



# **Norfolk Rural Economic Strategy 2021 – 2024**

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## **Acknowledgements**

The Norfolk Rural Economic Strategy for 2021-2024 was developed in consultation with both the Steering Group for the current 2017-2020 Strategy (which comprises members of the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, such as the Federation of Small Businesses, Community Action Norfolk, Broads Authority and County and District Councils) and a dedicated Strategy Working Group – some 18 representatives of Rural Norfolk in all.

The Strategy refresh also included a public online consultation which received 98 responses - of which 72% were from the public, with 90% of respondents overall living or working in Rural Norfolk.

Three consultation webinars were also attended by more than 60 partner individuals and organisations.

The Steering Group would like to thank all those who took the time to suggest ideas, provide comments and advise on the content of the strategy. We have sought to include the key issues raised by consultees.

## Executive Summary and Foreword

From the time of the first Agricultural Revolution, Rural Norfolk has been at the forefront of change. Environmental land management schemes, now the central feature in UK Agricultural Policy, trace their roots back to pilots in The Broads in the 1980s, long before it became a National Park.

In 2021, Covid-19 has impacted every aspect of life and the implications for how we all we live, work, travel and spend will be with us for many years. However, the respondents to our consultation on this Strategy were positive about the future – while the pandemic has had many negatives, it has also created a real movement to change for the better. Norfolk is known as the place that likes to ‘do different’ and we need to use the learning from the pandemic to rethink what we want our rural communities, economy, and environment to be like, while retaining Norfolk’s essence – a county of big skies and open spaces, with a self-reliant, resourceful population who are not afraid of change.

The **Norfolk Rural Economic Strategy** is refreshed every three years, against a set of guiding principles:

- To be ambitious for Rural Norfolk, so it delivers a dynamic, sustainable economy and quality of life for all
- To make the case for Rural Norfolk to decision makers at every level – from parish to national government
- To provide the underpinning evidence base to make the case for investment
- To adopt an intervention approach of:
  - Assessing what is already going around the county to address the challenges and opportunities the evidence base and Strategy identify, and pinpoint gaps in provision
  - Learning from, and working with other areas – our neighbouring counties, rural areas elsewhere in the UK and overseas - to build on best practice models of rural economic development and produce a pipeline of projects that delivers on the themes of the Strategy

Our **Vision** for Rural Norfolk is **inclusive, sustainable communities with a dynamic, connected economy and healthy natural environment, able to meet the needs of all rural residents and visitors**

In 2021, we have seen accelerating changes – some of which were already apparent before the pandemic:

- The transition to digital and online, affecting the way we work, learn and access services and entertainment, and which has had a profound effect on our market towns
- An increased focus on ‘clean growth’, as we seek to transition to net zero by 2050
- A growing emphasis on healthy communities, to combat growing levels of obesity, mental health problems and widening health inequalities
- A UK policy focus on helping the country to ‘Build Back Better’ – responding both to the pandemic, and to our exit from the EU and the shift from funding for agriculture to the environment, and access to nature.

The Strategy seeks to respond to these major changes to rural community life, and has been shaped by the evidence and consultation responses, with an over-arching Delivery focus, underpinned by six priority themes:

**Delivery:** We will advocate for rural investment, aligning with wider strategic plans, such as the Renewal Plan of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership for Norfolk and Suffolk and the Norfolk Investment Framework, being led by Norfolk County Council, both of which are due to be produced in early 2022. In light of our exit from the EU and the move to UK Government funding for ‘levelling up’ all parts of the UK, it is even more important to strongly make the case for funding for rural Norfolk. To support the making of that case, we are publishing a new evidence summary, enhanced by an online dashboard of key data that will

be kept up to date. The Steering Group will also produce an annual Delivery Plan for each year of the Strategy and work with partners to develop a pipeline of projects to address the Strategy's themes and deliver the Vision.

**New Rural Economy and Market Towns:** The role of our Market Towns and larger villages is changing, due to the pandemic, changing consumer patterns and digitalisation. We will examine their challenges and opportunities, setting up a Market Towns Working Group to explore what we can do collectively, including the scope to target the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund, potentially establishing Local Investment Boards to develop bids to the Fund. We will also make the case for a delegated grant scheme from the Fund for rural business diversification, informed by the successful [LEADER](#) and [DRIVE](#) programmes.

**World Class Environment and the Green Economy:** Norfolk has been a leader in the evolution of the green economy and we aim to remain at the forefront of the sustainability transformation, by embracing clean energy and transport, supporting new markets in ecosystem services and the bio-economy, and by using the natural environment to support sustainable tourism. With our long track record on biodiversity and landscape action, coupled to our region's leadership on clean energy and climate science, we are well placed to 'build back better' in relation to the environment and our own health and wellbeing, through targeted projects.

**Community Resilience:** Rural areas, together with our market towns, are home to over half of Norfolk's total population and, to be truly sustainable, our rural areas must have vibrant, diverse, and healthy communities which enjoy access to 21<sup>st</sup> Century services and job opportunities. As well as meeting the needs of an ageing population, it is vital to support the needs of the young people and families who are essential to the sustainability of our rural communities. The County Council will produce a Bus Service Improvement Plan, and work with partners to identify projects to address social, community and health challenges, and new ways to access services. We will also explore solutions to the affordable housing challenge in our rural communities.

**Skills and Rural Innovation.** We need to ensure the rural workforce has the skills needed for *Industry 4.0* — the change in jobs roles driven by digital technologies - as well as those new roles arising from clean growth. This will involve re-skilling and upskilling our workforce, using blended models of online and face-to-face delivery. The County Council is delivering several programmes linked to this priority theme: skills programmes for the clean energy and agri-tech sectors and the [Innovation Grant Mentoring Programme](#), which aims to help businesses develop the skills needed to bid for Government innovation funding.

**Digitalisation and technology adoption:** The digital transition in 2020, in how we live, learn, work, access public services and buy goods and services, is here to stay and we need to address the constraints too many still face, due to a lack of digital connectivity, digital skills or awareness of the opportunities digital provides. Digitalisation offers major opportunities to the rural economy in terms of remote working, e-commerce, and remote service delivery in the public and private sectors, while automation has applications, from the control of rural water and energy systems, to self-driving vehicles and crop harvesting, where labour availability is a major constraint. We will work with partners to explore innovative ideas and demonstration projects, with the County Council's [Go Digital](#) programme, a key initiative in helping businesses to do more business online.

**Modern Infrastructure:** We will lobby for, and help and deliver, modern infrastructure, such as broadband and mobile digital technology, roads, public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure, water (including the [Water Resources East Regional Plan](#)), and energy. Electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure in rural areas is also a high priority, with the ban on sales of petrol and diesel-powered cars and vans by 2030.

The Steering Group that I chair brings together the diverse talents of a range of organisations, each with their own extensive networks. Through our annual Delivery Plan we will work with many partners, to take forward those actions that will have the most impact on building a better future for our rural communities.

**Martin Collison, Chairman, Norfolk Rural Economic Strategy Steering Group**

## Introduction

Norfolk's Rural Economic Strategy (the Strategy) was developed in 2013 and refreshed in 2017. Since 2013 much has changed, from the march of technology to our exit from the EU, a growing urgency in the need to tackle climate change, and in 2020, Covid-19 which created the deepest recession in 300 years and largest global health pandemic since the 1918 Spanish 'Flu.

We need to respond to these events, which will have major impacts on how we live, work, spend and use our leisure time: Our aim is to make Rural Norfolk an attractive place to live, work, visit and invest in – for all age groups.

While agriculture is a key part of the rural economy, it is not a direct focus of the Strategy. One of the sector councils overseen by the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership for Norfolk and Suffolk (the LEP), is the [Norfolk and Suffolk Agri-Food Industry Council](#), which leads strategic delivery for agricultural production and the food chain across both counties. To complement the work of the Council, this edition of the Strategy focuses on the implications of changes to national agricultural policy, which places more emphasis on environmental work ('public money for public good') and the driver for carbon reduction, and associated jobs ('clean growth'). The Strategy's Steering Group, and Agri-Food Council, have some members in common, which will ensure that the two groups will continue to work together closely.

The earlier editions of the Strategy have been used to support successful bids for funding for rural projects and programmes and this will continue. However, a thriving rural community and economy are also dependent on advocacy, place-shaping and partnership working, and therefore actions on infrastructure and the way services, including health care and skills and employment, are delivered are also a focus.

The principles underpinning the Strategy are therefore:

- To be ambitious for Rural Norfolk so it delivers a dynamic, sustainable economy and quality of life for all age groups
- To make the case for Rural Norfolk to decision makers at every level - from parish to national government
- To provide the underpinning evidence base to make the case for investment
- A project development approach of:
  - Assessing what is already going around the county to address the challenges and opportunities the evidence base and Strategy identify, and pinpoint gaps in provision
  - Learning from, and working with other areas – our neighbouring counties, rural areas elsewhere in the UK and overseas - to build on best practice models of rural economic development with a pipeline of projects to deliver on the themes of the Strategy.

**Our Vision for Rural Norfolk is inclusive, sustainable communities with a dynamic, connected economy and healthy natural environment, able to meet the needs of all rural residents and visitors**

# The need for a Norfolk Rural Economic Strategy

## Why the rural focus?

Rural economies are, by definition, dispersed over larger, less concentrated areas than their urban counterparts. They can be harder to define and their identities, opportunities, and challenges can be less visible or identifiable. As such, securing funding to develop rural economies can be harder, and the cost of delivery can be greater in large, more sparsely populated areas. This remains as true today as when the first Strategy was written in 2013.

## What do we mean by Rural Norfolk?

The Strategy defines Rural Norfolk in a broad sense<sup>1</sup>, recognising that while our market towns have urban centres, they serve surrounding rural areas.

As such, the Strategy recognises **Norfolk as a predominantly rural county**, with the exception of Norwich and the urban centres of Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn.

On this basis, **70.2%** of Norfolk's population, or over 637,000 people, can be described as living in rural Norfolk<sup>i</sup>.

This compares to **62%** of the workforce working in rural Norfolk<sup>2</sup>.

Four of our districts have a majority rural population: Breckland, Kings Lynn and West Norfolk, North Norfolk, and South Norfolk.

Over half of the people in the County claiming universal credit while looking for work, live in rural Norfolk<sup>3</sup>.

## The Rural Norfolk Economy

The rural economy in Norfolk is diverse, and while some sectors have a distinctly rural nature (eg agriculture and much of the tourism offer), rural areas contain many of the same types of businesses as urban areas, with the largest employers including hospitality, public sector employment (including health) and the wholesale, distribution, and retail sector.

Our rural economy<sup>ii</sup> also has current strengths in sectors which were traditionally seen as urban. For example, manufacturing has a strong rural presence, with concentrations on redundant airfields and along the A11 corridor, amongst other areas. Indeed, our more rural areas (especially King's Lynn and West Norfolk and Breckland) have a higher proportion of their employment in manufacturing than in than in our largest urban centres.

**52.6%** of people in the county claiming universal credit while looking for work, live in rural Norfolk

**74.9%** of Norfolk's SMEs are rural

<sup>1</sup> The Office of National Statistics (ONS) assigns neighbourhoods to an urban or rural classification based on whether its centre is within or outside a built-up area of greater than 10,000 people. In the narrower ONS definition, 49.2% of Norfolk's population lives in one of these rural locations, a fall from the 53% evidenced in our forerunner Strategy in 2013. In this definition, over a quarter (26.8%) of Norfolk's population lives in a village or dispersed setting, either in a sparse or not sparsely populated setting. Over a fifth of Norfolk (22.3%) lives in a rural town setting.

<sup>2</sup> ONS 2011

<sup>3</sup> NOMIS claimant counts, June 2021, using the Strategy's rural definition



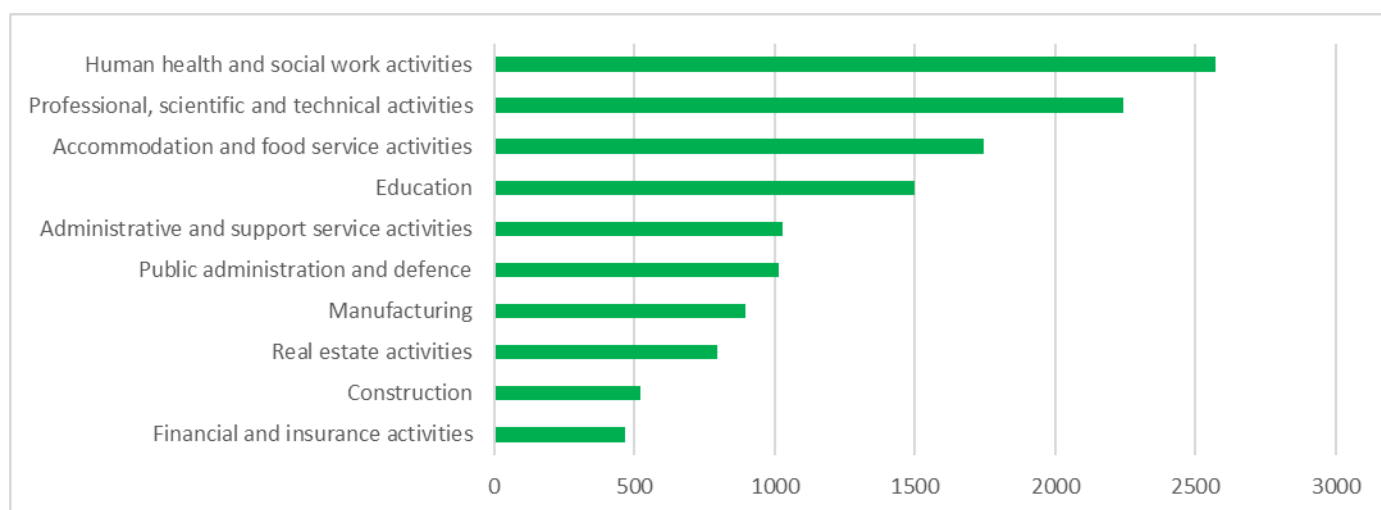
## Growth sectors in Rural Norfolk<sup>4</sup>

In the years preceding the pandemic (2015-19), Rural Norfolk experienced good growth in employment across many sectors, including the professional, scientific, and technical fields, accommodation and food services and manufacturing.

The growth was not even, with Breckland experiencing no accommodation and food services growth but growth in the professional, scientific, and technical employment fields. King's Lynn and West Norfolk experienced strong manufacturing growth.

By contrast, the cultural (-355) and retail (-2,085) sectors contracted in Rural Norfolk in the years prior to the pandemic.

## Biggest Growth Sectors in Rural Norfolk by Employment, 2015 – 2019<sup>5</sup>



The growing importance of technical and digital skills in Rural Norfolk is reflected in the Strategy, as is the need to develop high value, year-round tourism in rural Norfolk and our market towns.

Our rural districts also vary between each other, as much as they do from our urban centres, with hospitality and accommodation playing a larger role in the economy of North Norfolk (13.9% of all employment) than Breckland (6%), despite both being largely rural.

Business start-up rates<sup>6</sup> in Norfolk's rural districts are well below the national average, with, for example, only 53 businesses started per 10,000 working age inhabitants in North Norfolk, compared with 94 in the UK.

Of the four majority-rural districts in the county, only South Norfolk (66) has a start-up rate higher than the all-Norfolk rate of 63 per 10,000 working age people<sup>iii</sup>.

**Start-up Rates per 10,000 people:**

**UK: 94**

**Norfolk: 63**

**Norfolk Rural Districts: 60**

<sup>4</sup> ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2019

<sup>5</sup> ONS Business Register and Employment Survey 2015-19

<sup>6</sup> Per 10,000 people of working age (ONS Business Demography, 2019), Rural districts rate includes the majority-rural districts of Breckland, North Norfolk, Kings Lynn and West Norfolk, and South Norfolk



## Productivity

Norfolk's more rural districts have a lower output per person than urban Norwich and relatively urban Broadland. North Norfolk has the smallest GDP per capita in the county and is also the most rural.

### Gross Domestic Product per Capita in Norwich and our most rural districts<sup>7</sup>



## Building on the previous editions of the Strategy

Since the first edition of the Strategy and underpinning dataset was published in 2013, the public, private and not-for-profit Steering Group has worked to influence and support a number of rural economic growth initiatives, including:

**Advocacy:** On behalf of the Steering Group, Norfolk County Council has responded to a range of government consultations and requests for evidence, eg, making the case for a fair share of central government funding, the case for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for rural areas and the Glover Review of National Parks. Fairer funding for the rural economy remains a pressing need, as reported by the [Rural Services Network](#), of which the Council is a member.

**Digital Divide Group:** led by Anglia Farmers, this group, with the support of the Steering Group, made considerable progress in raising the profile of broadband and mobile issues in rural areas. However, there is still much to do, not least with 4G and 5G rural coverage and fibre-to-premises broadband.

The **Broadland Food Innovation Centre** on the [Food Enterprise Park](#) will provide essential facilities, as well as a managed Food and Drink Innovation Cluster, to support this sector to grow, collaborate and develop new product lines. Awarded £2.7m from Government's Getting Building Fund, matched by local partners, including Broadland District Council, the LEP and the University of East Anglia (UEA), delivery of the project will also involve Hethel Innovation, Norwich City College and the Quadram Institute.

**LEADER Programme:** Norfolk County Council has managed EU-funded LEADER programmes, designed to support rural business growth and diversification, for a number of years. The current 7-year programme has just finished, with over £9m of project spend and 241 jobs contracted to be created. Ensuring the availability of funding for rural business diversification remains a key focus.

**LIFT Programme:** The EU-funded LIFT programme, managed by Norfolk County Council, aimed to improve access to skills provision for those in rural areas who are not job-ready and to support them into employment.

**Natural Capital Evidence Compendium for Norfolk and Suffolk:** Responding to the transition from EU support to agricultural businesses to produce food to UK Government funding for 'public money for public good', the Steering Group developed the idea of a natural

<sup>7</sup> ONS 2018

capital evidence [compendium](#). The counties of Norfolk and Suffolk have stewardship of a wealth of natural assets. The purpose of the compendium is to present information about these assets and the potential risks to them, to provide an element of the preparatory work for a Norfolk and Suffolk 25 Year Environment Plan.

**EXPERIENCE:** running from September 2019 until June 2023 with the aim to promote new tourism ‘experiences’ between October – March, increasing the number of visitors and overnight stays during the off-peak season to six areas across England and France.

More details on some of these projects can be found in the appendix.

While a lot of work has been undertaken since 2013 to support rural Norfolk’s growth, the data shows there is still much to do. This Strategy recognises the continued work that needs to be done to address the evidenced structural weaknesses, such as in entrepreneurialism, business productivity and connectivity, and to equip our rural residents and workers for a changed economic and policy setting. There are also opportunities to build on previous work on Green Growth and a need for our market towns to reverse the decline seen in retail in recent years, using the growth in homeworking and online e-commerce to do so.

With New Anglia LEP now leading on the agri-tech agenda through the Norfolk and Suffolk Agri-Food Industry Council, this edition of the Strategy focuses on the broader rural economy, especially our Market Towns, Green Economy and strengthening the economic resilience of our communities.

Having prepared this Strategy in the midst of the challenges arising from the pandemic, the Steering Group is doubly grateful for the time invested by rural stakeholders and the general public into provide input to its development.

## Key Messages from the Consultation

The Strategy’s Vision and Priority Themes went out to consultation on Norfolk County Council’s Citizen Space platform. They received a strong endorsement from consultees, with their key priorities, including: the need to be ambitious on Green Growth; the provision of affordable rural housing remains a pressing concern.

Within the broader Green Growth feedback, the importance of biodiversity in underpinning our rural economy was a key message and is reflected in the Strategy. A need to encourage high value, year-round green tourism in rural Norfolk and our market towns, but to be mindful of its impact also came through, with this issue perhaps brought to the fore by the pandemic and the increased number of domestic holidays in 2020-21.

Many respondents stated the need for a continued emphasis on improved digital connectivity and rural transport. Young people at online engagement events told us that, while remote delivery of education can bring great benefits, it can never fully replace social impact of campus life.

Across the consultation process, three themes were consistently mentioned:

- **Digital Transition** - respond to the digital transition we saw in 2020 in how we all live, learn, work, access public services, buy goods and services and how often we travel. These changes are here to stay and we have to embrace the opportunities this transition creates, by addressing the constraints too many still face due to a lack of digital connectivity, digital skills, or awareness of the opportunities digital provides.
- **Clean Growth** - focus on how to ‘Build Back Better’ in relation to the environment, given its importance to our biodiversity, planetary health and our own health and wellbeing. There is a lot to do, but with our long track record on biodiversity and landscape action,

coupled to our region's leadership on clean energy and climate science, we are well placed to lead positive change creating a cleaner environment for all.

- **Sustainable Communities** - develop healthier communities, encouraging measures to sustain a balanced demographic profile, such as affordable housing, developing the skills to access future jobs and new ways to access services. Rural communities can provide excellent places to live, but it is important that we don't regard a pretty landscape as compensating for a lack of access to health and wellbeing services or the life chances which are found in urban areas. To be truly sustainable our rural areas have to have vibrant, diverse, and healthy communities which enjoy access to 21<sup>st</sup> Century services and job opportunities.

## Meeting the Challenges

A number of new challenges have emerged since the last Strategy in 2017. By 2024 rural Norfolk has to address major commercial, environmental and policy challenges, including:

- Covid has accelerated long term trends such as workplace digitalisation changing work, travel, and the importance of accessing services online, especially with an ageing demographic. This can reduce the need to travel and will potentially make rural areas more attractive and reduce carbon emissions. The digital transition will, however, also lead to significant changes in rural employment patterns and require improved digital connectivity and changes to the High Street and economic structures.
- Brexit is changing how land managers are supported and the grant programmes which have backed rural development, workforce skills development and innovation programmes. It is changing how rural businesses and services (such as health and care), can recruit staff and increases the need to upskill and attract a local workforce to live and work in Norfolk.
- New UK policies are focussing on 'Building Back Better' and the delivery of Net Zero, which has been embraced by both businesses and government, with a focus on Clean Growth. The government is also promoting 'levelling up' to address decades of under-investment in more peripheral areas. Norfolk has to make the case for its rural areas to secure additional mainstream investment in health and social care, education, and infrastructure as part of the post-Brexit, post-Covid programme of change. The creation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) is a real opportunity to review how funds are allocated in England and fulfil Government's objective of 'levelling up'. To deliver inclusive growth, as well as sustainable job creation and retention in Norfolk, rural needs must be reflected strongly in the SPF priorities.
- The impact of climate change means drier summers and wetter winters. This will bring challenges in relation to water resource, flooding, coastal erosion and impacts on the natural environment.

Change can be particularly difficult for those who suffer from disadvantages of all types and living in sparsely populated rural locations can increase the impact of changes to services or how the economy functions. We recognise this and will aim to ensure that the impact of change on all sections of society is understood and the responses delivered address needs across society.

In Rural Norfolk, we have particular challenges in ensuring that we meet the needs that come with an ageing population, with growth in the over 65 age group concentrated in our rural areas. But we also have to ensure that our young people, who will be our future leaders, entrepreneurs, public sector workers and community champions see Rural Norfolk as a welcoming and inclusive place to build their future. This Strategy will place rural Norfolk on a sure footing to meet these changes.

## Our Response

The Strategy is refreshed every three years, against a set of guiding principles:

- To be ambitious for Rural Norfolk so it delivers quality of life for all age groups
- To make the case for Rural Norfolk to decision makers at every level – from parish to national government
- To provide the underpinning evidence base to make the case for investment
- To adopt an intervention approach of:
  - Assessing what is already going around the county to address the challenges and opportunities the evidence base and Strategy identify, and pinpoint gaps in provision
  - Learning from, and working with other areas – our neighbouring counties, rural areas elsewhere in the UK and overseas - to build on best practice models of rural economic development and produce a pipeline of projects that delivers on the themes of the Strategy

In response to the new economic and policy context, the messages from the consultation and data, this Strategy consists of six priority themes, supported by an overarching delivery focus.

**Delivery Focus.** We will advocate for rural investment, aligning with wider strategic plans, such as the Renewal Plan of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership for Norfolk and Suffolk, and the Norfolk Investment Framework (being led by Norfolk County Council), both of which are due to be produced in early 2022.

In light of our exit from the EU and the move to UK Government funding for ‘levelling up’ and ‘building back better’ all parts of the UK, it is even more important to strongly make the case for funding for rural Norfolk. To support the making of that case, we are publishing a new evidence summary, as well as an online dashboard of key data that will be kept up to date. The Steering Group will also produce an annual Delivery Plan for each year of the Strategy and work with partners to develop a pipeline of projects to address the Strategy’s Priority Themes and deliver the Vision.

## Priority Themes

- **New Rural Economy and Market Towns** - develop **new rural economic opportunities** for our Market Towns<sup>8</sup>, promote new tourism opportunities and secure funds for rural business diversification
- **World Class Environment and the Green Economy** - embrace **Clean Growth** and the economic opportunities it provides in Rural Norfolk delivering a **low carbon economy**.
- **Community Resilience** - ensure rural areas sustain diverse resilient communities by **preventing social, community and health challenges** at source and by seeking to influence delivery of affordable housing and infrastructure **for all age groups** in society.
- **Skills and Rural Innovation** - address the **rural skills divide** and embrace **innovation**, supported by project funding and innovation infrastructure.
- **Digitalisation and technology adoption** - support rural areas to embrace **online business and service delivery**, underpinned by **automation and new technology** to deliver high value jobs.
- **Modern Infrastructure** – delivery of new rural infrastructure supporting the **transition to clean energy, sustainable transport, a digital economy, and sustainable water management**.

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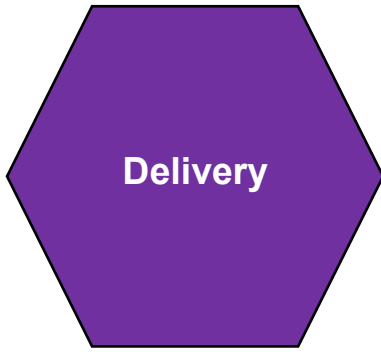
<sup>8</sup> In this context Markets Towns is taken to include larger villages and other service centres in rural areas which have a key role as service delivery locations for retail, health, education, or other services





# Norfolk Rural Economic Strategy Themes 2021 – 2024

Photo: Food Enterprise Park, Honingham, Norfolk



Rural Norfolk, in common with all parts of the UK, is facing significant change in the next few years. Having a clear vision for Rural Norfolk, supported by project proposals, and the evidence to demonstrate how these projects can address identified challenges or opportunities, will be essential in securing support. Advocacy for Rural Norfolk, by those who live and work in the area, will be needed to get the message across that it is a priority location for health, education, transport, and infrastructure investment.

**Aim: Effective influencing for rural investment, a proactive Project Pipeline with an accessible evidence base, good partnership working and impact assessment**

**Priority Actions:**

1a) **Engagement** - a proactive programme of engagement with decision makers will be supported by the Steering Group and other rural advocates. This action will include using social media, broadcast, and print media to promote the need for rural investment. It will also include direct engagement with decision makers at local, county, LEP and national levels to make the case for investment in rural Norfolk.

1b) **Strategic Delivery** – shared economic growth plans for Norfolk and Suffolk are taken forward through the [New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership](#) (the LEP), which comprises all Norfolk local authorities, businesses, further and higher education members and the voluntary sector. The partnership currently has a suite of linked plans: [Economic Growth Strategy](#), [Local Industrial Strategy](#) and [short-term, Covid-19, 'Restart Plan'](#). As we move into the next stage of the recovery, and in light of the publication of the Government's [Plan for Growth: Build Back Better](#) (which replaces the national Industrial Strategy), the LEP will replace these three plans with a single 'Renewal Plan' for Norfolk and Suffolk. This should be available in early 2022.

[Together for Norfolk](#), the County Council's business plan sets out priorities for boosting the economy, supporting communities, and protecting the environment. Our Clean Growth aims are also reflected in the County Council's [Environmental Policy](#), which seeks to work with partners to transition to a zero-carbon economy by 2030.

The Strategy complements these plans, with actions specifically targeting the rural economy and the resilience of our rural communities.

1c) **Rural Project Pipeline** - the Steering Group will work with partners, both in and outside of the county, to develop a pipeline of major projects or programmes. This will identify opportunities to replace specific rural programmes - such as LEADER - with SPF funding, as well as develop proposals for investments in transport, education, health, infrastructure, and business support, to ensure the needs of rural areas are met in mainstream programmes. With new grant schemes and bidding opportunities likely to emerge at short notice, the project pipeline will ensure that the Steering Group has a



range of 'oven ready' projects ready to access funding quickly when the opportunity arises.

In its role of providing the secretariat to the Steering Group, Norfolk County Council will maintain the rural project pipeline and work with the LEP and other partners to promote these projects for funding.

The project pipeline should aspire to include proposals to act as a demonstration site for rural innovation projects. We will also build a database of willing project partners who can be mobilised to support bids.



Photo: Burnham Overy Staithe from Holkham National Nature Reserve

- 1d) **Evidence base** - the Steering Group will work with Norfolk County Council to maintain an open-access rural evidence base to identify the need for rural interventions<sup>9</sup>.

This will be accessible to the public sector, third sector organisations and businesses, so that they can develop new project ideas or services based on clearly identified needs.

To recognise the significant speed of change which the county will see in the next three years, the evidence base will consist of the most up-to-date data and intelligence available, to give a true picture of local need.

- 1e) **Funding Alignment** - to deliver tangible contributions to Norfolk's strategies and plans, a key objective of the Strategy is to provide the evidence base and policy framework to support SPF<sup>10</sup> and other funding streams. This will enable the Strategy to deliver its sustainable growth aims, while at the same time fulfilling the Government's objective of 'levelling up' and delivering inclusive growth outside the capital.
- 1f) **Measuring Success** – a Delivery Plan will be developed for each year of the Strategy, including outputs and outcomes, which will be monitored at the bi-monthly meetings of the Steering Group. With limited resources we can't do everything, so the Steering Group will establish where it can add most value to what is already happening elsewhere and identify interventions and projects to plug the gaps.

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<sup>9</sup> [Norfolk Insight - Demographics and Statistics - Data Observatory](#)

<sup>10</sup> The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is the replacement for EU structural funds following the UK's exit from the EU. It replaces the European Social Fund (ESF), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and aspects of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Guidance is expected to coincide with Autumn Statement on 27/10/21





## New Rural Economy and Market Towns

Key objectives include making the case for specific rural programmes with local control, eg a successor to the LEADER programme, or local direction of ELMs (Environmental Land Management Schemes), alongside making the case for mainstream programmes in education, health, transport, and infrastructure, to address rural needs.

The rural economy will continue to change rapidly, and Norfolk has to ensure that its rural areas, villages, and market towns have a diverse and dynamic economy, which can embrace

change. The Rural Norfolk economy is multi-faceted and increasingly diverse, as digitalisation enables new business models substantial growth in home working. Rural economic growth underpins our priorities for rural Norfolk and will enable the creation of an inclusive economy, support environmental gain, and deliver successful communities.

**Aim: To develop new rural economic opportunities for our Market Towns<sup>11</sup>, promote new tourism opportunities and rural diversification**

At consultation, respondents emphasised a need to embrace the post-pandemic change in work patterns, to prioritise the recovery of our market towns and the important role of connectivity and tourism in the economy.

### Retail pressure and opportunity

Our market towns are important retail centres, including Diss (61% retail), Wymondham (53%), North Walsham (52%), Dereham (47%), with the high streets of Watton, Fakenham, Attleborough, Long Stratton, Holt, Downham Market, and Aylsham also comprising a significant retail presence<sup>12</sup>. The [2021 Norfolk Market Town Centre Report](#) shows that our market towns have been less heavily impacted by the pandemic than elsewhere. While the average vacancy rate in Norfolk increased from 5.9% in 2019 to 6.6% in 2021, this is well below the UK average of 13.8%. However, the expectation is that the change in how our high streets are used will continue, and that many premises will need new uses.

In the years prior to the pandemic (2015 -19) employment in the retail and wholesale sectors declined by over 2,000 across rural Norfolk. However, e-commerce accounted for more than 30% of total retail sales in the UK for the first time in 2020, up from 21.8% in 2019.

### Supporting Business

Business start-up rates in Norfolk's rural districts are well below the national average, with, for example, one start-up per 188 working-age people in North Norfolk in 2019, compared with one per 108 people in the UK as a whole. The more urban districts in Norfolk (Norwich and Great Yarmouth) have better start-up rates than the more rural districts<sup>13</sup>.

In 2021 Norfolk County Council successfully bid for a final £1.65m from national underspend in the LEADER programme. This popular programme delivered business diversification across the county, allowing existing rural Norfolk enterprises to take advantage of new opportunities. Ensuring funding for diversification is available for the future remains a key focus.

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<sup>11</sup> In this context Markets Towns is taken to include larger villages and other service centres in rural areas which have a key role as service delivery locations for retail, health, education, or other services

<sup>12</sup> ONS March 2020

<sup>13</sup> ONS Business Demography 2019

## Priority Actions

2a) **Market Towns and primary villages** - Norfolk's Market Towns and villages provide a network of services close to over half of Norfolk's population, and provide services which support the visitor economy. Building on the mobilisation effect of the Town Deal process in Norwich, King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth, Market Towns will be encouraged to bring together community and business leaders in a Local Investment Board (LIB) to develop Community Development Plans covering a group of towns or villages with similar needs. Breckland is already doing work in this area, developing a set of Town Delivery Plans for Dereham, Thetford, Attleborough, Swaffham and Watton, to help deliver a series of Breckland-wide objectives. The Steering Group will form a Market Towns Working Group to explore the key challenges and opportunities for our Market Towns, and what we can do collectively. It will be important to explore the LIB concept if the SPF guidance indicates that our rural Market Towns could bid for funds for their priorities.



*Photo: Diss Market (Visit Norfolk)*

with more people likely to remain in Market Towns and villages during the week. If supported proactively, this could support the provision of services and sustain additional service sector companies in Market Towns.

Towns will be encouraged to work proactively with their planning authority to identify private and public sector vacant buildings, to repurpose (including through the One Public Estate programme).

In September 2020 the government introduced new flexibilities to the planning system to enable the rapid redeployment of vacant buildings to new uses. As the impacts of Covid-19 and other longer term changes, such as the move to online retail and remote service delivery changes, the demand for high street shops and service centres, Market Towns will be encouraged to repurpose vacated premises into, for example, affordable housing or work hubs, which meet the need for changes in the community. This transition to new commercial uses and work hubs in Market Towns requires the delivery excellent digital connectivity.

2b) **Visitor economy** - tourism in Norfolk is mainly located in rural and coastal areas and is worth £3.4bn a year to the economy. It is supported by many protected sites and areas. For example, the Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, The Broads - with a similar status to a national park – and more than 18,000 hectares of National Nature Reserves (more than 20 sites). Tourism was hit hard by the pandemic and continues to face challenges again in 2021. Rural Norfolk's mix of open space and its tapestry of rural and coastal landscapes, biodiversity, local food, drink and culture and historic estates and

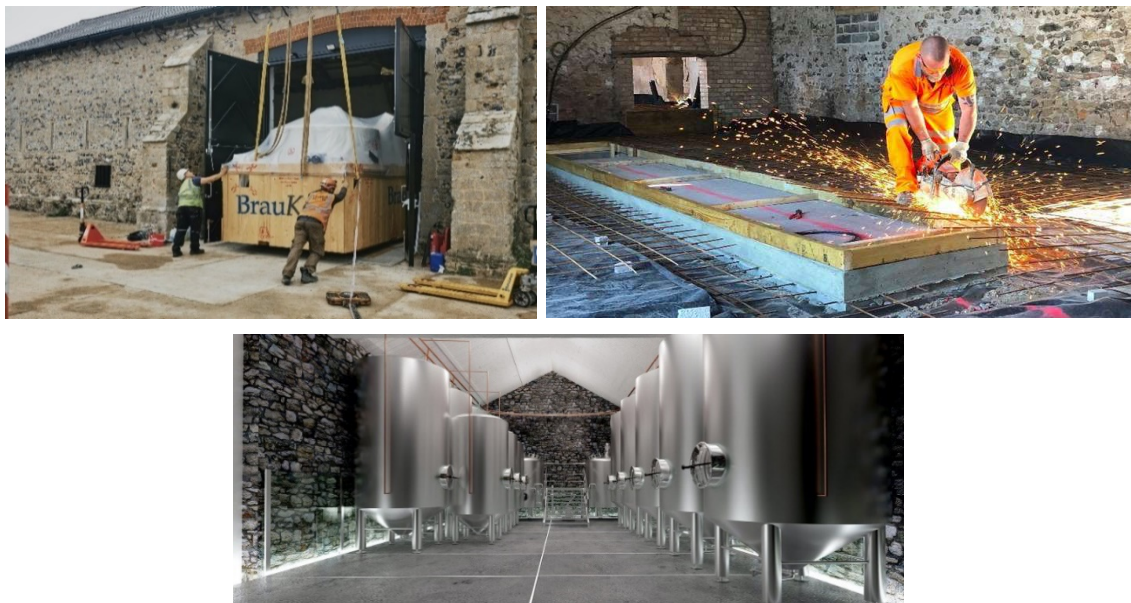
Given the challenges of Covid, LIBs will prioritise the adoption of digital technology, grants, and business support to help businesses recover, linked to the [Norfolk and Suffolk Covid-19 Economic Recovery Restart Plan](#) and the countywide Norfolk Investment Framework (both due in January 2022). Higher levels of home and remote working present a changed economic landscape for market towns to adapt to and benefit from,

towns, offers an exceptionally rich visitor experience, meeting consumer demand for authentic experiences in a safe, welcoming environment. Rural Norfolk's tourism offer will build on and invest in these themes, to attract new visitors with a focus on higher value, year-round, green tourism.

Experiential tourism is growing and this provides a real opportunity for Rural Norfolk to drive footfall, through festivals and special events. This would build on the cultural heritage of our Market Towns and historic estates, by focusing on the arts, built environment, nature, sport, regional food, and drink. The growth of experiential tourism offers an opportunity for high value, year-round green tourism in rural Norfolk and our market towns, in a sustainable way that benefits the wider rural economy. The €23million Experience Interreg project<sup>14</sup> is working actively to promote this in Norfolk, Kent, and Cornwall and three areas of Northern France.

The aims for the visitor economy are to increase spend rather than visitor numbers and to target this at extending the season and responding to consumers' desire to pay for authentic experiences.

2c) **Rural Diversification** - rural Norfolk's farms, villages and Market Towns have the potential to deliver new enterprises in food and drink, the green economy, and services. The growth of online working allows them to host workers who derive their income by working for employers in major cities or towns whilst living in rural areas. The Strategy supports appropriate diversification of the economy by promoting diversification grants<sup>15</sup>, eg a new LEADER programme or the DRIVE programme, and by advocating for a responsive planning system, to support diversification and access to digital connectivity, to open up new work and business opportunities. Publicly-owned assets, such as the County Farms portfolio, can also be used to support rural diversification and environmental gain.



Photos: Duration Brewing at Abbey Farm, situated at the historic West Acre Priory in Norfolk, received funding from the LEADER programme to develop the site, to bring employment and foster farm diversification

<sup>14</sup> [EXPERIENCE tourism project - Norfolk County Council](#)

<sup>15</sup> By the end of the LEADER 2014-2020 programme, funding awards for projects stood at just over £8.465million, leveraging in an additional £1.635million of private investment, with recipient businesses contracted to create 240 new jobs





Norfolk's World Class Environment supports the economy in many ways - from green tourism to agriculture, and securing a plentiful, clean water supply, as recognised in Norfolk County Council [Environmental Policy](#). Norfolk's land is productive and, with the growth in the bioeconomy, provides the raw materials needed for new energy and biomaterial production, as well as its traditional role in food production. The natural environment is also an economic opportunity, through the delivery of nature recovery networks<sup>16</sup>, eco-system services and through the support it provides to the visitor economy.

**Aim: To embrace Clean Growth and the economic opportunities it provides in Rural Norfolk, through delivering a low carbon economy.**

At consultation, respondents emphasised the importance of including biodiversity in underpinning Green Growth, the need to better manage the impact of tourism and the role sustainable transport can play in that. Water management was also identified as a key area in which action was needed.

### Spotlight on sustainable, clean growth

November 2021 saw the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP26, held in Glasgow, under the presidency of the United Kingdom. This shone a spotlight on sustainable, clean growth, and the help needed to support actions on the environment right across the UK.

With the UK transitioning to net zero carbon emissions by 2050, research shows that rural areas have more high carbon-emitting jobs and car use than their urban counterparts<sup>17</sup> and so will need to see the greatest shift toward a greener economy.

The [Nature Recovery Network](#) is a major commitment in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan, with the aim to expand, improve and connect wildlife-rich places across our towns and countryside.

### Consumer changes

Consumer research shows a clear trend towards purchasing more sustainable and often local/regional products<sup>18</sup>.

As noted in Natural England's<sup>19</sup> monitoring of attitudes towards the environment, the public value time in the natural environment. This report shows strong growth in the total number of visits to green and open space, with the total rising 38% from 2.9 billion visits to 4 billion visits in the five years to 2018/19. Of these, 1.9 billion visits (nearly half of the total), were to the countryside or coast in 2018/19. Whilst having a dog is still a major factor for many in accessing green space (cited as a reason for 38% of visits in 2018/19), its relative importance has fallen, as other issues have driven larger increases in visits to open space.

People saying that a prime motivation for a visit was for health and exercise, rose from 34% in 2009/10 to 56% in 2018/19. Taken together with the underlying increase in visits, the number of people accessing the natural environment for health and exercise rose from 1 billion to 2.25 billion, a 125% increase in 9 years. Over the same time period a similar

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<sup>16</sup> [Nature Recovery Network - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> <https://quantumst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Rural-Net-Zero.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/industries/retail/our%20insights/perspectives%20on%20retail%20and%20consumer%20goods%20number%208/perspectives-on-retail-and-consumer-goods\\_issue-8.pdf](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/industries/retail/our%20insights/perspectives%20on%20retail%20and%20consumer%20goods%20number%208/perspectives-on-retail-and-consumer-goods_issue-8.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Natural England (2019), Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: Adult Headline Report 2018/2019 supporting data

increase was seen in those who said that green space helped them relax and unwind, from 26% to 38% of all visits, or a rise from 0.75 billion visits in 2009/10 to 1.5 billion visits by 2018/19, a 100% increase in 9 years.

## Priority Actions

3a) **Natural Environment** - the development of the Natural Capital Assets Evidence Compendium<sup>20</sup>, by Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils and UEA, provides a strong platform of evidence on which to build environmental programmes. This will be used to deliver UK-leading approaches to the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), to support investments in the natural environment that contribute to the Nature Recovery Network, and the Government commitment to protect 30% of land by 2030<sup>21</sup>. Investment in the natural environment will facilitate sustainable tourism and community wellbeing, through promoting active access to the countryside, eg through walking and cycling, with resulting benefits for physical and mental health.

Rural land management is at the heart of these plans and provides a natural solution to these challenges, at the same time as supporting sustainable tourism. Planning should be responsive to this shift to eco-tourism and the trend for wellbeing on holiday<sup>22</sup>. As identified above, experiential tourism is growing in importance and has the potential to deliver lower impact and higher value tourism, if combined with a focus on the natural environment.

Links will also be made to social prescribing and community groups who promote access to the countryside to deliver physical and mental wellbeing. This will have consequential benefits for community wellbeing and reduce pressure on the NHS.



Photo: planting trees in Rural Norfolk

3b) **Ecosystem Services** - the role of rural land in providing environmental benefits, through eco-system services, is increasing and will be supported by the ELMS programme. In Norfolk, a particular challenge exists in relation to water supply, with pressures from development, agricultural abstraction, climate change and biodiversity targets. The Strategy supports the ambitions, led by councils in

Norfolk, to work with Water Resources East, The Nature Conservancy and Anglian Water to develop a sustainable Norfolk Water Strategy, to address both flood risks and water supply in a holistic way, for the long term. The aim is to ensure there is sufficient water for agriculture, the environment and to support economic growth in the long term.

3c) **Biodiversity** - Rural Norfolk has a wealth of natural biodiversity both on land and the marine environment around the Coast. This biodiversity is a key environmental asset which supports a healthy ecosystem and life, but also has clear benefits for the economy. From seal watching trips to bird watching, wildlife directly supports economic activity across Rural Norfolk.

<sup>20</sup> [PowerPoint Presentation \(norfolkbiodiversity.org\)](https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/PowerPoint-Presentation-norfolk-biodiversity-org)

<sup>21</sup> [PM commits to protect 30% of UK land in boost for biodiversity - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-commits-to-protect-30-of-uk-land-in-boost-for-biodiversity)

<sup>22</sup> Relatedly, [EXPERIENCE](#) is a €23m project to attract visitors in the off-peak season, through a new 'experiential tourism' approach.

3d) **Clean Energy** – The LEP is already at the centre of the UK’s development of clean energy, with an ambition to become a leading hydrogen region, delivering on clean energy and carbon reduction (Net Zero) to address climate change. Rural Norfolk must play its full role in delivering on this ambition, both through both helping to generate renewable energy, eg solar, wind and biomass, as well as by embracing new energy systems for transport, heating, and power.

There is an opportunity to raise awareness of the [Rural Community Energy Fund](#) and encourage applications from local communities to access it. Funding for decarbonising homes is set to double, and this investment in home efficiency can be expected to include many rural homes, where there is often no gas grid, and homes use solid or oil fuel, presenting an opportunity to meet our Net Zero carbon target and create new jobs. Community-led action can help to deliver clean energy, and Rural Norfolk should embrace the potential to deliver community-based schemes. We will also seek to build on the learning from the [EU-funded Intelligent Community Energy project](#), for which UEA is a testbed.

3e) **Clean Transport** - the move to electric vehicles (EVs) by 2030 is a particular challenge in rural areas, due to poor grid capacity and will require innovation and substantial investment to start the transition before 2025, given the ban on new fossil fuel cars from 2030. As well as the need for cars to embrace the EV transition, public transport options, such as commercial bus services, community transport and taxis, will need to make the transition to electric.

In Rural Norfolk, the large agri-food sector also creates a large demand for road freight transport and this will require green fuel options, such as green hydrogen or EV freight vehicles. The growth of online retail and delivery services will create further demand for EV vans and light commercial vehicles.



In addition to powered transport, improved cycle paths and walking routes could both help local people access services, education, and work (eg in new local hubs) and support the growth of green tourism options. Active modes of transport have also been shown to have major benefits for physical and mental health.

3f) **Biomaterials** - the UK Bio-economy Strategy (2018)<sup>23</sup> commits the UK to develop the bio-economy, worth £220bn (GVA) with an aim to double GVA to £440bn by 2030. The strategy encourages a focus on bioenergy, biomaterials, and bioplastics. Norfolk, with its large agricultural and forestry sector to provide the raw materials and the biotechnology research cluster in Norwich, will aim to be at the forefront of this economic transition at the heart of Clean Growth.

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<sup>23</sup> HMG (2018), Growing the Bioeconomy: Improving lives and strengthening our economy: A national bioeconomy strategy to 2030





Community resilience is a complex area which includes access to services, education, health, social care, housing, recreation, leisure and sport opportunities and the role of community organisations. To ensure that rural areas are attractive to a broad demographic, it is essential that the needs of all age groups are met. However, service delivery has often been concentrated in larger urban areas, leaving rural communities with poor, or no local access to services, leading to poor outcomes. New delivery models combining virtual and physical access can help meet rural needs.

**Aim: To ensure rural areas sustain diverse resilient communities, preventing socio-economic challenges at source and encouraging innovative ways to deliver affordable housing and infrastructure for all age groups**

At consultation, respondents said the need for affordable housing as their top concern. Respondents also mentioned improved transport, improved access to services and health and wellbeing.

### **Sustaining our Communities**

Service delivery has often been concentrated in larger urban areas, leaving rural communities with poor, or no local access to services, leading to poor outcomes. The English Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2019) show Norfolk's rural areas face greater distances to travel to services such as post offices, schools, and surgeries than our urban areas: 57% of Norfolk's rural population live in an area more than **2km** away from a GP surgery. Over 28% of our rural population live in an area more than **4km** away from a GP surgery<sup>24</sup>. New delivery models, combining virtual and physical access, can help meet rural needs.

Rural Norfolk has an older age profile than urban areas, and ageing is accelerating fastest in the most rural locations. To sustain this older population, without overwhelming health and social care provision, more focus is needed on healthy and active ageing. The proportion on people aged 70 or over is set to climb from **18.2%** of Norfolk's population in **2019**, to **24%** in **2041**, an increase of over 77,000 people (Source: ONS).

Housing affordability is important to balancing this demographic profile. ONS data shows Norfolk's housing affordability ratio to be worse than England's average, and this problem has increased significantly since 1999. The number of homeless households in Norfolk's predominantly rural local authorities grew to 922 in March 2020, up from 862 in 2019.

### **Priority Actions**

**Access to services** - access to services has been a growing problem in rural communities for decades, as service delivery in both the public sector, eg hospitals, and the private sector, eg banks and shops, became more concentrated in urban areas<sup>25</sup>. Many rural residents, especially the elderly, the ill or low-income groups, struggle to access services remotely or to travel to large urban areas. The Government's [Bus Back Better](#) Strategy sets out the vision to improve passenger services, and increase bus use and passenger numbers across England. The County Council, as the Local Transport Authority, is developing an 'enhanced partnership' with local bus operators, with a Bus Service Improvement Plan for Norfolk published on 31 October 2021. The Council also secured £700,000 from the [rural mobility fund](#), as one of 17 pilots to trial digitised on-

<sup>24</sup> Source: English Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2019

<sup>25</sup> Which? [Consumer Report](#), 2019



demand bus services. The project aims to better link the villages around Swaffham and launches in January 2022.

Rural areas need innovative, new collaborative solutions, including investing in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, and through combining service delivery points through the One Public Estate programme.

There is also a clear role for community-led action in helping to provide services through, for example, developing the role of community centres such as village halls. With the expected trend to less commuting, community halls can have an enhanced role as centres for remote working and the provision of services, such as training and childcare for workers who remain in their community for much of the working week.

Public transport, and digital solutions (both private sector and through the County's Digital Inclusion Strategy) to access services in market towns and cities will also be of growing importance, as the number of older rural residents increases and innovative solutions are needed. This could include transport services which respond to service requests, and the growth of tele-medicine. These services will help older residents continue to live independent, connected lives.

- 4a) **Housing** - it is critically important to ensure that sufficient homes are provided, but it is equally important that the homes that are built are the right type in terms of size, affordability, and tenure. Affordability of housing is a particular challenge in Norfolk, with a lower quartile<sup>26</sup> housing cost to income ratio of 8.34 in 2020, compared to England at 7.15<sup>27</sup>. The ratio is even higher in areas such as North Norfolk, making many rural areas unaffordable to those on lower incomes, who are unable to afford market prices and rents. Homelessness has also been rising in rural areas.

Rural housing must embrace future energy standards, but requires specific help in doing so, given that many of the current and emerging energy options available in large urban areas are not available in rural areas.

More affordable housing provision is essential for young families and workers, in both public and private sector jobs.



Photo: New housing at Mulberry Park, Poringland

Innovative ways to address this, such as Community Land Trusts, are needed, so that there is a supply of affordable housing for lower-paid and younger workers, who are essential to sustain rural businesses and service delivery.

The need for new rural housing, especially affordable options for young people, or as retirement and sheltered living options for the old, can be developed by the third sector or commercial developers, using the new planning flexibilities introduced in autumn 2020, which make the

conversion of redundant commercial space to housing easier. Given the impact of Covid-

<sup>26</sup> The affordability ratio compares average wages with average house prices. In rural areas there is a particular challenge with affordable housing for those in lower paying service sector or manual jobs – best captured by comparing lower quartile average earnings to the price of lower quartile housing. On this measure, some of rural Norfolk, particularly in attractive coastal locations has some of the worst affordability in the UK.

<sup>27</sup> House price to residence-based earnings ratio

19, and the growth of online retail on the demand for retail space, many Market Towns are likely to have retail units which could be re-purposed in this way.

- 4b) **Health and social care** - adjusted for risk factors, such as age and income, rural areas do well on most health metrics. Whilst health care provision is concentrated in urban areas, the rural population is older, has more complex care needs and constrained access to service, particularly for those most in need, due to poor digital connectivity or a lack of private and/or public transport. Population change estimates show that the rural population will age much faster than in Norwich and this will increase the pressure to provide more health care in rural and coastal areas. By combining the delivery of services and access to care, provision can be sustained and improved in our rural areas, enhancing the wellbeing of residents. The formation of new **Primary Care Networks**, including the 17 in [Norfolk and Waveney](#), can play a role in this.

The health and social care sector is a major employer, and provides many opportunities for training and early career development. The development of a new School of Nursing in West Norfolk supports this work and can help young people progress to long term careers.

Investment in preventative actions, including an enhanced role for community organisations and active travel, such as cycling and walking, can deliver improved physical and mental health. We will champion the role of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) in supporting countryside access and active recreation.

- 4c) **Demographics** - rural Norfolk has an older age profile than Norwich, and ageing is accelerating fastest in the most rural locations<sup>28</sup>. To sustain this older population, without overwhelming health and social care provision, more focus is needed on healthy and active ageing. The [Norwich Institute for Healthy Ageing](#) is developing strategies to promote sustained population behaviour change, to improve physical and mental wellbeing. The older population are also increasingly important to the economy, with the 'Silver Pound'<sup>29</sup> supporting a lot of local economic activity.

In contrast, rural areas have fewer young people, with many born in rural Norfolk leaving, due to poor access to educational programmes, low wage jobs and high house prices. Rural young people face particular challenges with access to affordable housing and this has to be addressed if rural areas are to be able to retain young people and young families with the drive and innovation they can bring to rural areas.

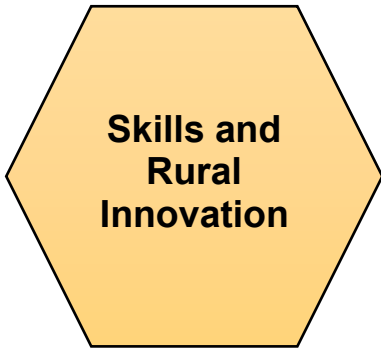
Creating a more balanced rural demographic is important to the economy, and the ability of businesses and service providers to attract the skills needed, often through small local interventions such as those supported by the Norfolk LIFT programme. A policy commitment to work with young people to address their needs is essential to deliver future rural community sustainability.

### **Case Study**

83 day service users in Norfolk are already benefitting from **Alcove Video Carephones** to help them stay connected with their support workers, friends and loved ones. The current pilot scheme in Norfolk is aiming to provide 200 devices to users. Kim, 53 from Morton on the Hill, is one user who felt lonely and really missed talking to her friends and support workers at the hub. Kim said: "After Christmas, we had to stay at home and couldn't see anyone. I really missed my friends and the staff at the hub."

<sup>28</sup> The proportion on people aged 70 or over is set to climb from 18.2% of Norfolk's population in 2019, to 24% in 2041: an increase of over 77,000 people (Source: ONS)

<sup>29</sup> The first Norfolk Rural Economic Strategy in 2013 reported that spending by the over 50 age group in Rural Norfolk would rise from £4.2billion in 2012 to £8.6billion by 2037



Rural Norfolk has a lower qualifications profile than the England average, and the gap is largest in sparsely populated and coastal locations. The increase in digitalisation and economic change means many rural workers need new skills to retain existing jobs, or to embrace innovation, and open up new job roles and career options. Increases in online education could benefit rural areas, but can be constrained by poor digital connectivity. More focus on rural skills delivery would ensure the rural economy has the skills needed to embrace future economic opportunities.

**Aim: To address the rural skills divide and embrace innovation, supported by project funding and excellent skills and innovation infrastructure, helping rural areas to retain and attract job opportunities for younger people**

At consultation, respondents emphasised connectivity and access to the internet and online learning resources as their top priority for this theme. The importance of aspiration also came through, as did a need for apprenticeships and courses that lead directly to employment.

### Levelling up the skill base

Rural Norfolk has a lower qualifications profile than the England average, and the gap is largest in sparsely populated and coastal locations. Breckland has the lowest proportion of highly qualified workers, and only the urban district of Great Yarmouth has a lower proportion of residents with an NVQ3 education attainment or above in Norfolk.

The increase in digitalisation and economic change means many rural workers need new skills, to retain existing jobs, or to embrace innovation and open up new job roles and career options. Increases in online education could benefit rural areas, but can be constrained by poor digital connectivity. More focus on rural skills delivery would ensure the rural economy has the skills needed to embrace future economic opportunities.

To help businesses recover from the pandemic, the County Council has introduced two countywide schemes: [Employer Training Incentive Programme](#), a grant that helps business fund training opportunities, and [Recruit, Retain, Reward \(RRR\)](#) which provides a grant of £1000 to help businesses recruit an apprentice aged 16-24.

Coupled with RRR, Children's Services' New Pathways to Work Team is also seeking to reverse this downturn in apprenticeship starts for 16-19 year olds, as well as to increase the take-up of other work-based options, such as 'T levels'.

The [Youth Pledge for Employers project](#) also engages with a wide range of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across the Norfolk and Suffolk, to develop opportunities for young people to engage in work-based experience, structured employment activities and sector-related learning until December 2023.

### Need for new skills

Research by the LEP suggests that over 40% of the workforce, in every rural district, are in job roles which will see significant change by 2030 as a result of changes in technology<sup>30</sup>. Across Norfolk and Suffolk, 32% of workers are in occupations at risk of automation, but whilst only 12% of those with higher level skills are at risk from automation, this rises to 46% for those with lower qualification levels.

Apprenticeship take-up in Norfolk fell dramatically in 2020, with overall starts in 2019/20 declining by 15% compared to 2018/19. Whilst better than the 18% decrease across

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<sup>30</sup> New Anglia Sector Skills Plans (2016-19), [Sector Skills Plans - New Anglia](#)

England, this fall in apprenticeship uptake is a major challenge when the need for technical skills is increasing, as the demand for digitalisation and automation grows.

The RRR project, mentioned above, is seeking to address this downturn - countywide. The County Council's Higher Aspirations Scheme is also targeting young people across Norfolk, on Level 3 courses in years 12 and 13. The scheme aims to boost the information, advice and guidance (IAG) they receive in school sixth forms, to broaden young people's horizons, and encourage aspirations towards higher education and higher level apprenticeships.

## Need to grow Research and Development spending

In 2017 the Government committed to increasing UK Research and Development (R&D) spending from 1.7% to 2.4% of GDP by 2027. The current government has reaffirmed this commitment to innovation, but data shows that R&D expenditure remains focused in large urban areas.

## Priority Actions



5a) **Digitalisation and Clean Growth** - the demand for digital and clean growth skills is rising quickly, as the Covid-19 pandemic and longer-term trends combine to reshape the jobs of the future. This represents a once-in-a-generation change in the skills base needed, and Rural Norfolk has to embrace this change. The growth in automation and digital service delivery will require the engineers and programmers who can build, maintain, and upgrade technology,

and the move to clean growth will create new job roles in energy, transportation, building, and many other sectors which are major energy users.

A focus on the skills needed for this transition in job roles must be developed in school, further and higher education and – critically - in courses to help existing workers gain new skills, as job roles in the workplace change.

5b) **Schools** – while schools in some rural settings in Norfolk ('rural hamlets and isolated dwellings schools') improved outcomes at Attainment 8 and/or English and Maths at Grade4+, between 2017 and 2019, outcomes for schools in 'rural town and fringe', 'rural town and fringe in a sparse setting' and 'rural village' settings all declined over this period, and progression to further and higher education remains well below national averages.

As the qualification levels needed for most jobs continue to rise, there is a need to continue to promote high quality support, to ensure that rural young people can obtain the qualifications, and the aspiration to progress to Further Education (FE), Higher Education (HE) and higher paying jobs<sup>31</sup>. This includes developing local partnership action plans to address issues with 14-19 transition and progression in rural areas, including access to technical and vocational education provision, extension of digital and remote learning provision, tailored provision for additional needs (such as special educational needs, looked-after and home-educated children, care leavers and those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds) and provision of personal IAG and transition support.

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<sup>31</sup> New Anglia's Careers Hub project has a team of Enterprise Coordinators working with careers leads in schools now across Norfolk and Suffolk.



Rural businesses have a key role to play in working with schools, to help young people appreciate the growing diversity of job roles which can be found in rural areas.

5c) **Colleges and University access** - many parts of Rural Norfolk are a long way from a full range of FE and HE provision. As the economy creates more technical, or NVQ Level3+ jobs, and fewer entry-level roles, the challenge is for more equal access to technical and vocational provision for young people in rural areas.

New, blended delivery, which both facilitates students to travel to FE and HE provision, combined with enhanced outreach programmes using digital technology, would make a wider range of FE and HE study options available to rural young people. This will both benefit young people and ensure the economy has the future workforce skills needed.

5d) **Workforce upskilling** - digitalisation, technology and new business models are changing how business operates, is and creating new job roles<sup>32</sup>. Rural Norfolk will work with education providers, and the LEP, to develop new routes to upskill the rural workforce, focusing on adopting new technology or obtaining the business skills needed for new job roles or self-employment, building on programmes such as LIFT and accessing SPF.

5e) **Innovation** - in 2017 the Government committed to increasing UK Research and Development (RandD) spending from 1.7% to 2.4% of GDP by 2027. The current Government has reaffirmed this commitment to innovation, but data shows that RandD expenditure remains focused in large urban areas.

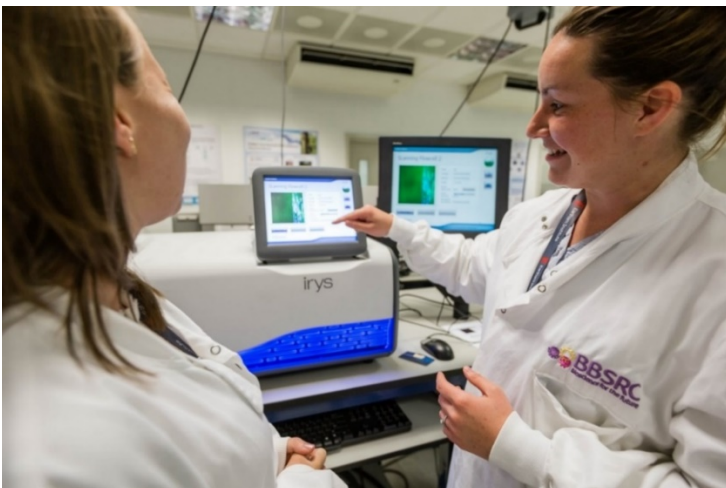


Photo: Norwich Research Park

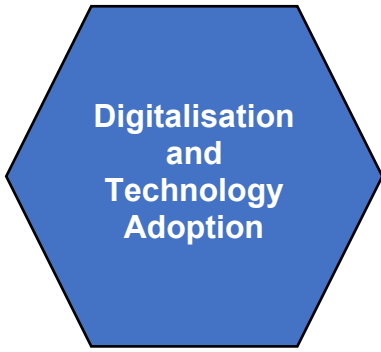
The Steering Group will work with Norwich's world class research base, and the LEP, to increase the number of rural businesses engaged in RandD and innovation activities, by increasing access to skills and innovation programmes. This will focus on priority rural economy sectors, such as bioeconomy and renewable energy, to deliver clean growth, or where rural factors create concentrations of demand, such as in health care for the elderly (who disproportionately live in rural areas).

The County Council's [Innovation Mentoring Grant Programme](#) continues to help businesses across Norfolk to access the Government's innovation funding programmes.

The digitalisation and automation of services is also of growing importance and the wider region has expertise in this with, for example, UEA working with Cambridge and Lincoln Universities on the AgriForwards<sup>33</sup> project, to create automation for the agricultural and food chain sectors.

<sup>32</sup> Demand from Norfolk businesses to expand digitally is strong, with Norfolk Council's Go Digital Programme, which helps SMES to grow online, oversubscribed at the beginning of 2021.

<sup>33</sup> [EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training in Agri-Food Robotics: AgriFoRwArdS \(lincoln.ac.uk\)](https://www.lincoln.ac.uk/epsrc-centre-for-doctoral-training-in-agri-food-robotics)



Digitalisation, and the adoption of new technology, are essential for economic success, and this need has been accelerated by the pandemic. Rural areas are in the front line of this change, and must embrace the opportunities created by new technology. Programmes for fibre rollout and mobile connectivity will need to support rural areas, to ensure that rural communities, businesses, and services have the digital connectivity needed to support new models of delivery. The pace of digital development is relentless and Covid-19 is widely reported to have delivered a decade's worth of growth in one year.

**Aim: To support rural areas to embrace online business and service delivery, supported by automation and new technology to deliver high value jobs.**

At consultation, respondents emphasised encouraging remote working. Improved connectivity with rural work hubs also came through strongly.

### Changing habits

2020 saw a big increase in people working from home, either full or part-time, as offices and other workplaces were closed. This is very significant in rural Norfolk, which had very high levels of out-commuting, and some of the longest average commutes in the UK. As education also adopts blended digital and physical delivery, it is essential that digital skills and technology enable rural learners to access education.

Whilst 2021-24 will see some return to commuting, for both work and education, surveys show that many employers and employees expect to move, on a permanent basis, to a mix of working from home, combined with days in the office. Digital infrastructure and the provision of working space - either in the home or in rural hubs in rural communities- is important to support this change.

### Changing markets

The Office for National Statistics reported that, as of November 2020, online department store sales increased by 157.2%, while household goods stores and "other" non-food stores also saw sales rise by 124.7% each, compared to the same month in 2019.

On 30 December 2020, Openreach revealed that, during 2020, the use of internet data in the UK more than doubled, from 22,000 petabytes in 2019 to 50,000 in 2020, as customers worked, shopped, learned, and accessed services and entertainment remotely.

### Priority Actions

6a) **Remote working and online learning** - 2020 saw a big increase in people working from home, either full or part-time, as offices and other workplaces were closed. This is very significant in rural Norfolk, which has very high levels of out-commuting and some of the longest average commutes in the UK.

The same is true for education, particularly post compulsory education, with some young people travelling 40 miles or more to access further and higher education. As education also adopts blended digital and physical delivery, it is essential that digital skills and technology enable rural learners to access education.

Whilst 2021-24 will see some return to commuting, for both work and education, surveys show that many employers and employees expect to move on a permanent basis to a mix of working from home combined with days in the office. Digital infrastructure and the provision of working space, either in the home or in rural hubs, in rural communities is important to support this change.

For rural service providers and retailers, more people working in the area, rather than travelling to cities, should increase demand and support a vibrant rural community economy in Market Towns and larger villages, and this should be actively encouraged. This can also help sustain services such as village halls, which can develop a wider role in the community, including for the delivery of training.

- 6b) **E-commerce** - online retail sales doubled in 2020, as Covid-19 restrictions on non-essential retail and a reluctance to travel to access essential retail, combined to deliver more growth in one year than seen in the previous decade. Many rural retailers responded, but further investment and support is needed, to ensure that they keep pace with these sector-wide changes, and the major investment in online delivery by national retailers. Programmes to support the online skills of businesses in rural areas, such as the County Council's [Go Digital programme](#), which is available across Norfolk, will help increase productivity and business resilience.
- 6c) **Remote service delivery** - service delivery, eg GP appointments, access to government services and education, have all seen major increases in the use of online delivery. Connectivity, access to IT equipment, and skills, are critical in rural areas, to ensure that these changes don't disadvantage rural communities and, in particular, the most vulnerable in these communities. Training and grants through SPF could help address these needs.

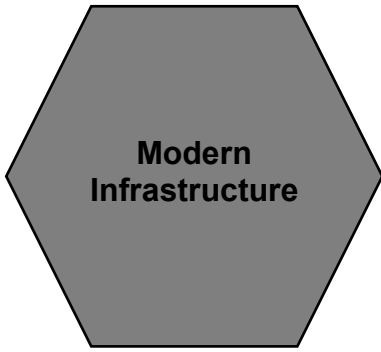
Longer term, the development of self-driving vehicles could bring substantial benefits to older people, and those with disabilities in rural areas, by allowing them the independence to travel to appointments in towns or cities. This, in conjunction with services such as telemedicine, could be transformative for service access, but will require investment in digital infrastructure, including the deployment of 5G in rural areas, so that self-driving vehicles and the delivery of online services have the bandwidth needed for effective provision.

- 6d) **Automation** - the growth in the use of robotics and automation has been accelerating and offers the prospect of higher quality, better paid jobs, whilst also addressing challenges with securing staff for manual and lower paid roles in the manufacturing, food chain and service sectors. Automation can also improve environmental and process monitoring, delivering efficiencies and environmental gains.



Photo: The largest free-to-use, long range, wide-area network (LoRaWAN) in the UK has been launched here in Norfolk, giving businesses, individuals, schools, and educational organisations free access to the network to experiment and build solutions.





Delivering a vibrant, dynamic rural community in Norfolk requires infrastructure fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While roads are important, particularly in sparsely populated parts of rural Norfolk, the infrastructure to support the economy needs to include digital connectivity and access to the national rail network. Covid-19 has also seen increased demand for cycling and walking, which requires more investment in cycleways and footpaths. Water and energy infrastructure is also at the heart of delivering clean growth and requires integrated, future-proofed solutions.

**Aim: To support the delivery of new rural infrastructure underpinning the transition to clean energy, sustainable transport, a digital economy, and sustainable water management**

At consultation, respondents emphasised this theme, citing the scope for improvement across a broad array of infrastructure, including rural bus routes, upgrades on the train lines, cycle infrastructure, digital infrastructure, walking routes, electric vehicle (EV) charging points and community transport.

### **Improving our rural Infrastructure**

The rural nature of Norfolk means that many people need to use the car as their primary form of transport. A significant minority, however, do not have a car, and are reliant on local service provision, public transport or walking and cycling provision. Some families that do run a car can ill-afford to do so<sup>34</sup>: 15% more miles were travelled on Norfolk roads in 2019, compared to 2012 (5.8 billion miles in 2019 and 4.9 billion in 2012). See section 4a on the [Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) that the County Council will be producing.

### **Improving our digital infrastructure**

Ofcom data shows that rural Norfolk has significantly worse 4G coverage than urban England. North Norfolk, in particular, has both worse 4G coverage and voice coverage than the average in rural England.<sup>35</sup> However, coverage is increasing both nationally and locally over 2G/3G/4G, and now 5G.

Over the last three years, through closer engagement with the Mobile Operators (MO) initiated by the County Council, Norfolk has benefited from an increase in MO investment, which has resulted in some improvements in coverage.

However further work needs to be done. Norfolk's profile continues to be being raised with the MO, and where there is a less compelling business case for investment (in areas with fewer residents), these areas are being identified and raised with them. Going forward, it is anticipated that the most significant improvements in rural coverage will be delivered through the Shared Rural Network programme, supplemented by more collaborative work to address community objections to proposed mobile installations.

To date, [Better Broadband for Norfolk](#) has seen access to Superfast broadband increase from 42% in summer 2013, to over 95% of Norfolk properties during spring 2020 (from the independent organisation "[Think Broadband](#)" data). In July 2018 the Government published The Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review, that set clear, ambitious targets for the

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<sup>34</sup> The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 reported 72 rural areas within the 10% most deprived and 6 in the worst 1% nationally for access to services.

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/186413/Connected-Nations-2019-UK-final.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/186413/Connected-Nations-2019-UK-final.pdf)

availability of full fibre and 5G networks. Ensuring these faster connections to Rural Norfolk is also taking place through the Local Full Fibre Programme.

Transport and digital infrastructure both allow rural residents and visitors to access services and should therefore be developed in a co-ordinated way, eg blending tele-medicine with transport options to allow patients to reach acute care or treatment, and students to combine remote online learning with access to classrooms, labs, and workshops for practical study.

## Priority Actions

7a) **Digital infrastructure** - rural Norfolk continues to have thousands of premises without superfast broadband<sup>36</sup> and problems with mobile coverage<sup>37</sup>. As urban areas adopt gigabit connectivity and 5G, it is inevitable that data capacity and speed requirements will continue to grow rapidly.

We will continue to work with partners to proactively engage with the telecoms market, both fibre and mobile, in order to raise Norfolk's profile, and attract further private sector investment.

We will campaign for government to support an 'outside in' approach, so that public support is targeted at the hardest to reach rural communities first, using a combination of 5G and fibre, to ensure that rural areas are not left behind as retailing, services and education all continue to move online.

As a result of the Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review, the Chancellor announced in 2019 a £5 billion commitment to fund gigabit-capable broadband for the 20% of UK premises that would be unlikely to receive commercial access to it. In March 2021 the first live phase (Phase 1b) of Project Gigabit was launched. Norfolk has been included in the first wave, which will deliver gigabit-capable connections across Norfolk, to premises that are unlikely to benefit from commercial investment.

The Country Land and Business Association have estimated that, nationally, the rural economy is 16% less productive than the urban economy and that closing this gap, for which ultrafast broadband is essential, has the potential to increase the rural economy by £43 billion per annum. We will continue to push for improved connectivity, so that the full potential of its economy can be realised.

7b) **Sustainable transport** - many of Norfolk's rural residents will continue to rely on private transport because of weaknesses in public transport. Actions to improve public transport are important, especially for the young, old, those with disabilities, and those on lower incomes.



Connecting rural areas to the services and facilities centred in the market towns and urban areas means improving the connections between them. Better public transport options and lift-sharing initiatives can help alleviate dependence on private transport in rural areas. See section 4a.

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<sup>36</sup> 95% of the county's homes and businesses can now access superfast broadband, up from 42% in 2012

<sup>37</sup> The majority of areas across Norfolk receive a weak 2/3/4G signal, with the strongest signals in Norwich and market towns such as King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth

Bids to the Restoring Your Railway Fund can also help increase connectivity, and investment in the existing network is important, eg longer trains on the Fensline, and improved services from Norwich to London, Ely, and connections to North Norfolk.

For tourists accessing the area by public transport, solutions are needed to address the “last mile” problem and can help in attracting new visitor demographics to Norfolk.

Much of the county also lacks safe cycling routes and all-weather footpaths. This needs further investment, to provide more sustainable transport options - which have the added benefit of improving health and attracting visitors.

7c) **Clean Growth** - as highlighted in the World Class Environment and Green Economy section of the strategy, clean energy systems and sustainable water management are needed. Delivery of clean growth will require substantial investment in new infrastructure, enabled by a planning system which allows the rapid deployment of new technology.

Modernisation of the energy system also needs to address areas where sustainable rural growth is constrained by electricity grid capacity. The plan to decarbonise transport, with a policy to ban the sale of new fossil fuel cars from 2030, means we have less than 10 years to deliver an EV charging infrastructure across the whole county. With plans to decarbonise homes, moving away from fossil fuel heating, the demand for electricity will also increase. With its concentration of offshore wind power, Norfolk is well placed to be at the forefront of this transition in energy systems, but for Rural Norfolk to benefit, further investment in the electricity grid is needed, to convert to clean energy sources.

The [Water Resources East Regional Plan](#) is considering a new reservoir and pipe infrastructure, to ensure Norfolk has a secure long term water supply. It is also focusing on nature-based solutions, eg using flood meadows to manage extreme rainfall events, and this offers the potential to create enhanced landscape features and habitats to increase biodiversity, at the same time as delivering better water management. All these major schemes need support to secure the resources and planning permission needed for timely delivery.

Clean growth also involves future plans for waste disposal. Legislative changes expected in 2023/24 mean that for rural businesses and communities there are future opportunities and challenges. For example, if significant growth in the amount of food waste collected from households and businesses in an area is expected, having local solutions, and deriving local benefits from that waste, would be beneficial to the local area. In addition, if there is a need for different materials to be collected from premises for recycling, there may be benefits for collaboration across businesses, to meet any future requirements in ways that are efficient and practical.

7d) **Skills** - Rural Norfolk needs to ensure that it has the workforce and skills base to build new infrastructure, and the Steering Group will explore partnering with the existing CITB centre at Bircham Newton to support this drive. The Steering Group will also work with partners to promote innovative solutions to rural infrastructure construction and management, including bidding to deliver UK demonstration projects on clean growth and infrastructure.

## Governance

The Strategy is refreshed every three years, against a set of guiding principles:

- To be ambitious for Rural Norfolk, so it delivers a dynamic, sustainable economy and quality of life for all
- To make the case for Rural Norfolk to decision makers at every level – from parish to national government
- To provide the underpinning evidence base to make the case for investment
- To adopt an intervention approach of:
  - Assessing what is already going around the county to address the challenges and opportunities the evidence base and Strategy identify, and pinpoint gaps in provision
  - Learning from, and working with other areas – our neighbouring counties, rural areas elsewhere in the UK and overseas - to build on best practice models of rural economic development and produce a pipeline of projects that delivers on the themes of the Strategy

Delivery of the Strategy is overseen by the Steering Group, which meets bi-monthly, assisted by ad hoc working groups to progress particular issues. Steering Group members are drawn from the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors, and include:

- a private sector chair
- stakeholders linked to the Strategy's key themes
- an elected member from Norfolk County Council
- officers from Norfolk County Council (secretariat and officer support), as well as rural district councils.

## Appendix: Case Studies

### Food Innovation Centre

Food and drink manufacturing GVA (gross value added – a measure of wealth creation) in Norfolk has been falling behind the rest of the country (2016-17 growth was 2.9% - 28th out of 40 NUTS2 regions). Norfolk is the largest agricultural producer in the UK. However, 50% of Norfolk-grown produce is processed out of area, limiting the value added to the local economy with Norfolk 5<sup>th</sup> nationally for food processing. The food production business base in Norfolk comprises some major large enterprises, and many small businesses, but too few of the medium scale enterprises needed for a properly functioning cluster.

A **Food Innovation Centre**, led by Broadland District Council, will provide essential facilities and a managed Food and Drink Innovation Cluster to help this sector to grow, collaborate and develop new product lines. The Centre will include thirteen food-grade units, two test kitchens, meeting spaces and a sensory testing facility. It will also provide a tailored innovation support package to eligible businesses to fast-track growth through innovation and RandD expertise from the nearby Norwich Research Park and Hethel Innovation.

Located on the [Food Enterprise Park](#), the Centre is on a development site within the Greater Norwich Food Enterprise Zone, and benefits from a Local Development Order (covering 46 acres) to encourage and support more food processing through the co-location of commercial enterprises.

The £11m project was **awarded £2.7m from the Government's Getting Building Fund** in 2020; matched by investment from Broadland District Council, New Anglia LEP, UEA and Hethel Innovation, with support from Norwich City College and the Quadram Institute. The Cluster Support Programme is due to begin in Autumn 2021, followed by the opening of the Centre in Summer 2022.

### [LEADER Programme](#)

Norfolk County Council has managed EU-funded LEADER programmes, designed to support rural business growth, for a number of years. The current 7-year programme has just finished, with £8.32m of project spend, across the whole of the programme's geographic area for the first time, and 241 jobs contracted to be created. So successful were Norfolk in drawing down funds that they were able to secure additional funding from unspent national funds of £1.4m.

A key element of the LEADER programme's success is its grassroots model of five Local Action Groups, made up of a range of local stakeholders, coming together to oversee the programme for their area and approve rural projects that have a strong fit with the programme priorities. These priorities are:

- Increasing farm productivity
- Supporting micro and small businesses and farm diversification
- Boosting rural tourism
- Providing rural services
- Providing cultural and heritage activity
- Increasing forestry productivity

**DRIVE** is a mentoring and capital grant programme aimed at businesses contributing to the rural economy. It offers 12 hours of business mentoring and capital grants of between £5,000 and £30,000 towards up to 40% of project costs.



## LIFT Community Grants Programme

The [LIFT programme](#) was financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) to improve access to skills provision for those in rural areas who are not job-ready and to support them into employment. This included training for commercial and not-for-profit organisations who were able to upskill employers to retain and grow their future workforce capacity. The programme also sought to address social inclusion issues, along with identifying opportunities for commissioning pilot projects and modelling new approaches to reducing economic inactivity and hardship.

Norfolk County Council administered the £1.172 million grant (with 50% match funding from project applicants) across Norfolk and North Suffolk. Between September 2017 and June 2020, 34 grants were awarded across three strands of skills provision, for tailored opportunities within the LAG (Local Action Group) areas of Brecks, Broads, Waveney Valley, Wensum and Coast and West Norfolk.

- **LIFT Jobs** enabled organisations to engage with individuals who face barriers to work and move them into, or closer to, employment
- **LIFT Skills** assisted organisations to deliver personalised skills support for people employed in rural businesses
- **LIFT Trials** helped organisations deliver tailored support for businesses enabling them to offer a range of work experience to individuals who have limited or no workplace experience

## Natural Capital Evidence Compendium for Norfolk and Suffolk

This [Compendium](#) was produced to respond to the development of DEFRA's 25 Year Environment Plan. The counties of Norfolk and Suffolk have stewardship of a wealth of natural assets and the purpose of the Compendium is to present information about these assets and the potential risks to them, providing an element of the preparatory work for a 25 Year Environment Plan for Norfolk and Suffolk. Where possible, data is provided by county and also for five key 'natural areas' within them: the Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONB, plus The Broads National Park, The Brecks and the Dedham Vale AONB. Background information on the environmental and socio-economic setting of the two counties is also included, to provide some regional context.

## EXPERIENCE

The €23 million [EXPERIENCE project](#) (of which €16 million is funded by the European Regional Development Fund via the France – Channel - England Programme) runs from September 2019 to June 2023 and aims to promote new tourism 'experiences' between October and March, increasing the number of visitors and overnight stays to six areas across England and France, during the off-peak season. The project's goal is to attract more than 20 million additional visitors to the Channel regions of France and England by its completion, and approximately 44 million after a further five years. This approach is in contrast to traditional destination-based tourism, based on conventional, mass-market locations during peak season. Modern travellers are losing interest in this type of holiday and experiential tourism is a growing travel trend, based on regional uniqueness. The current regional offer does not target the off-season or meet new expectations, limiting competitiveness in the global tourism market.

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<sup>i</sup> ONS mid-year population estimates

<sup>ii</sup> The rural economy uses the broader definition to include all our market towns where data is available, including for the proportion of SMEs (ONS UK Business Counts, 2020)

<sup>iii</sup> ONS Business Demography 2019