

Reviewing Economic Development Policy in Rural areas

Recommendations

1. Scrutiny welcomes the Cabinet's review of the report by Hill Consulting on [Tourism](#) and that of Devon County Council [[Devon Towns Study](#)] but is concerned about the gap in housing affordability
2. In view of the economic turbulence, energy crisis, inflation and food chain disruptions, to urgently review the Corporate Strategy for the AONB and rural areas of the District
3. Embed a focus on sustainability, 'green' best practice and accessibility across the rural area., linking policy and support for businesses with planning for homes, business space, digital and physical infrastructure and energy.

Background

The rural areas of EDDC contain a majority of the population and businesses of East Devon. In 2019 Overview requested the development of a Rural Strategy. The new Local Plan is due for consultation in October 2022. The Cabinet is due to review a Tourism policy on September 7th. However the Portfolio holder and Strategic lead Officer dealing with economic development have both indicated that there is no capacity for developing a Rural Economic Strategy. This was requested by Overview Committee in 2017 and again requested by Overview in January 2020 before the Pandemic shifted priorities.

Recognising that the challenges are complex; not only is there a shortage of skilled labour but additionally there are difficulties in accessing affordable accommodation for current and future employees and there is a lack of public transport to many businesses and tourism venues in rural areas. It is not surprising that there are high vacancies in the health and the care sector and hospitality and both latter sectors are particularly low wage and vital to the District. The stakeholder reports which informed these strategic recommendations below have come about because the current economic and employment situation, especially for Health, Care and Hospitality, is very challenging, with widespread vacancies across the district.

Recently the All-Party Parliamentary Committee issued a report on the rural economy (Levelling up the rural economy April 2022) dealing with the issues which have also been covered more specifically by a report by HOTSW (THE SW RURAL PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION) and another by DCC on the rural economy.

The issues covered are summarised here and Scrutiny is asked to comment on the need for an EDDC Rural Strategy, which issues should be explored if any and how .

Rural Business sectors are now similar to urban sectors with agriculture now quite small as a proportion of employment. Rural areas have more businesses and more start-ups per head of population than urban areas. Rural firms have a higher likelihood of exporting their goods and services; display higher levels of self-employment and entrepreneurial activity

and have higher growth rates in knowledge-intensive businesses. This includes business and financial services which now account for a quarter of rural economic output. Rural Businesses contain a greater proportion of employees in manufacturing; and have higher employment rates⁹

An important element in the growing differentiation and diversification of rural areas is their response to changing consumption patterns, whereby rising income levels have led to increased spending on the leisure goods and services offered in rural areas.

Four key variables were identified as being robust drivers of productivity that we can be most sure of have a strong influence:

- 1 Business start ups per 1,000 population ▲
- 2 Number of employees per business unit ▲
- 3 Capital investment per work force job ▲
- 4 Proportion of employees who are in public service ▼

Sustainable Rural Community Development

Rural areas have the very real potential to become an economic powerhouse of creativity, enterprise and opportunity through the balanced use of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Landscapes and the environment must not be damaged, but without sensible and well-designed sustainable development the countryside will not be able to offer the jobs, housing and services that are vital for its communities to survive.

A new approach to rural economic development is emerging nationally:

| | Old approach | New Approach |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Objectives | Equalisation, farm income, farm competitiveness | Competitiveness of rural areas, value added to local assets and produce, exploitation of unused resources multifunctional use of land assets |
| Key target sector | Agriculture | Various sectors of rural economies (rural tourism, food, manufacturing, Knowledge Industry etc.) |
| Main tools | Subsidies | Subsidies, Investments and Community Volunteers |
| Key actors | National governments, farmers | All levels of government (European, UK and local), various local stakeholders (Public, Private, Social Enterprises and Community Stakeholders) |

Businesses in UK towns and villages are 99% small or micro hence the need for a clear policy. In your Local Plan you will have planning policies to help such industries develop and hopefully special rural farm policies to help succession from parents to children and then to retain skilled generations by skills transfer from older to younger.

However all too often there are no specific Economic Development policy for Rural areas to match in with your Local Plan and Corporate aspirations

National and local surveys show that the main constraints on rural business are IT, Planning permissions, labour and workspace.

In respect of office workspace, the bulk of availability is often centred around the cities and larger towns, with small amounts of lower quality space available in rural towns and villages. Typically, the modern space available is purpose built office space with a good quality specification. Other conventional office accommodation across an area tends to be poorly specified but more cost effective. In both cases space is normally let on long term leases, removing availability to many small businesses who are uncertain about how quickly their business will grow. Landlords will often want to see evidence of 3 years of trading history. Clearly start-up companies cannot provide this and will instead be asked to provide a cash rental deposit which could better be invested in the new venture.

Industrial property take up over the last ten years has seen a more even distribution than the office market. There has been widespread activity, in terms of size of deals, location and rent per square foot in the 0-500 sq m range.

Strong latent demand is often identified for small business units from socio-economic analysis, reinforced by evidence from a business survey. Such analysis has regularly demonstrated strong demand for small-unit office space and reasonably specified workshop and industrial space up to 500 sq.m. in size.

In the years since 2,000, consultancy Deloitte has been tracking the types of business which produce the growth and higher paid jobs in the UK economy. They found around 10% of businesses grew strongly across many sectors, especially enabled by high technology. Since then many local Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) have developed a High Growth business service and complementary export support for such businesses. This, along with each LEP's work on skills provision and apprenticeships can provide the right help through small amounts spent on locally funded consultancy. However inward investment enquiries are primarily channelled into the environs of large cities and any Inward Investment website is often difficult to find and is sparsely populated with detailed local information.

Rural economic policy therefore needs to enable workspace development and encourage a proportion of high growth businesses which will become VAT and Business rates eligible businesses.

National Planning Policy states

Planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. To promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should:

- support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings;
- promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;
- support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision

and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres; and

- promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

Summary option additional recommendations

We consider the rural area should be sustainable and accessible and ask Council to consider issues as follows:

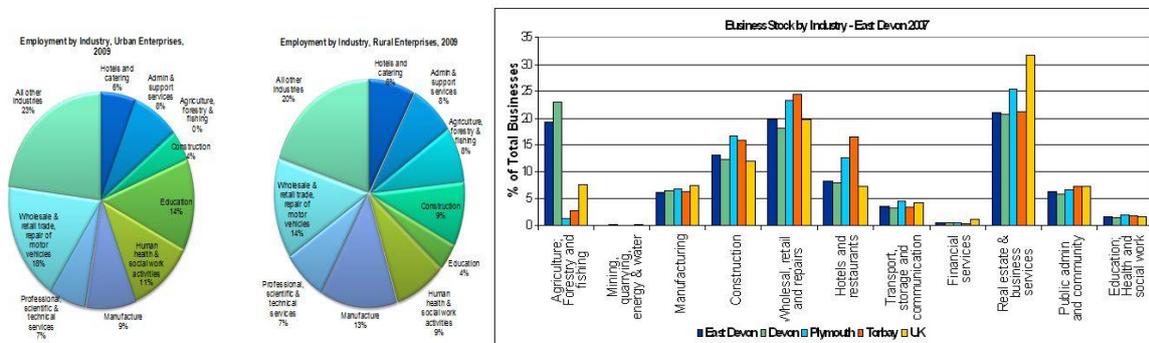
1. Scrutiny welcomes the Cabinet's review of the report by Hill Consulting on Tourism and that of Devon County Council
2. In view of the economic turbulence, energy crisis, inflation and food chain disruptions, to urgently review the Corporate Strategy for the AONB and rural areas of the District
3. Embed a focus on sustainability, 'green' best practice and accessibility across the rural area., linking policy and support for businesses with planning for homes, business space, digital and physical infrastructure and energy.
4. Collaboratively to build the District's reputation, share best practice and create new opportunities for innovation in economic activity by working in partnership and fostering collaboration with all partners.
5. In preserving and connecting with nature, to ensure that we protect the natural capital of our outstanding environment and its biodiversity, sympathetically leveraging its assets to grow the sector and its economic contribution.
6. To further equity and inclusivity we should support economic development, from the countryside to the coast, enabling the whole rural district area and especially the AONBs to thrive in a sustainable way while seeking to raise average incomes, facilities and healthcare arrangements.
7. Facilitate and Support Business start-ups in rural areas
8. Assess ways to drive up investment per work-force job
9. Ensure all new Business Units have high speed broadband and mobile telephone access and enable provision of these facilities to existing units
10. Encourage Planning Authorities, Economic Development and Regeneration officers to work together to facilitate rural business space in accessible sites beside A roads and in town environs.
11. Work to enable 4G AND 5G mobile communications infrastructure development
12. Encourage local supply networks and resilient food chains
13. Enable workspace, market housing and affordable housing to be available in towns and villages. Where possible new construction should also give funds or land to workspace infrastructure via S106, CIL or Unilateral Undertakings (if neighbourhood plans so wish)
14. Allow speculative commercial development near to villages (where Neighbourhood Plans so wish)
15. Encourage LEP Support for improved Skills Training: locally and via e-learning
16. Enable availability of Business Support services accessible by Broadband for Micro- and home-based businesses, because these often fall under the radar of business groups and support organisations
17. Review and track trends on Inward Investment marketing activities
18. Lobby at all levels to enforce Rural-Proofing in National and Local Policies

Appendix 1

Background

Agriculture now employs only 4.5% of the rural workforce¹. The structural shift from agriculture towards the 'New Rural Economy' is generally associated with higher incomes and rising prosperity, but has benefitted rural areas unevenly, boosting accessible rural areas more than remoter rural areas:

Most rural businesses today are micro-businesses or small and medium enterprises (SMEs): two thirds of rural England's businesses are micro-businesses and most of the rest are SMEs². Rural businesses have a good record of innovation, and include many knowledge-intensive businesses associated with growth. There are also many food and value added diversified agricultural businesses, Equine and Tourism businesses with local suppliers



Rural and Land-based sectors and industries

Recent planning policy in the UK has tended to take a preservationist approach, restricting the opportunities for people to work locally in rural areas. Current policy methods for addressing rural issues, such as rural proofing and devolved policy delivery, do not adequately respond to the needs of rural area sustainability

Broadly speaking, the sectoral make up of rural economies is now almost the same as that of the national economy with agriculture continuing to decline in importance both in terms of employment and its contribution to gross domestic product. However, the similarities between the rural and the national economies mask a number of issues which predominately affect the latter:

- o There are growing numbers of knowledge intensive and home based businesses (HBB) in rural areas. HBBs are particularly important to the economy in remote rural areas.
- o Rural businesses tend to be small: 85.4% of businesses in rural areas are micro-businesses compared to 82.6% in urban areas.
- o ICT infrastructure is poor or non-existent in many rural areas. This may discourage some owners from establishing their business in a rural location and disadvantages many knowledge intensive and creative businesses that are forced to rely on lower broadband speeds or unreliable connections

- o In-migrants to rural areas often set up businesses following their relocation. They are an important source of new human capital for rural areas, including knowledge, information and skills.
- o Rural businesses often face challenges when seeking to start up or expand including problems in recruiting suitably skilled workers or in finding appropriate business premises.

Over the last 20 years a significant movement of middle-aged and retired people have moved into the Countryside. Many of those who are moving to rural areas in middle age are doing so as they negotiate important family/life and work-related transitions. Often they may be recent 'empty-nesters' and are therefore able to downsize their accommodation and unlock financial capital. In-migrants are also frequently downsizing their economic activity. Often a job related move for one partner will necessitate a shift to part-time employment or full-time home-making for the other partner. Other shifts out of full-time employment for those moving to rural areas include partial retirement, self-employment or setting up a small business

Middle-aged in-migrants thus help to diversify and strengthen the rural economies into which they move. An example of this dynamism has been found in relation to business networks (chambers of trade, business fora and associations) which have particularly high concentrations of these in-migrants and provide a site both for the integration of newcomers and the pollination of new ideas. These associations take on a role in marketing the local area, representing the voice of active businesses in key local issues and taking on ancillary roles usually performed by public bodies. In-migration therefore provides a stimulus both to commercial enterprise and to the development of society in the local area.

Home based businesses are becoming increasingly important in rural economies. They account for 50% of rural business compared to 26% in urban areas. Driven by factors such as the greater flexibility of service sector jobs, technological improvements, environmental concerns and a shift in lifestyle preferences, this 'sector' seems set to continue to grow. Home based businesses have significantly lower than expected membership of rural business associations suggesting poor integration within the local rural business community. The evidence also suggests that they are 'under the radar' of policy and support organisations. However they may be the seeds of future larger companies because of the business expertise and capital of the founders

A view from rural business

National Enterprise Network (NEN) and the Rural Services Network (RSN) entered into a partnership to get a clear view of business needs and opportunities in the rural areas of England. As part of this partnership plan four short surveys a year across the enterprise support organisations within NEN in order to understand and measure the views of those servicing rural businesses.

22 enterprise support organisations responded to the first survey carried out in February 2017. They served over 3700 rural businesses over the previous 12 months. By far the most common issue considered to be facing rural businesses was broadband and mobile connectivity. Other common issues identified were help with marketing, access to finance

and service/transport availability. 80% of respondents to the survey considered that these needs were different to the needs of urban based businesses.

The opportunities currently being exploited by rural businesses were wide ranging including food and tourism sector opportunities, online marketing and working from home. The final question in the initial survey asked: "In a post Brexit world, what do you consider to be the top two rural business support needs which should be addressed by public funding?" Answers ranged from connectivity and access to digital services to skills, start-up and growth support.

Food Sector

In terms of the food sector, and particularly the provenance of food, 79% of consumers said it was a consideration (63% some of the time, 16% all the time) and just a fifth said they never thought about it. Three-fifths of shoppers say place of origin is at least as important to them as other factors, such as price and quality, and 55% specifically say they prefer buying UK brands to support British businesses (citing reasons, such as increased trustworthiness and being more attuned to needs and tastes).

The British beer brewing sector has grown from just 140 breweries in 1970 to an excess of 1,700 – with the UK now having more breweries per capita than any other country. In terms of sustainable and secure food: The food and drink manufacturing sector is increasingly automated and more reliant on highly skilled people to maintain and operate new complex technologies. Waste minimisation technologies such as anaerobic digestion and in-vessel composting will require suitably qualified managers and operators and present new opportunities in the industry. Shifts in the skilled workforce including scientific, engineering and management roles, alongside the traditional craft and technical vocations, are necessary if the UK workforce is to be competitive and support the security of the food and drink industry into the future.

The sector, referred to as land-based, comprises a wide variety of industrial and occupational activities. In its simplest and traditional sense the land-based industries are assumed to refer to farming and forestry with an emphasis on agriculture and horticulture for primary food production.

In considering land-based skills, [Lantra](#) ¹⁴, identifies the following occupational areas:

- [Agricultural livestock & crops](#)
- Animal care
- Animal technology
- Aquaculture
- Environmental conservation
- Equine
- Farriery
- Fencing
- Floristry
- Forestry and timber processing
- Game conservation

- Land-based engineering
- Landscaping
- Productive horticulture
- Veterinary nursing

The UK Standard Industrial Classification (UK SIC) does not identify 'land-based' as a distinct category but recognises a section for Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry with Groups for:

- Growing of crops; market gardening; horticulture
- Farming of animals
- Growing of crops combined with farming of animals (mixed farming)
- Agricultural and animal husbandry service activities, except veterinary activities
- Hunting, trapping and game propagation including related service activities
- Forestry, logging and related service activities

To address its knowledge transfer and knowledge exchange objectives, the OpenFields library draws on the science, technology and research base for farming, food, environment and energy together with information relating to other rural business activity (e.g. tourism and recreation) and on generic subjects as applied to land-based or rural businesses (e.g. information technology).

They consider the following topics are of relevance to the land-based sector:

- Arable & industrial crops
- Livestock & dairy production (including animal health & welfare, veterinary practice and fish farming)
- Business and management
- Social & community enterprise
- Information technologies
- Environmental impacts (including wildlife & biodiversity and landscape)
- Equine
- Equipment (agricultural and related)
- Food & drink (including aspects of manufacture, processing and the supply chain)
- Horticulture
- Land-based crafts (ranging from heritage and conservation crafts to bee-keeping)
- Renewable energy
- Rural policy & economic development
- Tourism & recreation (including outdoor recreation and field sports, hunting & fishing)
- Training & skills
- Trees & timber

Until recently land use has been viewed in a single function context whether it be biodiversity, farming or history and heritage (Hine et al., 2007). Land was seen as providing either for food production or biodiversity or heritage for instance. Yet recently it has been recognised that any area of land can provide many different environmental, recreational and health services at the same time and hence be considered to be multifunctional (Hine et al., 2008). Farm diversification takes advantage of this trend combined with the concept of

sustainable development. However Planners tend to view any “invasion” of the rural areas as unsustainable. If we also acknowledge that the natural environment is essential to a healthy society this seems a paradox. Natural England, for example, aims to provide an integrated approach to sustainable land management and conserving the natural environment with attention to biodiversity (Natural England, 2006).

The movement of young people (age 16-29) away from rural areas has occurred alongside counter-movements which tends to involve both older people and families with young children moving to rural areas. The net result is an ageing population in most rural areas which is more advanced than nearby towns. The median age of a rural resident is 42, whereas urban residents have a median age of 36. Over the next 20 years, the median rural age is set to rise towards 50, higher in the more rural districts⁴.

The challenges for communities of rural broadband provision plus the opportunities for them from ‘alternative’ energy generation need to be understood. Not only will these challenges and opportunities clearly continue into the future, but they also show how quickly technological change can bring new issues onto the local agenda, and provide a very uncertain environment in which a community might take action. We have seen this in the growth of renewable energy initiatives in water, wind and photovoltaic rural “farms”. The benefits that Information and Communications Technologies could bring to rural communities through improved local services and business opportunities have been well-documented; however, these can only be realised via a good quality telecommunications infrastructure. This is why recent rural connectivity initiatives by BDUK have been essential

Rural Investment In October 2011, the government announced £150m in capital expenditure to improve mobile coverage and quality – known as the [Mobile Infrastructure Project](#) (MIP). This project is being run by Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK). This still needs to improve the coverage and quality of fast broadband and mobile services for consumers in 25% of East Devon where existing coverage is poor or non-existent.

Rural Tourism has developed in diverse ways, in part rooted within particular local landscapes, traditions and farming styles. Local culture heritage and cultural landscapes are crucial elements of rural tourism, with rural places offering destinations for visitors. Making money from the appeal of landscapes, rural environments and local cultural heritage is thus an important economic development strategy

So a new Rural Development approach is developing ¹³:

| | Old approach | New Approach |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Objectives | Equalisation, farm income, farm competitiveness | Competitiveness of rural areas, value added to local assets and produce, exploitation of unused resources |
| Key target sector | Agriculture | Various sectors of rural economies (rural tourism, food, manufacturing, Knowledge Industry etc.) |
| Main tools | Subsidies | Investments and Community Volunteers |
| Key actors | National governments, farmers | All levels of government (European,UK and local), various local stakeholders (Public, Private, Social Enterprises and Community Stakeholders) |

It is now possible to envisage rural areas as sources of the future, as places of innovation and themselves engines of social renewal and economic growth. It has been found, for

example, that innovation is greater in rural areas than in urban ^{5,6,7} that productivity is growing faster, and nationally around 2 million people are using broadband to work from home in rural England. Such findings encouraged the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) to claim the untapped economic potential of rural areas might be worth an extra £347Bn pa to the national economy, if policies supported rural economic development⁸.

Another report⁹ also shows that entrepreneurs in rural areas have just as strong aspirations to grow their businesses as do their counterparts in urban areas

The Taylor Review¹⁰ 2008 and the *Rural Economy Growth Review*¹¹, in late 2011, recognised the strength of these arguments and proposed a series of measures to support rural economies beyond agriculture

A detailed statistical analysis of economic drivers in rural areas supports the encouragement of investment and business start-ups¹²

Implications

- Low GVA so need to drive up investment per work-force job and productivity
- Sustain service and facilitate to support Business start-ups
- A particular focus on low carbon industries and sustainable business practices.
- Development Management and Planning applications need to facilitate rural business space in accessible sites on A roads and in environs of town creating a “ladder of business accommodation” –incubation units, work hubs and move on space –through investment in eight hubs and several secondary sites across two counties.
- Fast Broadband and mobile telephone access will be essential for success
- Encouragement of local supply networks is necessary
- Re-use of existing buildings for commercial purposes is needed for upgraded uses.
- Market housing and affordable housing should be available in Towns and village
- Improved skills training locally is needed perhaps via e-learning and masterclasses would be useful to foster succession planning in rural family businesses.
- Business support services need to be accessible by Broadband need to be available. Because Micro- and home-based businesses, which are more prevalent in rural economies, have particular characteristics and needs, they often fall under the radar of business groups and support organisations
- Lobbying at all levels should enforce Rural-Proofing in National and local Policies
- We need partnership with universities and multiple private sector research and development agencies to nurture new businesses and support businesses with high growth potential.
- There is need to galvanise whole communities to recognise, celebrate and promote entrepreneurship
- Support for 4G/5G and fibre networks would help mobile communications

The stakeholder reports which informed these strategic recommendations, reinforced by the current employment market, especially for Care and Hospitality, is very challenging, with widespread vacancies across the district.

Recognising that the challenges are complex; not only is there a shortage of skilled labour but additionally there are difficulties in accessing affordable accommodation for current and future employees and there is a lack of public transport to many businesses and tourism venues in rural areas. It is not surprising that there are high vacancies in the health and the care sector and hospitality and both latter sectors are particularly low wage and vital to the District

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9. Inclusivity We will support economic development, from the countryside to the coast, enabling the whole rural district area and especially the AONBs to thrive in a sustainable way while seeking to raise average incomes and healthcare arrangements.

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