

Norfolk Rural Development Strategy 2013-2020

Executive Summary

**Developed by the
Norfolk Rural Development Strategy Steering Group**

September 2013

supported by



Executive Summary

Norfolk is a rural county with 53% of its population designated as rural and only two districts, Great Yarmouth and Norwich, which are primarily urban. Addressing rural issues is thus central to the County's future.

This strategy is focused on how rural areas can be developed so that the rural economy continues to grow, the community in rural Norfolk is successful and inclusive and Norfolk's high quality natural environment is maintained and enhanced. This strategy was developed with the rural community and its success depends on action by businesses and local communities, with the public sector playing a supportive and enabling role.

The principles underpinning this strategy are that it must be: ambitious for rural Norfolk; strategic, proactive; innovative and optimistic. It focuses on the long term success of rural Norfolk and how this can be delivered.

The relationship between Norfolk's urban and rural communities needs to be strengthened. Current policies are viewed by those in rural areas as favouring urban led economic growth. This is seen by many as leading to an unsustainable model of development, in which rural areas have a rapidly growing population many of whom commute to urban areas for work, education or to access services, leaving rural areas as dormitories for the rich and affluent.

The 2020 Vision for Rural Norfolk is to:

Achieve inclusive, sustainable rural areas which provide their inhabitants with a high quality of life through a dynamic economy, vibrant community and healthy natural environment

Rural Norfolk is keen to develop its economy. With the right support to increase skills, an enabling planning system and digital connectivity, it can deliver substantial economic gains.

The ten priority issues for rural development in Norfolk are to:

1. Build on strengths in agri-tech, engineering and manufacturing sectors
2. Increase the quality and number of rural jobs
3. Increase the number of rural business start-ups
4. Deliver superfast broadband
5. Improve mobile phone coverage
6. Increase attainment in rural schools
7. Improve links to research and development to drive innovation
8. Increase the rate at which new affordable housing is developed
9. Increase private water storage capacity
10. Increase the area of land in environmental management

This strategy will be used to help secure the resources needed to deliver growth by:

- Providing an evidence base and priorities for bids for EU, LEP and national support
- Encouraging new models of commercial funding to support emerging sectors including the Agri-tech sector where Norfolk is a World leader

The strategy identifies:

- Emerging and existing sectors which can deliver long term growth and high value jobs
- Other sectors which are important to the future of the rural economy
- Key areas of enabling action (enablers) which are needed to deliver sustainable growth

Emerging and existing sectors

The long term focus for rural growth will be on four inter-related sectors with high Gross Value Added (GVA) per job and where Norfolk has globally competitive advantages:

- **Agriculture and the food chain** where Norfolk's commercial strength and World class research base will be used to deliver innovation, including: increased resources for high value crop production - water supplies and skilled employees; adding value to food by processing and marketing; creating new technology to increase agricultural productivity
- **Energy** where the largest offshore investment in the World is expected in the Southern North Sea creating thousands of new jobs both for those working offshore as well as those supporting the sector onshore. There is also potential to utilise agri-food waste streams, solar and small scale wind power on land to generate further renewable energy
- **Manufacturing and engineering** with rural Norfolk having a large concentration of businesses and a much higher proportion of its workforce in this sector than urban areas. Notable areas for growth include food processing, agri-tech and energy equipment
- **The knowledge economy** building on Norwich Research Park (NRP) and growth in the demand for knowledge based services to grow the agri-food, energy, manufacturing and engineering sectors. Unlocking this potential requires improved broadband, new skills and the development of improved links between rural businesses and the research base

Growth of these sectors requires entrepreneurship, and whilst much of this must come from Norfolk, it is important to attract new talent to the county. A **High Growth Rural Norfolk** programme will attract inward investors, professionals and skilled technicians to the county to help these sectors grow and deliver economic growth. Short term investment will focus on two areas related to these sectors where Norfolk could take a national lead:

- **Agri-food technology** - this is a major strength of Norfolk and will be used to lead a new green revolution in the UK by building on the cluster of businesses and research centres in this sector. The focus will be on addressing water, energy and nutrient supply challenges, genetics, diet and health, supply chain management and engineering
- **Healthy ageing technology and systems** - a partnership of NRP, Hethel, the NHS and businesses should be established to address the challenge of a rapidly ageing rural population by creating new technology, services and businesses through a healthy ageing programme to help rural Norfolk address its largest social challenge whilst simultaneously creating new jobs and increased economic output

Other sectors

Two further sectors will continue to be important to Norfolk's rural employment base in the long term, although there is a challenge in both to try to create more full time employment, increased wage levels and higher GVA per employee. These sectors are:

- **Tourism** by focusing on Norfolk's natural and built heritage to drive an increase in quality, season extension, and higher economic returns from the 34.6 million tourists who visit Norfolk each year (3.4m staying visitors, 31m day trippers), by increasing overnight stays, promoting local food, drink and crafts and by increasing the activities available
- **Services and social care** where the growth of the rural population, particularly the retired, will lead to increased demand for services in rural areas. Meeting demand will require policies to train employees for these roles, innovation in how services and social care are delivered and provision of affordable housing for those providing these services

Enablers

To deliver growth in these sectors of the economy a number of areas need to be addressed:

- **Meeting the skills challenge** - the Norfolk Employment and Skills Board should review the delivery of rural skills and co-ordinate a programme to help schools raise attainment by using professionals and rural business leaders to support school leadership.

Addressing skills gaps requires better careers advice and the delivery of more vocational education from 14+ to allow all young people to fulfil their potential whilst meeting industry needs. A range of solutions including remote access and online content are needed to help address under performance across all skill levels in rural parts of the county.

- **An enabling planning system** which encourages and supports jobs growth in rural Norfolk will deliver sustainable growth. Planning policy will focus on the creation of balanced communities where housing and population growth is matched by job creation. Creating new rural jobs will reduce pressure on key commuting routes and make rural communities more sustainable. The priority action is to ensure that both small and larger rural businesses are supported to grow so that they can provide high quality local jobs. Inward investors in rural areas will also be encouraged.
- **Improved connectivity** - the Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBfN) programme will make substantial progress in providing faster broadband to rural Norfolk by 2015. All available technologies must be used to close the gap in digital access, but there is a risk that some rural properties will fail to keep up with the pace of change in digital services in the longer term as currently only fibre based solutions can provide superfast access speeds.

Mobile access is also a critical issue in which parts of rural Norfolk have poor or even no service and the solutions are more challenging than for broadband. Norfolk County Council will review how best to address mobile phone access by working with businesses, community groups and telecoms providers.

Transport connectivity is also important and policy must recognise that rural transport will continue to be dominated by private transport, whilst supporting, where possible, the growth of community and public transport.

- **Green infrastructure** is vital to the future wellbeing of rural Norfolk, both inherently to support biodiversity, the natural environment and landscape, and also as an enabler of community health and wellbeing and to attract visitors to the county. As most of Norfolk is managed by private landowners, working with them and ensuring that they have the support and incentives to manage the environment effectively is essential. Rural Norfolk also needs to build greenspace and infrastructure into new developments and adopt effective adaptation strategies to cope with climate change.

Enabling Structures

Delivery of the strategy will be enhanced by supporting:

- **A Norfolk Rural Bid consortium** - to help rural businesses access potential funding. With established business groups such as NNBF, FSB, Chamber of Commerce, Anglia Farmers, NFU and the CLA there is scope to reach many thousands of rural businesses quickly and effectively with a funding updates. The objective would be to inform, broker and facilitate an increased number of good bids from Norfolk companies and consortia for national and EU funds.

In addition there is a need to develop a team which works to develop potential larger projects (even before the funding source is identified) so that rural Norfolk proactively develops innovative and substantial projects.

- **Leader Local Action Groups (LAGs)** - the role of LAGs will be extended by linking them to the Norfolk Rural Bid consortium, so that they help local businesses and communities access all the potential funds available to them. To maximize the efficiency with which LAGs can be supported a central county wide administrative system will be provided so that back office functions are delivered efficiently, allowing dedicated LAG staff in each Leader area to focus on supporting local projects.
- **A Communities for the Future Programme** will be established whereby at least one community in each district or Leader area is used to test new ways to create sustainable rural communities. These would focus on the priorities for vibrant communities including: increasing the quality and range of rural jobs to raise incomes; focusing on how to make rural areas attractive for young people and families (e.g. affordable housing) and developing new ways to deliver services to rural communities.
- **Business School Partnerships** - will be strengthened to raise aspirations and promote careers in rural business, with a programme to link businesses and schools. This will build on the work of other programmes such as Beacon East, Norfolk Knowledge, the Edge apprenticeship programme and existing work by Colleges.
- **Rural Enterprise Zones** - will support clusters of rural businesses. However, where these are developed and companies are provided with benefits through locating in an enterprise zone, they will be encouraged to provide benefits back to the local rural community e.g. by supporting local schools, providing work experience, taster sessions or mentoring. This will help to develop links between businesses and the community.

Acknowledgements

The Rural Development Strategy Steering Group and Norfolk County Council would like to thank all those who contributed to this strategy by attending the consultation events held in May and June 2013, by submitting ideas and comments online or by agreeing to be interviewed. In total over 200 people and organisations participated in the strategy development process, including representatives of businesses, business groups, community organisations, charities, environmental bodies, councillors and council staff.