements, with Harborough and Melton districts containing a total of 70% of settlements under 10,000.

The county surrounds the urban area of the city of Leicester, and shares a border with Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Rutland. The majority of these adjoining counties are also rural in nature, although there are large urban centres of Nottingham and Derby close to the north and north-west of the county boundaries.

Leicestershire benefits from excellent national road and rail links. London is just over 1 hour away by train, with many principal roads passing through the county, including the M1, M69, M42 and A14. Public transport in the county is based on a network of bus routes, of at least hourly frequency, linking to major settlements, with smaller settlements increasingly linked to the network using demand responsive (dial-a-ride) bus services tailored more to the individual needs of residents.

Leicestershire is a county of considerable variety in character and landscape - the result of interaction between the human and physical influences acting upon the land over the centuries, as well as the fundamental influence of the land itself.

It can be broadly divided up into several landscape character areas, the main ones being the Wolds, Charnwood Forest and the Coalfields across the north, High Leicestershire to the east, and the Leicestershire Vales to the south. Some of these areas are distinctively 'Leicestershire', of which residents are very proud.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland combined have only 3.3% woodland cover, making it one of the least wooded areas in England. Government policy aims to achieve an expansion of this, the county hosts the National Forest which includes Charnwood Forest and pockets of ancient woodland.

A variety of different factors combine to have an effect on the social characteristics of rural Leicestershire, and a number of patterns can be observed relating to different social indicators:

- There is a concentration of economically inactive residents in parishes in the former coalfield areas of North West Leicestershire.
- The former coalfield areas of North West Leicestershire and Hinckley and Bosworth also demonstrate a concentration of people with long term illnesses.
- The distribution of households without access to a car shows slightly higher concentration of households without a car in the north of the county, with Harborough having the lowest concentrations of households without a car.
- Charnwood, Melton and Harborough have higher concentrations of elderly people than other districts.
- Young people aged 0 – 15 are particularly concentrated in the Harborough district.

Settlements in Leicestershire

The Rural Strategy divides settlements into 4 categories, based on their size, function and relationship to surrounding settlements. These categories include:

- Leicestershire Urban Area/Large Towns
- Market Towns
- Service Centres
- Other rural settlements

A map showing the distribution of settlements across the county can be found on page 8, with the settlement classification and names listed in Table 1.

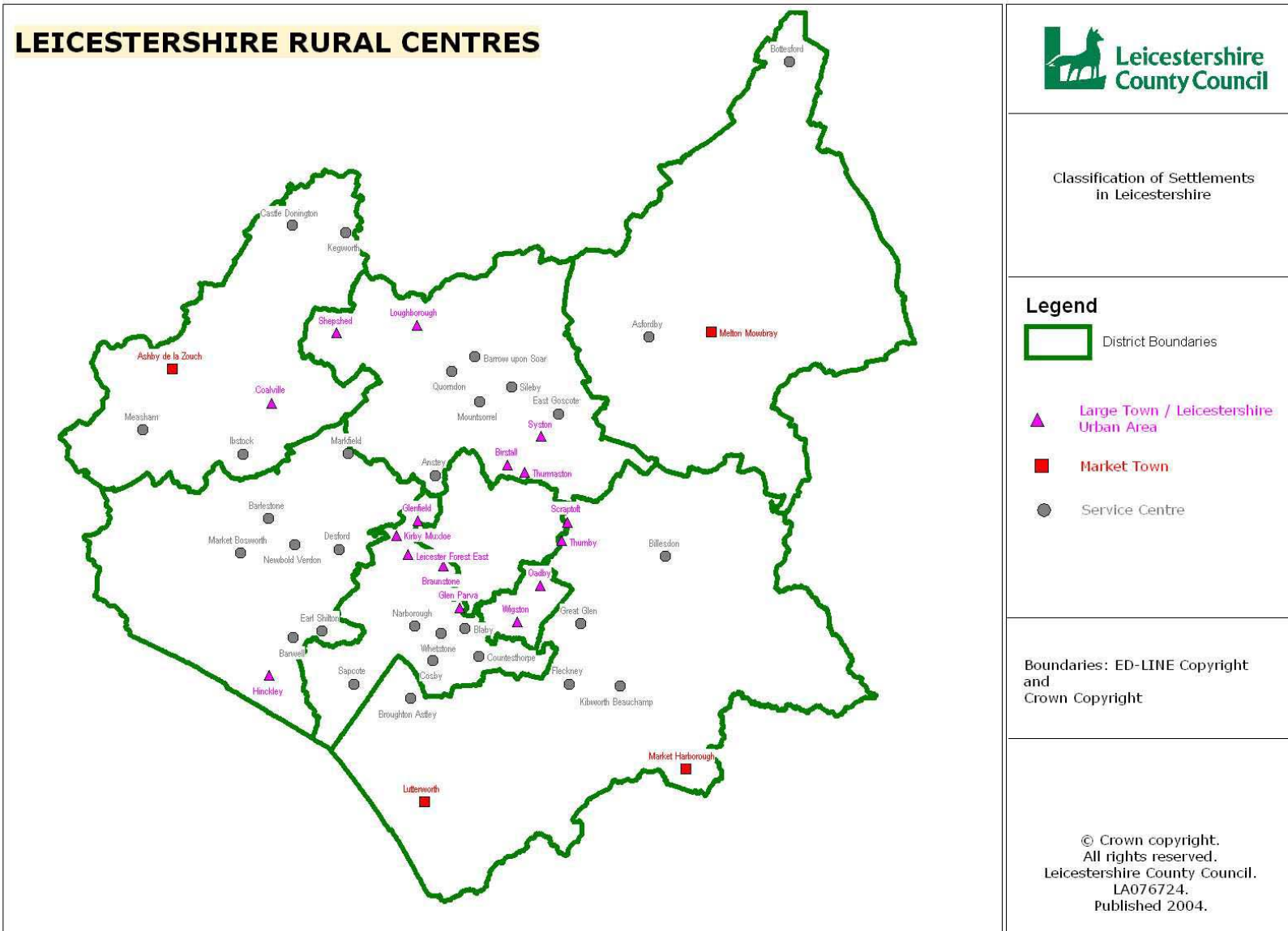
The Leicestershire Urban Area is as defined in the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan. Larger towns are those with a population of over 25,000, or a population over 10,000 but with no service relationship to surrounding rural areas. There is a presumption against the LRP working in the urban area or large towns.

Market towns have populations of 10,000 to 25,000, and contain a significant number of services within the town which are accessible to, and used by, residents and businesses in surrounding rural settlements.

Service centres are settlements with a population below 10,000 but which have several services such as shops, post offices and schools that serve the surrounding rural settlements.

Table 1: Classification of settlements in Leicestershire

| Classification | Settlement | |
|--|---|--|
| Leicestershire Urban Area/ Large Town | Loughborough Hinckley Coalville Oadby Wigston Shepshed Thurnby Scraptoft | Thurmaston Syston Birstall Glenfield Braunstone Town Kirby Muxloe Leicester Forest East Glen Parva |
| Market Towns | Market Harborough Melton Mowbray | Lutterworth Ashby-de-la-Zouch |
| Service centres | Bottesford Asfordby Billesdon Great Glen Kibworth Beauchamp Fleckney Countesthorpe Blaby Narborough Whetstone Cosby Broughton Astley Sapcote Earl Shilton Barwell | Newbold Verdon Desford Market Bosworth Barlestone Markfield Ibstock Measham Castle Donnington Kegworth Anstey Mountsorrel Quorn Barrow-upon-Soar Sileby East Goscote |



Policy context

The objectives of the Rural Strategy are shaped by policy at international, national, regional and local levels. **Internationally**, reforms to the European Commission's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), due to come in to force in 2004-5, will change the way the EU supports the agricultural sector. Most subsidies will no longer be linked to volumes of production. Direct payments for bigger farms will be reduced, so that payment for environmental, quality or animal welfare programmes can be increased. These reforms are intended to make farmers more competitive and market-orientated whilst still providing income stability and introducing an element of support for rural development.

At the **national** level, the 2000 White Paper *Our Countryside: the future – a fair deal for rural England* focuses on the Government's aim to 'sustain and enhance the distinctive environment, economy and social fabric of the English countryside for the benefit of all'. It established a vision of:

- A **living** countryside, with thriving rural communities and access to high quality public services;
- A **working** countryside, with a diverse economy giving high and stable levels of employment;
- A **protected** countryside in which the environment is sustained and enhanced;
- A **vibrant** countryside which can shape its own future and with its voice heard by Government at all levels.

The White Paper sets out to 'make a difference' to the quality of life in the countryside. It contains 261 commitments, more than 200 of which have either been achieved or seen 'real progress', according to Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for Rural Affairs, in November 2003. Remaining challenges are now more clearly defined, however, and fundamentally relate to the large variation in economic, social and environmental conditions between different rural communities.

Since the White Paper was launched, however all government rural policy delivered through DEFRA has been investigated as part of Lord Haskins' *Rural Delivery Review*. This was instigated following concerns that customers were not receiving the best services from DEFRA initiatives and due to organisational confusion in rural areas. The weight of this report leans towards Councils and local partnerships taking the lead in delivering rural services, and regional development agencies such as East Midlands Development Agency (*emda*) having a greater role in rural development. This shift away from centralised Whitehall control is necessary for several reasons, which can be summarised as:

- Poor accountability
- Failure to satisfy regional and local priorities
- Too many players
- Lack of co-ordination
- Confused customers

Of the five key themes for change, the one that will be of greatest relevance to the LRP is:

- To bring delivery closer to the customer by devolving greater responsibility to regional and local organisations for the delivery of economic and social policy.

The intention of the report is to make life better for customers. This will result from having to contend with fewer points of contact, from greater local knowledge on the part of the deliverers, more flexible responses to their needs, clearer expectations and a better understanding of their obligations and fewer unnecessary burdens to face.

At the **regional** level there are a number of strategies and initiatives that have a major impact on rural Leicestershire. The East Midlands Regional Assembly's (EMRA) Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS) provides an overarching sustainable development framework within which other regional and sub-regional strategies can be prepared in a co-ordinated and complementary

fashion. The IRS includes an agreed regional vision that the East Midlands 'will be a place where people want to live, work and invest because of our vibrant economy, our healthy, safe, diverse and inclusive society, and our quality environment'. A Review of the IRS is currently underway. The Assembly itself has recently undergone an organisational restructuring which has seen the establishment of three key Boards with responsibility to oversee the Assembly's key policy integration, planning and scrutiny roles.

2003 saw the launch by *emda* of *Destination 2010*, the revised Regional Economic Strategy, with the aim of propelling the East Midlands into Europe's top 20 regions by 2010. The economic strategy has been developed within the policy framework provided by the IRS and outlines 12 steps the region needs to take to address the economic aspects of the IRS vision, from enterprise to urban regeneration. It also identifies six potential sectors to attract more investment and innovation. These are:

- High performance engineering
- Clothing and textiles
- Food and drink
- Healthcare
- The creative industries
- Environmental technologies

The Rural Action Plan, published in mid-2000 by *emda*, complements the Regional Economic Strategy by highlighting the key issues needing to be addressed in rural East Midlands to sustain and support rural enterprise. These include: learning and skills; enterprise and innovation; agriculture; transport; tourism; and market towns. Addressing these will enable rural areas to play their part in the region's aim of becoming one of Europe's top 20 by the year 2010, and to benefit from that aim being achieved.

Regional Planning Guidance for the East Midlands (RPG8) provides a broad strategic land-use planning framework within which Structure Plans and Local Plans are produced. It therefore influences development patterns in rural areas, including the quantity and distribution of economic and housing development. Revised RPG8 was considered at an Examination in Public in November 2003 with the final revised RPG expected to be issued in autumn 2004. Reforms to the planning system will see the development by the EMRA of a Regional Spatial Strategy which will set the context for Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) produced by district and unitary councils. The spatial strategy and LDFs will be expected to more closely integrate land-use policy with other key policy areas.

Two key strategies yet to be published (in 2004) will also influence the work of the LRP: the Regional Tourism Strategy and the Regional Housing Strategy. Tourism plays an important part in supporting the rural economy and the tourism strategy will seek to maximise the tourism potential of the region. The provision of housing in rural areas is an increasingly topical issue and the housing strategy will be an important influence on how funding for social housing is distributed across the region.

Rural issues are considered in the round at regional level by the East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum (EMRAF). EMRAF links with and influences the work of the Government Office for the East Midlands, *emda* and EMRA, but it is not 'under' any one of these bodies. Links to national policy are made through EMRAF's place on the Rural Affairs Forum for England, which is chaired by the Minister for Rural Affairs. EMRAF's roles and responsibilities include to:

- provide a forum for sharing information on issues & initiatives affecting rural areas;
- identify issues of concern to rural people & businesses;
- give views on new regional proposals affecting the region's rural areas;
- act as a conduit for regional views on national proposals affecting rural areas through its links with the England Rural Affairs Forum;
- review progress on implementing the Rural White Paper and key rural policies;

- suggest further policy developments needed to implement the Rural White Paper objectives;
- review service delivery to rural areas in the region to inform the above.

Think Farming and Food is an EMRAF produced regional action plan, that seeks to achieve a sustainable future for farming and food industries in the East Midlands. The plan sets out a range of priorities and proposed actions to assist development, influence and direct change within the industry. The aim is to make a real difference by proposing actions in four areas: crosscutting projects; sustainable agriculture; the food chain; and the environment.

EMRAF has also produced a Rural Charter, *Think Rural*, whose purpose is to engage organisations and companies in making a positive difference to the region's rural areas. Those that adopt the Charter demonstrate their commitment to achieving rural prosperity and providing a fair deal for rural areas to the benefit of all.

Finally, at the **local** level, the *Leicestershire Community Strategy* has been prepared by the Leicestershire Local Strategic Partnership (LLSP) to help achieve the aim of improving the quality of life and the quality and co-ordination of public services in the county. It identifies a number of key issues that concern the people of Leicestershire and sets out the LLSP's priorities for action to make real and long-lasting changes towards the vision of:

- A vibrant and thriving county in which to live, work and play
- A county where all have access to quality services
- A county which looks to the future by maximising opportunities for its young people.

The seven District's which in the county have each formed their own Local Strategic Partnership and developed individual *Community Strategies*. The majority make reference to issues in rural Leicestershire, some of which the LRP is in a position to address.

The county's culture strategy, *Love Leicestershire*, presents four themes, each of which will be of relevance to rural Leicestershire. These include:

- Strengthening Communities
- Celebrating Leicestershire
- Lifestyles and Health
- Building a Creative Economy

Organisations such as the Police, county and district councils and the Fire and Rescue service have established a Crime and Disorder Partnership in each of the 7 districts. Each partnership has a *Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy* in place, which sets out the priorities for the partnership for the three-year period it covers. This includes national priorities, such as reducing vehicle crime, and also locally identified priorities. Priorities may be based around a theme - e.g. to raise awareness of domestic violence - or around a geographical area - e.g. reduce retail crime in Market Harborough Town Centre, or both.

Local Issues

Housing

Housing choice for those on lower incomes in rural Leicestershire is narrowing. With the average house prices in the County of £147,551, many villages are increasingly unaffordable. The lack of rental accommodation in rural areas further compounds the situation.

This is having a significant effect, and may in future profoundly undermine social structures in rural communities. This jeopardises any potential for these communities to be termed sustainable. There are also economic implications relating to the lack of affordable housing. A lack of housing for people on lower incomes will mean fewer people living in rural areas willing to work for local businesses or services. The implication in accessible areas is reverse commuting from urban areas, but in more remote areas businesses and services will find it difficult to recruit staff at a competitive rate.

Social change

The operation of the housing market is having a significant effect on the demographic and social structure of rural communities. As rural residents become more affluent and mobile there may be fewer beneficial social interactions within the community, such as shared schools and leisure time. Many villages do retain a vibrant community, but this is usually the result of considerable local effort and commitment. Social change offers opportunities for businesses and services, but also for communities through the development and introduction of new skills, experience and interests.

Rural areas in Leicestershire are also characterised by a significantly older age profile than urban areas. One implication of this is in the increased demand for care and healthcare in areas where service providers can have difficulty sourcing low paid employees, and where access to services can be poor. Older people are at particular risk of experiencing isolation as they suffer from declining mobility with age. However older populations may have more time available to devote to valuable local social activity.

Access

The defining characteristic of rural areas is their geography, and their relative remoteness from urban areas. As a result access to services (shops, healthcare, etc) and opportunities (jobs, leisure, etc) is more difficult for those without access to a vehicle of their own. Public transport offers limited transport options when compared to personal vehicles and as a result most households who have the option will own a vehicle. This undermines the ability of public transport to adequately meet the needs of rural areas, by further reducing the number of potential passengers.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (2000) identifies the districts of Harborough and Melton, particularly parishes to the east of each district, as being the most isolated in terms of access to services and transport.

Services providers, such as Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts, face the challenge of providing efficient services to dispersed rural populations. However new technology continues to emerge with the potential benefit to rural residents and businesses of improving access to information and certain services and reducing the need to travel.

Market towns, and rural service centres, have a significant role to play in providing access to services for their surrounding rural hinterlands, by functioning as service delivery hubs. To enable them to play this role access to market towns and rural centres needs to be maximised.

Decline in services

Rural services, such as shops, post offices and pubs, face particular challenges to remain competitive particularly as larger urban retailers are so accessible to mobile rural residents who increasingly shop and socialise outside the local community. The continuing closure of services

and pessimism about future market conditions are tangible indicators of the difficulty facing rural service providers.

The closure, or reduction, of local services has the greatest effect on the least mobile rural residents, leaving them isolated and reducing their quality of life.

Inclusion

Despite the overall increase in the affluence and mobility of rural residents, there remain sections of rural society who find themselves increasingly excluded from the sort of opportunities that most people enjoy. The causes of exclusion are many, and not all relate to income or mobility. For example a lack of local childcare provision can cause some household members to be excluded from work or leisure opportunities.

In many villages there may only be a small number of households experiencing exclusion, and there will be a variety of reasons for exclusion. This makes it difficult to both identify individuals and households experiencing exclusion, and to take effective action to address exclusion when identified.

Young peoples experience of rural life is markedly different to that of their parents. This is initially due to limited transport and a lack of leisure opportunities and, as they get older, employment in rural areas. Young people can find it difficult to take action on their own behalf, and to encourage others to act on their behalf with the result that some find rural life increasingly frustrating and unattractive. Young people are often seen as a cause of social problems in communities, rather than resulting from them.

Economy

Despite recent setbacks such as the Foot & Mouth outbreak, the Leicestershire rural economy is outperforming the regional average, with higher rates of employment growth and more VAT registrations and de-registrations. Whilst agriculture is still adjusting, there are many examples of rural diversification and the development of new rural businesses, with recent migrants to rural areas being responsible for creating an average of 2.4 jobs each. Business advice and support to new and existing businesses remains of variable quality and accessibility, with a reluctance amongst some rural businesses to embrace new skills or markets.

Market towns and larger rural settlements remain in competition with urban centres, and can find it difficult to retain or develop successful local economies. The key to their success will lie in identifying and building on their strengths as a location for business.

Funding

Funding is available from a variety of sources, including the County Council and other partners in the LRP, to support activity in rural Leicestershire. Much of this is provided in time limited grants, and often a maximum of 3 years funding is available. This can make it difficult to sustain grant funded initiatives over the long term. There is a proliferation of grant initiatives available, each with differing requirements and administration regimes to enable projects to receive grants, this can make it difficult for individuals and organisations to obtain the required information, advice and resources.

Strategic objectives

These objectives outline what action the LRP will support to address identified issues.

Community Development

Through it's work, the LRP will:

Enable rural communities, and the organisations working with them, to achieve their potential to be thriving, diverse and inclusive.

The LRP will support:

- Effective and inclusive community consultation and participation processes by assisting in their implementation, sharing knowledge and developing mechanisms that ensure a link between consultation and tangible outcomes.
 - Examples: Community Development Officers; Market Towns & Rural Centres; Community Consultation Seminars; Parish Plans Protocol:
- The sharing of information, advice and resources to enable Parish/Town Council's and the voluntary, community sectors to work with communities and address their needs and aspirations.
 - Examples: Funding provision; Funding info pack; Social Enterprise advice.
- The development of social capital that empowers communities to address their own aspirations or improve quality of life.
 - Examples: Better Communities Awards; Rural Safety Initiative; Pubs & Learning Partnership; Social Enterprise advice; Mobile ICT training
- Activity that increases the influence of rural communities, and encourages other organisations to recognise and benefit from the contribution of community based organisations.
 - Examples: Annual conference

Accessibility

Through it's work, the LRP will:

Promote access to services, information and opportunities that is convenient, flexible, affordable and available to all.

The LRP will promote and support:

- The effective use of existing facilities and services, by ensuring that they can be used by the widest range of groups and individuals and are accessible to all who might use them.
 - Examples: Sheepy Church; Post Office Development Grant Scheme (PODS);
- The development of an effective and integrated transport network, which recognises and supports all forms of transport provision, to enable equitable access to the maximum number of opportunities.
 - Examples: Harborough bus service; Transport to hospitals; Battlefield Bus
- The provision of electronic infrastructure and services to ensure that individuals and businesses are able to benefit from their provision.
 - Examples: Access to Broadband campaign; Community Access Points; Community portals/websites
- The provision of accessible information which is of relevance, interest or use to rural communities
 - Examples: Frequently Asked Question's leaflet

Rural services

Through it's work, the LRP will:

Enable service providers and community groups to deliver effective and equitable services to rural communities.

The LRP will promote and support:

- Proactive consideration of how best to provide effective, equitable services that meet community needs. This will involve recognition of the particular social, economic and geographic characteristics that define rural communities and effect service delivery.
 - Examples: Citizens Juries; Parish Plans; Village Shop & PO Training Seminars; Good practice guide
- Responses to threats to rural services when possible, by protecting where necessary, and enhancing where feasible, existing rural services and facilities whilst seeking alternative delivery methods that will be sustainable in the long term.
 - Examples: Service Co-ordination; PODS; Melton Services Pilot
- The role of service providers in meeting specific rural community needs, by providing relevant information and advice, and resources.
 - Examples: Affordable Housing;
- The role of rural communities in using local capital to respond to local service needs by providing them with appropriate tools and advice, sustainable resources and developing their capacity to influence to implement community solutions.
 - Examples: Rural Community Safety Initiative; Social Enterprise advice;

Economy

Through it's work the LRP will:

Enhance and secure a vibrant and sustainable rural economy by supporting business development that recognises local needs.

The LRP will promote and support:

- The co-ordination and delivery of business support to develop, or diversify, existing rural businesses and encourage entrepreneurial activity, particularly for uncompetitive sectors or those of greatest benefit to the rural economy.
 - Examples: Rural Business Programme Team
- The responsible development of the rural economy through measures that promote environmental and social sustainability.
 - Examples: Wood Fuels Project; Social Enterprise advice; New Life For Redundant Rural Buildings
- The co-ordination and delivery of training to enable skills development
 - Examples: LANTRA (Land Based) training
- The development of new markets for products of benefit to the rural economy
 - Examples: Wood Fuels Project; Farmers Market
- Further research into the rural economy to enable a better understanding of it's structure and relationship with the environment and communities and to enable more effective intervention.

Young People

Through it's work the LRP will:

Enable young people to achieve the best quality of life by helping them take action to achieve their aspirations or meet their needs, and improving their influence on organisations that work with them.

The LRP will promote and support activity which;

- Enables the gathering and sharing of information on the needs of rural young people, particularly the vulnerable and isolated.
- Engages with young people in an effective and participative manner, ensuring that they have appropriate influence over issues that effect them
 - Examples; Citizens Jury
- Facilitates action by young people, or those working with them, that responds to their needs in a timely and appropriate manner.

Environment

Through it's work the LRP will:

Sustain the rural environment by supporting activity that conserves or enhances a diverse environment and an accessible countryside, which is an attractive place to live, work or visit.

The LRP will promote and support:

- An improved understanding of the environment and the effect it has, now and in the future, on social and economic activity in rural areas.
- A sustainable balance of activity that maximises environmental resources.
 - Examples: Rural Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme
- Measures that will enable sustainable access to the countryside, particularly where this will secure additional cross sector benefits.