

Executive

Cherwell Rural Strategy

2 February 2009

Report of Head of Urban and Rural Services

Purpose of Report

To consider the final draft Rural Strategy and Delivery Plan, and to consider appointing a Rural Champion. To commend the Rural Strategy and Delivery Plan to the Cherwell Community Planning Partnership.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended to:

- (1) To recommend to Council the approval of the final draft Cherwell Rural Strategy 2009-2014 and the Delivery Plan.
- (2) Approve the appointment of the Executive Member for Urban and Rural Services to lead the delivery of the Strategy as Cherwell District Council's "Rural Champion".
- (3) Commend the final draft Cherwell Rural Strategy 2009-2014 and the Delivery Plan to the Cherwell Community Planning Partnership.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 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 its 73 rural parishes.

Proposal

- 1.2 It is proposed that the Rural Strategy is agreed by the Council and the Cherwell Community Planning Partnership to provide a framework for improvement and support across Cherwell's rural communities and countryside. Whilst many of the actions will be led by this Council, it is a Cherwell area plan. It flows from the Cherwell Community Plan (Cherwell Sustainable Community Strategy) and as such is owned by the Cherwell Community Planning Partnership.

Conclusion

The Rural Strategy 2009-2014 and the Delivery Plan, which sets out detailed actions, will be part of the strategic framework that helps deliver the rural themes in Cherwell's Community Plan.

Background Information

- 2.1 The Council's restructure and the establishment of a small Rural and Countryside Team (2 full time equivalent staff) 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 placing demands on the Team's time which will limit capacity to deliver the actions that are set out in the Rural Strategy.
- 2.2 This limited level of resource is one of the reasons 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 of Cherwell. 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. The Council has also undergone considerable change with a refocus on key Strategic Priorities and a restructure into new Service Teams.
- 2.4 During 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 Council's website). Draft strategies and response forms were sent to all Cherwell parish councils, Cherwell 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.

Feedback and Strategy Development

- 2.6 Executive received a report and draft of the Cherwell Rural Strategy 2009-2014 at its December 2008 meeting, where the early emerging issues from consultation were reported.
- 2.7 Since this report the consultation feedback has been collated, analysed and reviewed and the final draft Strategy presents the themes, issues, objectives and aims that have emerged from this and from the review of other strategies that impact on rural communities. Overall the consultation results strongly endorsed the vision, underpinning principles and objectives of the draft Strategy. However several issues were raised that have led to adjustments in the final draft and influenced actions set out in the Delivery Plan.

- 2.8 The overall Vision of the Strategy is to work towards “Inclusive, sustainable rural communities in an inclusive, sustainable countryside”. The first draft of the Strategy did not explain or define this Vision, and some consultees commented that it was not meaningful. The final draft Strategy defines an inclusive, sustainable rural community as an active community where everyone has the opportunity to participate and can access the services and facilities they need. It defines an inclusive, sustainable countryside as a productive, economically viable countryside, where the needs of farming, conservation and development are appropriately balanced and where everyone has the opportunity to enjoy accessible outdoor recreation.
- 2.9 The essential underpinning principle of the Strategy is “Rural Proofing”, a commitment to explicitly consider the rural dimension in all future strategic and service delivery plans. The consultation returned 98% agreement with this principle. In essence, Rural Proofing is ensuring equal opportunity in our rural areas.
- 2.10 Several consultees made comments related to development planning and the Local Development Framework (LDF). In the final draft of the Rural Strategy particular emphasis has been given to explaining the relationship with the LDF, both in the introductory section and within each applicable objective. To provide a better fit with the LDF the issue of sensitive development has moved from Theme C to Theme E, so that landscape and built environments are within the same objective.

Principles and Themes

- 2.11 The Rural Strategy cuts across many service areas, so other strategies and plans may already be addressing related issues. Linked strategies and plans are signposted under each objective set out in the Themes.
- 2.12 The Strategy has 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.
 - 2: Locality Based Approach – We will develop a locality based approach, targeting resources at communities by reference to their particular needs.
 - 3: Community Engagement – We will actively engage with and seek the views of rural residents and countryside users.
 - 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.
 - 5: Sustainability, Climate Change & Resource Use – We will seek to improve the sustainability of rural communities and the countryside, and to reduce the impact on climate change and natural resources.

2.13 The five main themes of the Strategy are:

- Theme A: Improve Rural Services and Facilities
- Theme B: Develop Thriving, Inclusive Rural Communities
- Theme C: Provide Village Homes and Secure Village Infrastructure
- Theme D: Support a Thriving Rural Economy
- Theme E: Preserve, Enhance & Increase Enjoyment of the Rural Environment.

Delivery Plan and Strategy Review

2.14 The Strategy document (attached to this report) is supported by a detailed Delivery Plan which sets actions with specific, measurable targets over the five year life of the Strategy. Many are unique to the Rural Strategy, but some are carried across from other strategies and “rural proofed.” Input to the detailed Delivery Plan has been made by many organisations and has been considered by the Executive Member for Urban and Rural Services. It is available in the members Room but is not attached to this report due to its size and complexity.

2.15 Each year, performance against the Delivery Plan targets will be assessed, reported to the Cherwell Community Planning Partnership (CCPP) and published on the Cherwell District Council Website.

2.16 Development of the Delivery Plan actions will be influenced by feedback from the CCPP, parish input, individual representations and changing circumstances. New actions will be added, or existing ones amended to reflect successes, lessons learned, and new opportunities. Once the Delivery Plan is published it is likely that the proposed actions will spark further suggestions from interested parties, and that these can be considered for inclusion as part of the annual review process.

Following Executive consideration, it is intended to report the Strategy to 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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| Option One | Approve the Final Draft Strategy and Delivery Plan and appointment of the Executive Member for Urban and Rural Services to become the Council’s ‘Rural Champion’. Commend the final draft Strategy & Delivery Plan to the CCPP |
| Option Two | Propose further revisions to the draft and delegate final approval to the Executive Member for Urban and Rural Services.
Propose an alternative Member as the Council’s Rural Champion. |

Consultations

Extensive consultation with key agencies and partners has been undertaken (listed at appendix 1 of the Strategy)

Implications

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 and future years Service and Financial Planning process.

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

All

Corporate Plan Themes

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

Executive Portfolio

Councillor Nigel Morris
Portfolio Holder for Urban and Rural Services

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
None	
Background Papers	
Final Draft Rural Strategy 2009-2014 (available in Members room)	
Draft Rural Strategy Delivery Plan 2009 /10	
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