

## **Appendix B**

### **Findings of the Rural Strategy Study Group Working Groups**

#### **Rural Economy**

1. This group was led by Martin Gawith from the Greater Nottingham Partnership (GNP). The GNP has been particularly active in supporting projects in rural areas and its rural action team continues to drive forward the rural agenda in the Greater Nottingham area.
2. The Working Group report on the rural economy reflects on the current situation in rural areas and on some of the positive and negative characteristics of rural areas which impact on economic activity. It pays particular attention to the migration of people from urban areas to rural communities and the effects that this has, including maintaining rolls at small local schools and taking up previously redundant farm buildings for residential or commercial use. The negative side to the 'urban' influx is that many of the incoming families rely heavily on urban areas for work and shopping leading to some villages becoming 'dormitories' and not reaping any significant economic benefit from their presence.
3. The report highlights the competitive advantages of rural locations from an economic perspective. These are defined as :
  - quality of life
  - access to local markets
  - ability to work close to home
  - traditional craft skills and tourism potential.

These advantages are seen as key to developing sustainable rural economies in Nottinghamshire.

4. In conclusion, the Working Group recognise that there are a diverse set of issues and opportunities faced by rural economies and that partners need to work together more closely if they are to be addressed and exploited. In terms of future priorities, the report suggests that the following areas be considered in any future economic regeneration activity :
  - Specialist support for rural SMEs and micro businesses;
  - Planning advice and support for rural buildings;
  - Encouraging innovation in retail and craft activities;
  - Transport initiatives linked to job opportunities;
  - Specialist food advice and support for local producers/markets;
  - Support for green tourism and the development of village tourism in the County.

## **Governance**

5. Ged Greaves from Newark and Sherwood District Council took the lead in looking at governance issues for rural communities, particularly with respect to Parish Councils. Newark and Sherwood District Council (NSDC) has the greatest rural area of any of the Nottinghamshire districts and is particularly active in developing and sustaining its work with 72 Parish Councils.
6. The Working Group found that Nottinghamshire has a large number of thriving Parish Councils and that some – and by no means all - of these are supported by both the Nottinghamshire Association of Local Councils (NALC) and their relevant District/Borough Councils. The group acknowledged that levels of support vary from district to district and that County Council engagement with the Parish Councils has been limited in recent years.
7. Common concerns raised by the Parishes at events such as Newark and Sherwood's twice yearly 'Parish Conference' are:
  - Support for village appraisals and parish plans;
  - Council tax levels;
  - Planning and Local Development Frameworks;
  - Housing and the rural environment.

The Working Group agreed that the Parish, District and County Councils all have an important part to play in these areas and that other partners should also be able to contribute their experience and knowledge.

8. The group noted that there is some concern at the County Council's perceived lack of engagement with Parish Councils and suggested ways that this could be addressed:
  - Developing a County-wide Parish Partnership
  - Hosting an annual County-wide Parish Councils' Conference
  - Attending district-based Parish Council conferences
  - Using Parish Council networks for consultation on County Council plans, strategies etc
9. That said, Parishes usually have good links with respective Departments over key issues for which the County Council has responsibility – for example with Environment over traffic / highways matters. Nottinghamshire also has some best practice examples which the group felt should be built upon and rolled out across the County. These include annual newsletters for the Parish Councils, Parish Plans workshops and Handbook, access for Parish Councils to district-hosted websites, the thriving and well-developed "Countylink" newsletter and a Parish Council Network. The Group recommends that all of these be investigated further and that the County

and District Councils should work together to ensure County-wide coverage of these initiatives in the future.

### **Access to services**

10. Lynda Ogilvie from NALC agreed to take forward work on Access to Services in rural communities. This Group acknowledged that this was a very significant issue for rural communities and that while the term 'access to services' is very wide-ranging (covering commercial services, community and health-related activities, education and transport) the people most at risk of poor access to services are young people and the elderly.
11. The Working Group agreed that the County Council and partners have made considerable progress in getting information across via the internet, but that many rural areas are still poorly served by broadband connections and public access computers are not widely available. Public transport was identified as a key barrier for rural communities, particularly for young people and the elderly who may not have access to private transport. The Group agreed that access to shops and leisure activities was also a key problem for many rural areas and that this has significant implications for people's quality of life.
12. Whilst many of Nottinghamshire's smaller rural communities do not have easy access to basic facilities such as a Post Office, shop or regular and reliable public transport, the Working Group recognised that there are some innovative good practice models already being delivered in Nottinghamshire, including :
  - The Rural Contact Service/County Contact, run as a joint initiative with the Nottinghamshire Constabulary, carries stocks of information leaflets and offers advice on crime prevention;
  - The Mobile Library service is a good example of taking the service to the community, and this works very well in rural areas. It also carries information leaflets about other services;
  - Various voluntary car schemes operate across the County;
  - Community shops – Warsop Vale has a community shop and post office, run by a paid manager. Both Elston and Flintham are proposing to run a community shop;
  - Bowbridge School has become a 'multi-use' centre, providing a cinema, health centre, sports facilities.
13. The Working Group concluded that the County Council and partners could usefully consider the following in planning their future work with rural communities:
  - Improving access to information through support for rural broadband initiatives;
  - Providing grants, advice and guidance to voluntary groups that deliver vital services in rural areas (i.e. luncheon clubs, village hall activities);
  - Investing in dedicated hard-standing areas with electricity and telephone access for mobile services vehicles;

- Optimising the use of existing facilities in rural areas (i.e. film showings, IT classes, leisure activities);
- Subsidising and investing in more rural transport schemes.

## **Land Use**

14. Dr Bob Middleton of the Nottinghamshire Rural Community Council, oversaw the Land Use Working Group. This Group's report gives a summary of current national, regional and local trends in housing and planning and notes that population growth in rural areas is higher than in urban areas, particularly in rural Greater Nottingham and around Newark. Demographically rural areas are ageing much faster than their urban counterparts and this was highlighted by the report.
15. Similarly, the group looked at reforms to the agriculture industry and the way in which these will impact on Nottinghamshire's rural communities and businesses. The major reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will drive change in the countryside, with reduced CAP subsidies for production and a new focus on sustainability and land management. The new Whole Farm Plans system in which farmers will develop their plans for land management, access and recreation are also flagged up in the report as an area for further consideration.
16. The Working Group also considered the land use issues around tourism and the Trent Valley, recognising that the Trent is a major asset for Nottinghamshire and recommending that the County Council and partners engage fully in future developments being planned by the On-Trent Partnership.
17. In conclusion, the Working Group report recommends further discussion between the County Council and partners around:
  - Settlement patterns and housing – a strategic approach is needed to address the wide range of issues that this raises;
  - Additional business support services for farmers to manage the CAP transition and support to attract new agricultural industries;
  - Rural access to broadband as a key factor in economic activity;
  - Procurement policies that benefit local farmers and producers;
  - Support for small scale tourism in rural areas, as this is currently not being addressed by Experience Nottinghamshire;
  - Rural isolation, stress and homelessness and relevant support services;
  - Environmental industries such as Wood Heat, which the County Council already supports.