

REPORT NO. 2

**REPORT TO THE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL
MEETING OF 28th JULY 2022**

Status: For Discussion
Title: Rural Strategy
Report of : Tom Day, Community Partnerships Service Manager
Portfolio Holder: Cllr Whelband, Housing, Communities & Wellbeing
Where from: Community Partnerships
Where to next: Cabinet

Objective: To input into the development of the Rural Strategy.

1. Outcome sought from Panel

1.1 To review and scrutinise the draft Rural Strategy 2023-2028.

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, which have been compounded by the COVID19 pandemic.

2.2 It is commonly accepted that rural areas face particular challenges including:

- 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.

3 Issues

- 3.1 The Rural Urban Local Authority Classification¹ categorises districts and unitary authorities on a six point scale, based on the share of the resident population that resides in rural areas. The six categories are:
- Mainly Rural (80% or more of the population resides in rural areas)
 - Largely Rural (Between 50% and 79% of the population resides in rural areas)
 - Urban with Significant Rural (Between 26% and 49% of the population resides in rural areas)
 - Urban City and Town
 - Urban with Minor Conurbation
 - Urban with Major Conurbation
- 3.2 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. Further information is provided at Appendix A.
- 3.3 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. COMF is government fund which provides English local authorities with financial support to help reduce the spread of coronavirus and support local public health initiatives. It is allocated based on the government's COVID-19 Relative Needs Formula (RNF), which gives a weighting to both population and deprivation levels, based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, so that funding is targeted at areas with consistently high infection and enduring transmission rates. It recognizes that, while lower tier local authorities do not hold statutory public health responsibilities, they do hold the responsibility for other activities critical to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore gives upper tier local authorities (i.e. Leicestershire County Council) the discretion to provide a greater proportion of COMF funding to lower tier authorities depending on the needs of their local communities.
- 3.4 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. This charity was created in 1924 to improve wellbeing, increase resilience and tackle disadvantages in rural communities across Leicestershire, Rutland and the surrounding areas. It is therefore well placed to lead the development of this strategy.

¹ Office of National Statistics

3.5 To explore the specific issues facing residents of the Harborough district, engagement events were held 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

3.6 Drill down surveys were sent out in February 2022 after the engagement events to Parish Councils, the NFU, Young Farmers, Farming Community Network, East Midlands Chamber, Small Federation of Businesses, HDC Councillors and Service Managers, Veterans Along with social media support. A summary of all the engagement feedback and events can be found at appendix B.

3.7 The results of the desktop research and engagement have informed the draft Rural Strategy, which is attached at appendix B. 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

3.8 The draft strategy proposes that the Council adopt seven strategic priorities for the rural parts of the district between 2023 and 2028:

- To maintain and strengthen thriving, inclusive, safe and resilient **rural communities** by bringing people and organisations together to design and deliver high quality public services and community initiatives.
- To safeguard and enhance the **rural environment** by working together to ensure sustainable development, drive sustainable behaviour change, and to develop community-level net zero initiatives in rural areas.
- To grow a prosperous **rural economy** that works for all by supporting existing industries, harnessing the possibilities of diversification and digital connectivity, and facilitating the creation of local enterprises.
- To improve mental, physical and social health by working with all sectors to ensure people can access the care, services and facilities

they need, and make healthy lifestyle choices, whatever their circumstances.

- To meet **rural housing** needs and ensure rural homes are fit for the 21st century by working with developers to provide high quality housing that is genuinely affordable and designed to help combat fuel poverty.
- To level up and ensure no one is disadvantaged by virtue of where they live, work or do business by better **rural proofing** policies and services, and striving to ensure equitable investment into rural communities.
- To create **better connected** rural communities and reduce reliance on traditional transport by shifting focus onto enhanced digital connectivity, remote provision, and sustainable transport infrastructure.

3.9 To support delivery of the strategy an action plan will be drafted as part of service planning and budget setting for 2023/24 and will thereafter be reviewed annually.

4 **Points for discussion**

- Does the rural strategy cover the key issues
- Are there any of the priorities the RCC identified that Members feel are more important
- Are there any key partners that the council should engage in the delivery of the strategy
- To feed any views and opinions to Cabinet

5 **Equality Impact Assessment Implications/Outcomes**

5.1 Equality Impact Assessments will be developed where appropriate to support the delivery of key projects.

6 **Impact on Communities**

6.1 The strategy will have a positive impact – supporting rural communities to be connected and resilient, where everyone has the opportunity to participate, and access to the services and facilities they need

7 **Legal Issues**

7.1 This is a flexible policy which meets the council's legal obligations to meet the needs of the district. Any specific project contemplated under the strategy will be assessed as appropriate.

8. **Resource Issues**

8.1 Any specific project contemplated under the strategy will be assessed as appropriate. The strategy is about bringing together the work of the council and targeting existing resources more effectively to meet specific needs of rural communities.

9. Community Safety Implications

- 9.1 A key priority of the strategy is to maintain safe and resilient rural communities by bringing people and organisations together.

10. Carbon Management Implications

- 10.1 A key priority of the strategy is to safeguard and enhance the rural environment by working together to ensure sustainable development, drive sustainable behaviour change, and to develop community-level net zero initiatives in rural areas.

11 Risk Management Implications

- 11.1 A rural strategy will enable the council to better respond to the specific needs of rural communities both alone and in partnership with other organisations.

12 Consultation

- 12.1 Engagement with residents and partners via surveys and roadshows
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Previous report(s):

N/A

Appendices:

Appendix A – Urban Rural Classification 2011

Appendix B – Summary of Engagement

Appendix C – Draft Rural Strategy 2023-2028