

Rural Northamptonshire: A Plan



September 2016

Introduction

Northamptonshire has a diverse rural economy with a rich heritage and attractive landscape. The market towns, interspersed by small villages, serve the purpose of forming the main commercial and social centres for the surrounding countryside. Agriculture is the main industry in rural areas supporting a high proportion of micro and small businesses both directly and indirectly. There are however some pockets of hidden deprivation and, in more sparsely populated areas with a limited access to transport and services as well as modern infrastructure such as broadband. With continuing resource pressures, the growth of the knowledge economy, climate change, an ageing but wealthier population, new industries and new ways to communicate and purchase goods and services are just some of the issues and opportunities rural Northamptonshire faces.

Northamptonshire's Rural Plan has been developed in partnership between key representatives of sectors important to the rural economy in the county. The process was launched at NEP's Rural Conference held in June 2015 and sets out a framework for further collective action that will seek to address the issues and challenges facing the County's rural communities.

The delivery of the recommendations for action in Northamptonshire will be dependent upon working with partners across the county. All of those who live within, work in or support rural communities have a role in its delivery. Northamptonshire over the next 15 years and provide the infrastructure which could potentially release over 80,000 new homes.



Northamptonshire - Its rural landscape and environment

The key trends are as follows:

- Agriculture is the principal land user with 77% of Northamptonshire's land area in farming; the County has a high proportion of area in active land management for conservation with just less than 70% of land across in an environmental management scheme.
- Recreational use of land in and around rural communities has become increasingly significant, but such land is not used as widely as it might be by all groups in England's multicultural society.
- There is a growing use of rural land for energy generation, principally through wind farms and biomass, and this is a key focus of debate. Water mills are also being considered as a potential source of local renewable energy in some locations.

Key Opportunities

- Promoting the County's important rural natural assets that include the Nene Valley and the Rockingham Forest and its strong historical heritage.
- Strengthening and increasing habitat networks and appropriate recreational provision for the surrounding urban communities.
- Further utilisation of natural assets in a sustainable manner as a renewable energy resource.
- Collaborative working between landowners and statutory organisations to join up existing environmental schemes to enable further added value to the environment.

Key Challenges

- Retaining the sense of place in light of ongoing pressure for development growth, and protecting and enhancing key features such as the many heritage assets, meadows, woodlands and hedgerows in the light of new development, continuing gravel extraction and the pressure to produce more food.
- The impact of climate change on those living and working in the county and the effect on biodiversity.
- As a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU it is likely that this will have an impact on the biodiversity and benefits to the countryside as future uncertainty on agri-environment land management schemes is paramount across the sector.

Living in rural Northamptonshire

The key trends are as follows:

- Northamptonshire is a predominantly rural county situated in the heart of England with a growing population of just over 700,000. Over half the population of the county are living in sparsely populated areas which are classified as rural. It is one of the fastest growing areas but has an ageing population.
- Access to key infrastructural services, housing transport and broadband is particularly poor in the more rural areas of the county.

Key Opportunities

- A fast and growing population, of which a high percentage are retirees who have chosen to move into the rural areas.
- Utilise the Broadband roll out to enable more people to work from home and improve work/life balance.
- Re-localise rural services to support the local communities.
- Planning gain that will stem from increased building projects to meet the high demand for additional affordable homes to be recirculated in the rural economy to support improved local services.

Key Challenges

- A rapidly changing demographic in population putting pressure on local services and infrastructure.
- Pockets of rural deprivation masked by the more wealthy and affluent inhabitants.
- Infrastructure requirement's such as schools, roads and community facilities and locally based employment to make growth really sustainable.
- Current planning policy restricts around rural building conversion affecting economic growth in rural areas.

Working in rural Northamptonshire

There are a number of recognisable general characteristics of the economy in Northamptonshire's rural areas today:

- Income levels are often higher than those in urban communities; rural wealth is often generated outside the countryside where people live, from work and economic activity in urban areas.
- More remote rural communities have lower levels of household income, but even in less remote communities, one in six households are in income poverty.
- Rural communities have much lower unemployment levels than urban communities, especially in the smaller settlements.
- Rural communities exhibit higher levels of business and entrepreneurial activity.

Key Opportunities

- Further growth and development of micro and SME's.
- Extend support to agriculture, food and tourism sectors to expand and increase GVA further.
- Increase training opportunities to up skill the workforce including promotion of apprenticeships in key rural sectors.
- Promote the county as a place to live, work and play.

Key Challenges

- Low skilled workforce
- Low wages in rural areas
- Difficult for start-up, micro & SMEs to access capital funds to support development

The rural areas in Northamptonshire have an enormous potential to substantially increase their economic contribution for the county. The benefits with improved infrastructure and supply chain development across all economic sectors would provide rural households and residents the opportunity of a broader range of jobs on offer and by increasing incomes to close the gap which currently exists. It would also make attractive the offer to live and work in these areas. This in turn would make communities more sustainable as a more local workforce would help to justify investment in local services by both the private and public sector. By reducing the need to travel would lead to reduced carbon emissions and less road congestion. This would be beneficial to the environment.

In developing the Rural Plan, the following **key themes** that emerged from the Rural Conference in Northamptonshire and a baseline study of the county have been identified as:

Infrastructure and Housing:

Ensuring suitable housing and infrastructure is in place to enable economic growth including roads, commercial property, transport, utilities and broadband.



Economic Growth:

Providing rural businesses with appropriate support to ensure the development and diversification of a dynamic and innovative rural economy, and ensuring the development of a strong brand to promote Northamptonshire.



Social Environment:

Promoting and supporting the employment and skills needs within the rural economy.



Natural Environment:

Protecting and enhancing the environmental assets of the county to support sustainable development.



From these themes the Rural Plan has set a number of priorities.

Theme

Priorities

Infrastructure and Housing

Ensuring suitable infrastructure is in place to enable economic growth including roads, transport, utilities and broadband.

To support the development of an efficient travel and transport system that facilitates effective and safe rural - urban routes for all users.

To promote fair and equitable access to broadband for all rural dwellers and businesses.

To ensure rural housing and property needs are addressed.

Economic Growth

Providing rural businesses with appropriate support to ensure the development and diversification of a dynamic and innovative rural economy, and ensuring the development of a strong brand to promote Northamptonshire.

To ensure rural businesses have access to appropriate business support to support the growth of a vibrant rural economy.

To strengthen and develop the supply chain for food and drink producers and processors in the county from "plough to plate".

To provide support to agri related businesses to develop innovative solutions to take the industry forward in the 21st Century.

To diversify and modernise rural tourism products to generate business opportunities suited to local environments and communities and to develop a year round visitor offer that meet 21st Century needs.

Social Environment

Promoting and supporting the employment and skills needs within the rural economy.

To seek to maximise employment opportunities for those living in the rural areas.

To attract youth and the younger workforce back into rural areas.

Natural Environment

Protecting and enhancing the environmental assets of the county to support sustainable development.

To support the safeguarding of the beauty and fabric of our rural area and increase opportunities for all to enjoy the benefits of the countryside.

To support the development of a more sustainable environmental sector and enhancing agri-environmental links.

To utilise and protect natural assets to combat against the effect of climate change.

Northamptonshire has reviewed key national documents to ensure that there is an alignment with the policy direction whilst developing the Rural Plan.

The two key documents were:

In 2015 DEFRA launched its Productivity Plan which highlighted the following key priorities for rural areas:

- Rural areas fully connected to the wider economy.
- A highly skilled rural workforce.
- Strong conditions for rural business growth.
- Easier to live and work in rural areas.
- Greater local control.

In September 2015 DEFRA launched its plan for developing a 25 Year Food and Farming Plan. Defra also launched the development of a 25 Year Plan for the Environment.

- Both Plans are due for publication in late 2016.

This Rural Plan for Northamptonshire is intended to be a living document. Whilst many of the ideas it sets out are forward looking, it is recognised that solutions will evolve and change due to new technology or changes in government policy and economic and social conditions. It will capture these changes and identify new, more appropriate solutions to the emerging political circumstances.

It is important to recognise that change is constant. Policy making and intervention must respect the changes we are seeing in the way people want to live and actively empower them to participate in the decision making process.

The Plan therefore identifies the most important issues facing rural areas and suggests areas in which intervention and support will aid further sustainable growth.

The Rural Plan: Themes & Priorities



THEME 1 – Infrastructure and Housing: Ensuring suitable housing and infrastructure is in place to enable economic growth including roads, commercial property, transport, utilities and broadband.

Priority	Issue	Action	Position in June 2016	Lead Partner
To support the development of an efficient travel and transport system that facilitates effective and safe rural - urban routes for all users.	Increasing lack of rural buses/ public transport servicing rural communities.	Review current Community Transport Schemes and identify successes, issues, gaps and opportunities across rural Northamptonshire.	Issues to be flagged with Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) as transport authority. The Environment Agency(EA) presented at the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) re: ongoing maintenance of Nene Structures (shared benefits) – to discuss physical connections required to bring tourists directly to businesses.	NCC as transport authority in conjunction with Northamptonshire CALC.
To promote fair and equitable access to broadband for all rural dwellers and businesses.	There remains harder to reach or white areas in the rural parts of the county for both broadband and mobile phone coverage.	Review Defra 2015 Plan and commend the proposed Defra consultation process and mapping to start urgently. Explore alternative technology solutions to reach parts not covered with conventional provision.	Initial discussion in April 2016 with NCC and Rural Task Force to flag the issues in rural areas. NCC position on roll out available on the Superfast Northamptonshire website.	NCC to lead on the public sector element of the roll out as part of Phase 3 of the Superfast Broadband project.
To ensure rural housing and property needs are addressed.	Rural planning and housing stock – lack of affordable housing in rural areas. Lack of suitable commercial premises.	Engagement with Local Authorities (LAs) and Local Housing Associations to flag up the rural issues and prompt discussion and policy change. Explore and promote best practice from other LEP areas.	Continue to work with Local Planning Authorities to highlight rural housing needs and promote the benefits of rural building conversions.	District Local Authorities as planning authorities in conjunction with Northamptonshire CALC.

THEME 2 – Economic Growth: To provide rural businesses with appropriate support to ensure the development and diversification of a dynamic and innovative rural economy, and to ensure the development of a strong brand to promote Northamptonshire.

Priority	Issue	Action	Position in June 2016	Lead Partner
To ensure rural businesses have access to appropriate business support to support the growth of a vibrant rural economy.	Micro and small businesses in rural areas need additional help and support to ensure they survive and thrive.	<p>Ensure that the Growth Hub embeds the need to support rural businesses within their services.</p> <p>Encourage and signpost regular network opportunities.</p> <p>Provision of a one-page guide for rural funding for businesses.</p>	<p>Rural Funding Guide published and available on the SEMLEP website.</p> <p>Northamptonshire Growth Hub have been advised of the needs of rural businesses and this has been incorporated into the ERDF project which is due to be contracted.</p>	Northamptonshire Growth Hub as the main point of contact for business support.
To strengthen and develop the supply chain for food and drink producers and processors in the county from “plough to plate”.	Identify if there is a need for further Food Enterprise Zones within the County?	<p>Work with local partnerships to identify the need and ability to develop a Food Enterprise Zone (EZ) Plan.</p> <p>Identify possible sites in either Daventry District or East Northants to develop local food hubs such as in Market Harborough called edibLE16 www.edible16.org.uk</p>	Initial discussions have taken place that has established there is some appetite to develop an EZ around Moulton College but would require further development work to explore.	Moulton College in conjunction with District Council.
	Support to grow food and drink businesses through the development of the supply chain from farm to fork to ensure long term sustainability.	<p>Develop a “Northamptonshire Food and Farming Strategy”.</p> <p>Development of Local Supply Produce Supply Chains, e.g. revisit the Venison Supply Chain project; links to the Malt barley project being discussed under the Food & Drink Sector Strategy Board.</p> <p>Link up with formally “Love British Food”, an umbrella promoting local produce: www.lovebritishfood.co.uk</p>	<p>Food and drink is being promoted as a key sector to support via EAFRD Growth Programme and LEADER funding.</p> <p>Made in Northamptonshire (MIN) hosted two “meet the buyer” events in 2015/16 and celebrated Northants produce at Beckwith Emporium.</p> <p>NFU have developed with Mallows Company and sponsors Weetabix Growers Group a Farm Innovation Award under the Carlsberg UK Northamptonshire Food and Drink Awards umbrella.</p>	National Farmers Union (NFU) & the Country Land & Business Association (CLA). Northamptonshire’s Food & Drink Sector Strategy Board, MIN.
	The supermarkets are key markets but the local providence is often lost.	Grown and Made into Northamptonshire (MIN) Food Open Farm –links into Open Farm Sunday & school visits – to showcase the supply chain of the raw ingredient into a product.	11th June 2017 Open Farm Sunday, look to build upon 2016 events and link closely into MIN and Enterprise Advisors, promotion within schools and local communities.	MIN & NFU, Enterprise Advisors.
	Need to engage with local businesses to develop a stronger and more sustainable supply chain for these businesses.	<p>“Meet the Farmer” events: growing producers to meet those making products ‘Grown and Made in Northamptonshire’ is a stamp that can be used in marketing.</p> <p>Showcase Event – enable producers in the county to showcase the range and diversity of the products they have to develop relationships and local supply chain links – grown and made in Northamptonshire.</p> <p>Link directly and review the Directory of Grown in Northamptonshire – building on the successful Made in Northamptonshire (MIN) directory, showcase the opportunities to source your ingredients from Northamptonshire.</p>	<p>Moulton College have been awarded the funds to construct a Food & Drink Academy which is likely to be completed in 2018.</p> <p>MIN have built upon number of county events to present a wider range of opportunities for local producers to present their products e.g. Althorp Food Show.</p>	<p>MIN</p> <p>National Farmers Union (NFU) & the Country Land & Business Association (CLA).</p> <p>Northamptonshire’s Food & Drink Sector Strategy Board.</p>

THEME 2 – Economic Growth: To provide rural businesses with appropriate support to ensure the development and diversification of a dynamic and innovative rural economy, and to ensure the development of a strong brand to promote Northamptonshire.

Priority	Issue	Action	Position in June 2016	Lead Partner
To provide support to agri related businesses to develop innovative solutions to take the industry forward in the 21st Century.	Increased need to innovate food and farming industry through technological development to meet the demands, economically and environmentally, of the 21st Century and to improve productivity.	Provide and promote agri-tech courses specific to innovation and technology in the farming sector.	Moulton College have introduced the Basis Foundation course in Agronomy and a new BSc in Agricultural Technologies. Also support PhD level research in areas including: animal welfare, equine studies and agriculture.	Moulton College, NFU & CLA, LEP.
		Provide higher levels of agricultural apprenticeships. Improve precision farming technology to support for example innovative soil management techniques. Develop a Northants Agri-Tech initiative to look at innovative solutions through R&D and knowledge transfer.	NFU has had preliminary meeting on apprenticeships at Moulton. NFU has publicised the availability of rural development funding to farmer.	
	Increase knowledge transfer provision between key commodity producers and Development Companies, and promotion of best practice agri-tech and food incubator facilities.	Host an event focusing on Agri-technologies to explore the potential application and transformational capacity of new technologies whilst exploring opportunities for collaboration across a wider geography such as with neighbouring LEPS. Utilise Development Companies, e.g. AHDB Cereals and Oilseeds regional advisers to help develop ideas.	Moulton College planning an agri tech event in 2016/17.	Moulton College, NFU, and the LEP.
To diversify and modernise rural tourism products to generate business opportunities suited to local environments and communities and to develop a year round visitor offer that meet 21st Century needs.	Increase visitor numbers and spend in the county through maintaining and improving physical connections and developing the tourist overnight stay market.	Support the work of Destination Nene Valley (DNV). Ensure integration with the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy in order that the following is included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand image for the County • Green tourism links along the river and through the countryside. • Improvements to river and cycle access routes to create a linked network. • Mapping of all tourist attractions, historic and wildlife sites, tourism businesses, etc. Utilise 'attract and disperse' marketing to encourage urban and rural connectivity to help deliver growth and spread the benefits of growth (particularly important to grow business tourism in rural areas). Develop existing and new visitor activities and experiences that are less weather dependent, appeal to visitors throughout the year and reflect and support the local area (i.e. not imported in). Support development of traditional and new low impact and low carbon products and experiences in rural areas informed by consumer trends and behaviours (e.g. walking, cycling, Glamping, tepees, yurts, camping huts and shielings; slow tourism; outdoor concerts; museums and parks at night) and suited to local environments and communities.	DNV continues to roll out the Nene Valley brand in all marketing activity. The East Northamptonshire Greenway is being developed in phases, some of which are already completed and others will follow within the next few years. Mapping of all tourist attractions completed for the Nene Valley. Attract and disperse: one of the flagship projects is Nene Valley Festival. Now in 3rd year, it is one of the projects that will be supported through the Nenescape Heritage Lottery Funding. Festival undertaken in September to extend the summer season and support local businesses. Rushden Lakes will be a gateway to the Nene Valley: looking at opportunities around the Lakes to encourage repeat visits /longer stays. Less weather dependent. Developing Nene Valley app for visitors to enjoy all year round activities and experiences. Also developing packages and thematic itineraries for visitors. There are plans to develop the Festival further to include overnight stays e.g. glamping, tepees etc.	The LEP & Destination Nene Valley.

THEME 3 – Social Environment: Promoting and supporting the employment and skills needs within the rural economy

Priority	Issue	Action	Position in June 2016	Lead Partner
To seek to maximise employment opportunities for those living in the rural areas.	Raise the profile of locally produced food and drink and the opportunities it presents as an industry from primary school children upwards.	Link the programmes undertaken by FACE, Countryside Classroom, Why Farming Matters and Countryside Learning with workplace skills programmes to provide a joined up approach across the county of linking schools and farm, forestry and food producers and processors in the county.	Information shared with all schools in the county as part of communication from the 2016 Enterprise Advisor Programme.	The LEP.
To attract youth and the younger workforce back into rural areas.	Attracting young people to work in the rural economy including returning graduates to the County after University.	Ensure that the LEP promotes and includes the rural industry at careers events around rural Northamptonshire and jobs on offer, promotion of apprenticeships. Increase the number of rural ambassadors.	Details of the Workplace Skills programmes available have been sent out via rural networks to increase the number of rural ambassadors.	The LEP.

THEME 4 – Natural Environment: Protect and enhance the environmental assets of the county to support sustainable development.

Priority	Issue	Action	Position in June 2016	Lead Partner
To support the safeguarding of the beauty and fabric of our rural area and increase opportunities for all to enjoy the benefits of the countryside.	Promote Food, Environment and Tourism in a holistic manner to give a value within economic sector. Link between the increased enjoyment of the countryside and Destination Nene initiative.	Build on work carried out by the Nene Valley Area Improvement Partnership linking to the work undertaken by the Nenescape HLF bid and the Nene Valley Catchment Partnership. Link to potential EAFRD LEADER and Growth Programme funding opportunities to fund food, tourism and access projects.	Both EAFRD Growth Programme and the LEADER groups in the county are promoting sustainable tourism as a key sector to support. The Nenescape HLF bid and the Nene Valley Catchment Partnership are taking forward parts of this objective. Catchment Partnership: in June 2016 WFD GiA funding was allocated via the EA & Nene Catchment Partnership to 2 urban parks (Aberdare Rd, and Billing Brook) projects in Northampton. In addition, WFD GiA funding has also been allocated to the Nene Backwaters Restoration Project to prepare these sites for future implementation.	Northamptonshire Local Nature Partnership via the LEP & EA on the Task & Finish Group.
To support the development of a more sustainable environmental sector and enhancing agri-environmental links.	Lack of incentives at local level to protect and enhance the environment as loss of Environmental Stewardship Scheme.	Promotion of the benefits of farming in an environmentally sensitive manner.	In June 2016 WFD GiA was allocated via the EA & Nene Catchment Partnership to the Nene & Welland CSF Partnership to support actions on the ground to address rural diffuse pollution. Eco Systems work, via Uni of Northants is demonstrating value – lead to local payment system.	NFU & MIN ; Work of Catchment Sensitive Farming officer (who sits on the T&F group) & Natural England (administer Countryside Stewardship programme).
	Utilise natural assets in a more sustainable manner such as deer and woodland.	Development of managing, marketing and processing wild venison projects, following success of the East of England's 2009 RDPE Project, utilising LEADER funding.	One of five FC/NE priority areas for deer management covers Rockingham Forest. The joint grant from Forestry Commission and Natural England to the Deer Initiative is to enable collaborative culls, to reduce the damage caused by deer in Ancient Woodlands. In the Yardley Whittlebury LCA, FC is currently working with the Woodland Trust looking at woodland creation opportunities. Across Northants there are currently 4 woodland creation applications which, should they all get funding and be planted, will generate just over 51 hectares of new woodland in Northants. FC is also involved in a project utilising trees to reduce diffuse pollution in the Harpers Brook area this through a Catchment Sensitive Farming partnership (referenced above) involving EA, NE, FC and WT.	Forestry Commission, CLA, The National Trust, & Rockingham Forest & Boughton Estate & other landowners.

THEME 4 – Natural Environment: Protect and enhance the environmental assets of the county to support sustainable development.

Priority	Issue	Action	Position in June 2016	Lead Partner
To utilise and protect natural assets to combat against the effect of climate change.	Dangers from climate change, e.g. flooding.	Develop links to existing groups e.g. NCC Natural Flood Management Aspirations and the Northants Climate Change Officers Group, to be made through the Northants LNP.	<p>Lincs & Northants RFCC have agreed funding for the Water Friendly Farming Project in Rutland / Leics.</p> <p>This project could have a direct benefit by sharing its learning with Northants. This project opportunity to resolve local rural flooding issues as well as providing ecological benefit was able to use examples of Section 19 Flood Investigation sites within Northants as part of its pitch to the RFCC.</p> <p>The three actions in the Northamptonshire Climate Change Action Plan are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone – support the implementation and development of low carbon and environmental development as part of the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone. • Support the development of decentralised energy parks across the county. • Continue to embed ‘planning to adapt’ activities into public sector process, practices, and policies. 	Environment Agency, NCC as Lead Local Flood Authority.
	Increasing energy costs.	Investigate potential for linked hydropower projects link to the Nene Hydro Group (a group of Mill owners interested in hydro several years ago).	The EA, who has a responsibility to regulate hydropower applications/permits continue to work with Mill owners to explore the development of sustainable hydropower schemes that meet all regulatory requirements whilst ensuring that the environment is protected.	Environment Agency.

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