

# Executive

## Cherwell Rural Strategy

17 November 2008

### Report of Head of Urban and Rural Services

#### Purpose of Report

To present the initial outcomes and findings from the consultation on the Draft Cherwell Rural Strategy and to consider the adoption of the main themes for the final document.

This report is public

#### Recommendations

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The Executive is recommended to:

- (1) Confirm the themes set out in the Draft Cherwell Rural Strategy, with the amendment to Theme C to: Provide Village Homes and Village Infrastructure, and Theme E to: Protect, Enhance & Increase Enjoyment of Cherwell's Natural & Historic Environment, for adoption in the final Cherwell Rural Strategy 2009-2014.
- (2) Receive a further report on the draft Strategy following a full analysis of the detailed responses.

#### Executive Summary

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- 1.1 The need for a Rural Strategy for Cherwell stems from the fact that Cherwell is predominantly rural in character and one third of the District's people live in rural communities. This is recognised in Theme 8 of the Cherwell Community Plan "Rural Focus".
- 1.2 The aim of the Strategy is to provide a framework for improvement across Cherwell's rural communities and countryside. Whilst many of the actions will be led by this Council, it is not solely the Council's plan, rather it is a bringing together of the many and disparate objectives of people and agencies that work, live and have an interest in the countryside and in Cherwell's rural communities. The overall vision is to work towards inclusive, sustainable rural communities in an inclusive, sustainable countryside.
- 1.3 The draft Strategy set out a number of key principles and themes that had emerged from a review of priorities for Cherwell's rural areas. The public consultation has been undertaken to secure feedback and a 'reality check' on

these principles, themes and the emerging issues, and to Identify specific actions required that will contribute to improving lives and the environment in rural Cherwell.

- 1.4 The collation and analysis of all responses will be a lengthy process as many respondents have made detailed comments in addition to indicating their approval or otherwise of the proposed principles, themes and issues. All views and contributions need to be taken into account in the revision process. The task now is to refine and focus the plan, establishing realistic actions and targets that this Council and its partners can deliver.
- 1.5 An initial analysis of the responses received so far indicates that the proposed underpinning principles, themes and issues presented in the draft are recognised by respondents as the key areas of focus for work to achieve the proposals.
- 1.6 In the meantime, the majority of the actions contained in the former Rural Strategy will continue over the intervening period to April 2009 when the new strategy commences as there is a close alignment between these actions and the underpinning principles of the emerging new strategy.
- 1.7 In order to secure better consistency with the developing Local Development Framework , it is proposed that theme C should be re-titled "Provide Village Homes and Village Infrastructure" and theme E should be re-titled "Protect, Enhance & Increase Enjoyment of Cherwell's Natural & Historic Environment. This does not affect any of the issues identified, but does place some of them under different theme headings.

## Background Information

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- 2.1 The Council's restructure and the establishment of a small Rural and Countryside Team (2 fte) within Urban and Rural Services has enabled the profile of this area of service to be raised and for the Team to be the catalyst to start effecting change. However, this is only one part of the Team's work with other key priority areas being providing ecological advice on planning applications, delivery of the Bio Diversity Action Plan and managing, promoting and maintaining the Council's circular walks portfolio.
- 2.2 This limited level of resource is a further reason why extensive consultation has been undertaken and why it is so important that the new Strategy is adopted by the wide range of organisations (including those represented on Cherwell Community Planning Partnership) that have an interest in rural life and the countryside. It will only be successful through the combined actions of all partners.
- 2.3 The previous Cherwell Rural Strategy covered the period 2002-2006. Since the 2002-2006 Strategy was written, national rural policies and delivery mechanisms have changed significantly. There are new responsibilities placed on councils through the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Council has also undergone considerable change with a refocus on key Strategic Priorities and a restructure into new Service Teams. Despite these changes, the former Rural Strategy is still a robust and relevant strategic framework and most actions arising from are still relevant and continue to be delivered.
- 2.4 During late 2007 and early 2008, research was commissioned and a series of preliminary consultations were undertaken with key partners, agencies and individuals. Based on this evidence, principles, themes and issues were identified and a draft Strategy was written.
- 2.5 In July 2008, the draft of an updated Rural Strategy was put out for public consultation (via the CDC website). Draft strategies and response forms were sent to all Cherwell Parish Councils, Cherwell District Councillors, all organisations belonging to the Cherwell Voluntary Organisations Forum and several other targeted groups and individuals. This consultation process came to an end in mid October 2008.
- 2.6 The draft Strategy contained five underpinning principles which are:
  - 1: Rural Proofing – We will seek to ensure that the rural dimension is explicitly considered in the development of all future strategic and service delivery plans (94% of respondents agree).
  - 2: Area Based Approach – we will develop a locality based approach, targeting resources at communities by reference to their particular needs (96% of respondents agree).
  - 3: Community Engagement – We will actively engage with and seek the views of rural residents and countryside users (96% of respondents agree).

- 4: Vulnerable and Disadvantaged People – We will seek to ensure equitable access to services and facilities for vulnerable and disadvantaged people. Where possible we will reduce vulnerability and the effects of disadvantage. (96% of respondents agree).
- 5: Sustainability, Climate Change & Resource Use – We will seek to improve the sustainability of rural communities and the countryside. We will seek to reduce impact on climate change and natural resources (86 % of respondents agree).
- 2.7 It should be noted that these principles have applied to varying degrees in the former Rural Strategy, hence its ongoing relevance. However, these principles are now explicit in the emerging strategy with a high level of community and agency support evident
- 2.8 The five main themes of the strategies are:
- Theme A: Improve rural services and facilities (84% of respondents strongly agree or agree).
  - Theme B: Develop thriving, inclusive rural communities (84.9% of respondents strongly agree or agree).
  - Theme C: Provide village homes and promote sensitive development (76.6% of respondents strongly agree or agree).
  - Theme D: Support a sustainable rural economy (75.6% of respondents strongly agree or agree).
  - Theme E: Protect, enhance and increase enjoyment of Cherwell's countryside. (88.8% of respondents strongly agree or agree).
- 2.9 The next stage of the exercise is to collate and analyse all the consultation responses from which a modified draft Strategy and action plan can be developed. It is intended to report the draft Strategy early in 2009 to the Executive for onward consideration by the Cherwell Community Planning Partnership prior to implementation from April 2009.

### **Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options**

The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

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| <b>Option One</b> | Adopt the proposed Principles and Themes as set out in the Draft Strategy (incorporating the theme title revisions suggested by HPAHP) |
| <b>Option Two</b> | Revise the proposed Principles and Themes based on any key issues arising from the consultation process.                               |

### **Consultations**

The draft of an updated Rural Strategy was put out for public

consultation (via the CDC website). Draft strategies and response forms were sent to all Cherwell Parish Councils, Cherwell District Councillors, all organisations belonging to the Cherwell Voluntary Organisations Forum and several other targeted groups and individuals.

## Implications

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**Financial:** There are no financial effects arising directly from this report. Delivery of the actions will require commitment from partners. Actions that are the responsibility of the Council will be developed through the 2009/10 Service and Financial Planning process which includes a proposal for additional Countryside Officer to assist in delivering the Rural Strategy across Cherwell.

Comments checked by Karen Muir, Service Accountant 01295 221545

**Legal:** There are no issues arising from this report.

Comments checked by Liz Howlett, Head of Legal and Democratic Services 01295 221686.

**Risk Management:** There are no significant risks to the Council arising from this report.

Comments checked by Rosemary Watts, Risk Management & Insurance Officer, 01295 221566

## Wards Affected

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All

## Corporate Plan Themes

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**A District of Opportunity**  
**A Cleaner Greener Council**  
**A Safe and Healthy Cherwell**  
**An Accessible, Value for Money Council**

## Executive Portfolio

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**Councillor Nigel Morris**  
**Portfolio Holder for Urban and Rural Services**

## Document Information

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Appendix No	Title
None	
<b>Background Papers</b>	
Draft Rural Strategy 2009-2014	
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