

Harborough District Council

Report to the Cabinet Meeting of 10 October 2022



Title:	Rural Strategy
Status:	Public
Key Decision:	Yes
Report Author:	Rachael Felts – Community Partnerships and Customer Services Manager
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Simon Whelband, Wellbeing, Communities & Housing
Appendices:	Appendix A – Rural Strategy 2022-2027 Appendix B - Rural Strategy Action Plan

Executive Summary

The ambition to develop a Rural Strategy for the Harborough District was set out in the Corporate Delivery Plan for 2022. The justification for this was the acknowledgement that whilst Harborough District is a desirable place to live, work and visit, residents and businesses face a number of key challenges as a result of the rurality of our District.

Recommendations

- **To approve the Rural Strategy which sets the strategic objectives on how we can work together to overcome challenges, rural proof future policies, and realise the unique opportunities we have to enhance wellbeing and prosperity across the district.**

Reasons for Recommendations

Approval of the Rural Strategy will ensure we will build a future for the people of Harborough district that gives them the best life chances and opportunities.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To agree the new Rural Strategy, which aligns to the Council's key Corporate Priorities, as outlined in the Corporate Plan, as well as outlining key principles to support how we can work together to enhance wellbeing and prosperity across the district.



2. Background

- 2.1 The ambition to develop a Rural Strategy for the Harborough District was set out in the Corporate Delivery Plan for 2022. The justification for this was the acknowledgement that whilst Harborough District is a desirable place to live, work and visit, residents and businesses face a number of key challenges as a result of the rurality of our District.
- 2.2 Challenges include:
- Increased cost per capita to deliver essential public services
 - Ageing population and associated health and wellbeing issues
 - Affordability of housing and a rapidly rising cost of living
 - Access to transport, broadband and mobile connectivity
 - Balancing economic development and diversification with the preservation of our unique rural environment
 - Issues of social isolation and hidden deprivation.
- 2.3 The most recent Urban Rural classification report from 2011 sets out that 65% of the district's population live in rural areas. The remaining 35% live in Market Harborough which is classed as an Urban Town.

3. Details

- 3.1 The 12-month project to develop a Rural Strategy was funded by Contain Outbreak Management Funding (COMF) to look at the needs and service gaps of our rural communities including a focus on economic, housing, the impacts of Covid and the recovery needs going forward.
- 3.2 The Rural Community Council were commissioned to lead this work and undertake district wide community development at grassroots level to engage with citizens to understand their views, needs, concerns.
- 3.3 The results of the desktop research and engagement have informed the Rural Strategy, which is attached at appendix A. Through delivery of our Rural Strategy we are aiming to create and maintain:
- Inclusive, connected and resilient rural communities, where everyone has the opportunity to participate, and access to the services and facilities they need
 - An environmentally and economically sound rural district where the needs of farming, conservation, development and the economy are appropriately balanced
 - A safe and welcoming rural district where everyone is provided with opportunities to enhance their physical, mental, social and economic health and wellbeing
- 3.4 To support delivery of the strategy an action plan will be drafted as part of budget setting for 2023/24 and will be reviewed annually. An outline plan can be found at Appendix B.

4. Implications of Decisions

4.1. Corporate Priorities

4.1.1. The Rural Strategy will contribute towards the delivery of all the Council's key Corporate Priorities.

4.2. Financial

4.2.1 The Government has announced the introduction of the Rural England Prosperity Fund, which complements the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Harborough District Council has been allocated £709,681 across 2023/24 and 2024/24, (phased 25% in the first year and 75% in the second).

4.2.2 This capital funding will support key aspects of this Rural Strategy and the action plan.

4.3. Legal

4.3.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the Rural Strategy.

4.4. Policy

4.4.1 No policy issues arise directly from this report.

4.5. Environmental Implications including contributions to achieving a net zero carbon Council by 2030

4.5.1 No environmental issues arise directly from this report.

4.6. Risk Management

4.6.1 No risk management issues arise directly from this report.

4.7. Equalities Impact

4.7.1 No equalities issues arise directly from this report.

4.8. Data Protection

4.8.1 No data protection issues arise directly from this report.

5. Summary of Consultation and Outcome

5.1 Leicestershire Rural Community Council were commissioned to lead this work. Along with desktop research they undertook district wide community development at grassroots level to engage with citizens to understand their views, needs, concerns.

5.2 Engagement events were undertaken as follows:

- 23rd November 2021 – Market Harborough Leisure Centre
- 7th December 2021– Lutterworth Leisure Centre
- 11th January 2022– Houghton on the Hill Village Hall
- 3rd February 2022 – Hallaton Village Hall

5.3 Drill down surveys were sent out in February after the events and went to :-

- Parish Councils
- NFU
- Young Farmers
- Farming Community Network
- East Midlands Chamber
- Small Federation of Businesses
- HDC Councillors and Service Managers
- Veterans
- Along with social media support

6. **Alternative Options Considered**

6.1 No alternative options were considered.

7. **Background papers**

- Communities Scrutiny Panel – 28 July 2022 - [Meetings and Events \(harborough.gov.uk\)](https://www.harborough.gov.uk)