

## Creating an Impact: A Strategy for Our Work 2015 – 2020 Revised 2017



# Why we exist

## **Our Vision:**

**That rural Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will be sustainable, prepared for the future and flourish as a place for people to live, work and visit.**

## **Our Mission:**

**To work with partners, communities and individuals to develop Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as a vibrant place to live, work and visit.**

Established in 1924, as one of the first Rural Community Councils in the country, Cambridgeshire ACRE has been pioneering rural community development ever since. We recognise that there is a need for the whole community to take responsibility for rural life. We believe that people have huge capacity and potential to improve the places in which they live, work and visit. We build resilient communities where people are well networked and prepared for the future.

Our work is about engaging communities to consider a sense of place, encouraging local distinctiveness and drawing upon local assets and social action.

Our projects and programmes support:

- community-managed and owned local assets;
- neighbourhood and community planning;
- co-designing services;
- the development of affordable housing;
- the development of rural businesses and employment; and
- a better local environment and green space for all to enjoy.

Volunteering and social action is part of the glue that holds our society together. Our work with rural communities has supported many generations to tackle the requirements of taking responsibility for their Parish.

We have 265 members who have exclusive access to our full range of advice and information services.

We play a strong role in leading partnerships between public, private and community sector, aligning our efforts and achieving grant investment which has a positive impact for local communities.

Our independence means we can lead innovative rural development programmes. We can respond to local needs and demands, whilst understanding the impact of Government policy and strategy on local communities.

We are committed to influencing at a local level through active membership of strategic partnerships. On occasion, if proposed alterations to local services or policies are considered detrimental to Cambridgeshire's rural communities, we will lobby for more appropriate change.

# Our areas of work

## Parishes and Communities

Rural community facilities and key services are essential for sustaining community life and for providing a good place for people to live, work and visit.

Go to [page 4](#) to find out more

## Housing and Planning

Rural communities desperately need more affordable homes that meet local needs and are sensitively planned and designed to enhance local character.

Go to [page 6](#) to find out more

## Landscape and Environment

A thriving natural and historic environment reinforces people's sense of place and enhances people's quality of life and the place where they live and work.

Go to [page 8](#) to find out more

## Volunteering and Social Action

Volunteering and social action makes a huge difference to the lives of people in all communities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Go to [page 10](#) to find out more

## Economy and Enterprise

A healthy local economy is essential in maintaining the life and vibrancy of a rural area, providing local employment and sustaining rural communities.

Go to [page 12](#) to find out more

## Charity and Governance

Cambridgeshire ACRE will need to continue to adapt its working practices and find new funding and income in order to remain viable and robust.

Go to [page 14](#) to find out more

# Parishes and Communities

Rural community facilities and key services are essential for sustaining community life and for providing a good place for people to live, work and visit.



We are now working in a changed context with public sector spending cuts having an impact on local authorities, reducing their staff numbers and weakening their role to provide vital services. In this context our Strategy is to develop our support services to help communities succeed and reduce reliance on public services. Communities are being encouraged to take more responsibility for managing their own services and assets through enterprising approaches.

Across Cambridgeshire some rural communities have risen to the challenge of

devolved responsibilities, for example, starting community businesses, replacing bus services with community transport options and saving failing village pubs and shops through community-led enterprise. Others have had difficulties mobilising themselves so effectively.

We know living in rural Cambridgeshire provides a different experience across the county. Areas in the north show evidence of significant disadvantage as measured by income and educational levels, access to services and transport. These communities

find it harder to act and may well lose services and facilities. We are also concerned that the smaller parishes are more at risk of losing or suffering from reduced services.

Our Membership Scheme, taken up by 265 members (March 2017), underpins the provision of the support, advice and information we provide to parish councils, community building (village hall) committees and community groups.

Cambridgeshire has a good network of community buildings. Many parishes have concerns regarding the management and maintenance of these assets in the longer term and the capacity of volunteers, who are already stretched and unable to expand their work further.

The aim of our support to communities is to help them retain and improve existing services

where possible and support the development of alternative service models where they are needed.

Parish and Town Councils have a crucial role to play. They can draw upon local knowledge, community support and an effective structure to take action. We wish to work more closely with Parish and Town Councils to develop local partnerships and a 'Strategy for Action' to support them to shape development and protect local assets.

Our Support Cambridgeshire contract funded by Cambridgeshire County Council allows us to assist groups with Community-Led Asset Development and covers a wide spectrum of support to community buildings; shops; pubs; sports facilities and libraries.

**In the next five years, we will:**

- Work in partnership with Parish and Town Councils and Statutory Agencies to develop a 'Strategy for Action' and a clear support package for Parish Councils enabling them to play a crucial role in building local partnerships, managing community assets and developing co-designed services. [2017 – 2020]
- Maintain and develop the Community Buildings Advice Network, ensuring high quality specialist advice for both rural and urban community buildings. [2017 – 2020]
- Collect rural 'intelligence' and management information to enable Cambridgeshire ACRE to undertake a representation and influencing role at a local level and to feed into national picture. [2017 – 2020]
- Explore and develop opportunities for area-based working in particular communities. [2017 – 2020]
- Work alongside Cambridgeshire County Council to support the development of community service hubs. [2017 – 2020]

# Housing and Planning

Rural communities desperately need more affordable homes that meet local needs and are sensitively planned and designed to enhance local character.



Rising house prices remain further out of reach than ever for many residents of our rural communities. The average house price in Cambridgeshire had reached £302,679 in 2016. This was x10.1 higher than average incomes. The National Housing Federation estimates that an income of £69,184 would be required to purchase such a house whilst the National Living Wage pays about £15,000.<sup>1</sup> Many of our villages are becoming unsustainable dormitories that are the preserve of the elderly and wealthy. And the threats are not diminishing.

<sup>1</sup> Home Truths 2016-17: The Housing Market in the East of England (National Housing Federation)

The Housing White Paper, published in February 2017, has implications for both rural affordable housing and neighbourhood planning. However, these won't be fully understood until the consultation has been completed and subsequent amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework begin to be implemented.

Key challenges for rural affordable housing include:

- The lack of requirement for affordable housing on schemes of 10 or less dwellings (the majority of schemes in rural communities)

- The impact of the voluntary Right to Buy both on existing affordable housing stock and the appetite of local communities to accept further affordable housing
- How the widening of the definition of affordable housing, including starter homes, will affect the viability of genuinely affordable housing
- Delivering affordable housing where Local Authorities cannot demonstrate a five year housing land supply

After a slow start, neighbourhood planning activity has started to pick up in Cambridgeshire. There are currently (February 2017) c40 designated areas in the County although only one has been formally 'made'. Both the Neighbourhood Planning Bill and Housing White Paper make a number of recommendations to improve the neighbourhood planning process. The resources and time required to complete a neighbourhood plan and the weight the plan finally carries in influencing planning applications are the key issues for local communities.

The Cambridgeshire Rural Affordable Housing Partnership has adapted to the changing

environment by changing its funding model. However, our delivery activity remains largely unchanged. We continue to engage Parish Councils and develop a robust evidence base, both locally and strategically, to make the case for rural affordable housing.

We expect to continue supporting the construction of at least 50 affordable houses per year.

We support and encourage Parish Councils to undertake community-led planning (Parish and Neighbourhood Plans) as a way of galvanising support; establishing a vision for the future and determining the need for infrastructure, services and housing. We are able to give early support to those that need help to decide whether to undertake a plan and are able to support all stages of Neighbourhood Planning through our 'Neighbourhood Planning Service'. Many Parish Councils accept the need for development. However, they want a greater say in how and where this development occurs in their community. We have teamed up with two independent consultants to strengthen our offer and the initial results have been encouraging.

#### **In the next five years, we will:**

- Raise awareness of the need for rural affordable housing by visiting parish councils and completing 8 to 10 new housing needs surveys annually and producing a range of good practice materials. [2017 – 2020]
- Manage the Cambridgeshire Affordable Rural Housing Partnership to build 50 affordable rural homes per year. [2017 – 2020]
- Maintain the Cambridgeshire Affordable Rural Housing Partnership so that it remains the key forum for discussing rural affordable housing issues in the county. [2017-2020]
- Continue to develop the Neighbourhood Planning Service to offer support through paid staff/volunteers. [2017 – 2020]
- Support at least three communities a year to undertake a Neighbourhood Plan. [2017 – 2020]

# Landscape and Environment

A thriving natural and historic environment reinforces people's sense of place and enhances people's quality of life and the place where they live and work.



We know that the land and environment of parts of rural Cambridgeshire has undergone and continues to experience significant change, mainly as a result of the continuing development of new housing, business premises and associated infrastructure. Other influences are changes in agriculture and increased attention to recreation needs.

Natural and heritage amenities often require strong, locally-driven charitable groups to care for them. There are many ways people contribute including maintaining cycleways and footpaths, managing local nature reserves, planting trees, maintaining food gardens and allotments, developing natural play areas, safeguarding heritage buildings and conserving local churches.

In order for people to benefit, most communities need to have good information about the issues that will affect the environment around them and be given the opportunity to become more involved in their

future management. Our work supports communities with issues such as flood risk; water quality; and wetland habitat conservation.

To overcome the issue of fragmented management approaches, we advocated a landscape-scale approach for getting people to play a vital role in the future management of the local landscape and environment.

In the Ouse Washes area, we have implemented a Landscape Partnership Scheme where communities work alongside public agencies and other organisations to develop a shared vision for the area and a clearer brand as a visitor destination. We are now working with our partners to consider the legacy of this programme and leverage of future investment into the area through other funds.

We lead a Water Catchment Partnership in the Old Bedford and Middle Level Catchment.

This partnership aims to achieve better co-ordinated action by those who use water or influence land management as well as gain greater engagement of local people to tackle the significant pressures placed on the water environment. We will encourage people's involvement by raising awareness of the importance of the local water environment

through local activities such as running river care projects.

Our involvement with the Local Nature Partnership; Fens for the Future Partnership and Cambridge Conservation Forum means we will work in partnership with other organisations, to influence decision-making and create new opportunities for investment.

**In the next five years, we will:**

- Deliver, as a lead partner, the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership Scheme. [2017]
- Lead the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership's legacy planning, to investigate and secure future investment opportunities for the area. [2017]
- Lead the Old Bedford including the Middle Level Water Catchment Partnership and develop other community river projects. [2017 – 2019]

# Volunteering and Social Action

Volunteering and social action makes a huge difference to the lives of people in all communities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.



Neighbourliness, self-help and local organisations remain common and have provided a model of resilience and sustainable development seeing communities through periods of crisis and upheaval.

People volunteer in many different contexts; health, social care, protecting and improving the environment, sport, parish councils, village hall committees, parish and neighbourhood plan groups, church activities, libraries, information technology, running shops, pubs and post offices. Knowing that rural assets and services rely heavily on volunteers, and that those who volunteer tend to stay in their particular role over a long period of time, we

are aware of the need to nurture and support all those involved in social action.

We have extensive experience of leading effective volunteering programmes which require the management of volunteers. This extends to recruitment and retention, team working, health and safety, training and individual volunteer development and recognition.

The agenda for more extensive use of volunteers in public service delivery means that there are now new volunteering opportunities emerging.

Taking the learning from our management of the volunteering programme for Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue Service, and working with our key partners, we will develop other public service volunteering opportunities linked to protecting and improving the environment, health and safety and community resilience.

We wish to encourage a wider range of ages (particular those aged 16 – 30) to volunteer through opening up a broader range of formalised volunteering opportunities that reflect people’s own passions and interests.

**In the next five years, we will:**

- Deliver the Environment Agency Waterways Volunteering Scheme from set-up, volunteer recruitment and operation of the scheme for the Great Ouse and Nene. [2017 – 2018]

# Economy and Enterprise

A healthy local economy is essential in maintaining the life and vibrancy of a rural area, providing local employment and sustaining rural communities.



Rural Cambridgeshire tends to have lower wages, smaller scale firms and limited employment opportunities outside the main towns. The area is socio-economically diverse, with the remote rurality of parts of the Fens contrasting with the relative affluence of South Cambridgeshire. There are barriers to employment for the more disadvantaged households in communities including inter-generational poverty, worklessness and access to the workplace. Those with the highest educational levels tend to out-commute to London or surrounding centres of employment. In the more affluent parts, pockets of disadvantage can often go unnoticed, particularly disadvantage linked to

issues such as fuel poverty, isolation/loneliness and lack of transport.

In recent years, traditional industries such as agriculture and food manufacturing have been added to by new technology and knowledge-based businesses and greater levels of self-employment and home-working.

We are leading the Cambridgeshire Fens LEADER Programme investing around £1.4m EAFRD funds to support rural business to grow and the creation of new jobs over the next 4 years.

Building on our success in managing previous LEADER programmes, we are now delivering a

Community-Led Local Development programme in Wisbech involving a Local Action Group and the implementation of an area-based Local Development Strategy that takes into account local needs and potential.

Social, demographic and technological trends are all combining to have a clear effect on Market Towns. Consequences for towns mean that there are challenges in reviving their vitality and bringing about other ways to attract people to shop and visit, in order to help local businesses thrive. In Ramsey, we are leading a project funded by Big Local through the Ramsey Million Partnership to get the community, local authorities, heritage organisations, Town Council and businesses to work collectively together to promote the town to its residents and visitors.

We know there is still a need to raise the profile of tourism in the Fens by promoting it as a 'green tourism' destination and focusing on the special qualities of the area, including the potential of the market towns, waterways, wetland reserves, food and farming and its unique heritage. Working with the Environment Agency, we will look at the

feasibility of future community management of the Denver Sluice Complex.

Improving broadband speed and mobile phone coverage cross the county is vital so that business and communities can operate effectively. We are a partner in the Connecting Cambridgeshire programme and will continue to support with the roll-out of superfast fibre-based broadband. There will be a need to work with partners to develop strategies for assisting those in hard-to-reach premises to connect to alternative technologies and access funding from other sources. We realise that there are many rural residents that are not online and this creates isolation.

We expect the number of sustainable social enterprises to grow across rural areas as they play an increasing role in the development of the 'social economy' including, for example, community owned shops, care services, transport services and community land trusts. We support social enterprise through our LEADER programmes, through our Support Cambridgeshire projects and our membership service and through direct partnerships with others.

#### **In the next five years, we will:**

- Deliver the Cambridgeshire Fens LEADER programme distributing £1.4m. [2017 – 2019]
- Deliver the Wisbech Community Led Local Development programme distributing £2.1m. [2017 – 2021]
- Deliver the Promoting Ramsey Project for the Ramsey Million Partnership and obtain future funding post-2017. [2017]
- Deliver the feasibility stage of the Denver Sluice Complex plans including a Visitor Management and Access Plan and Business Plan for future community-management [2017 – 2018]
- Support the Connecting Cambridgeshire programme with the roll-out of superfast fibre-based broadband and develop strategies for assisting those in hard-to-reach premises to help them connect to alternative technologies. [2017– 2018]
- Support social enterprise through developing local networks that can support collaboration and business growth. [2017 – 2020]

# Charity and Governance

Cambridgeshire ACRE will need to continue to adapt its working practices and find new funding and income in order to remain viable and robust.



Over the last three years, we have coped with diminishing income from grants that provided vital subsidy to our community work. Analysis of the future of the voluntary sector and the local funding environment suggests that further cuts will be inevitable and the Directors recognise that over the next five years a new income generation strategy will be needed as an alternative way to provide quality services and services may need to be changed and charged for as grant subsidy ceases.

We do not expect things to stay the same and will actively seek alternative business and financial models to allow us to continue our work effectively. This might include sharing

services; merging with another organisation; or working over a larger geography to allow us to be more effective in the longer term.

Directors and staff will work closely together to generate fresh ideas across all areas of this Strategy in order to deliver the Charity's mission and objectives.

Our strategy has been to recognise the needs of local voluntary and community sector groups and then to design services that provide community benefit. Successful enterprises include our payroll service and neighbourhood planning service. These clearly demonstrate wider social, environmental and economic impacts but need to be established

on a more commercial basis in order to allow them to continue to offer a quality service to individuals and communities. We will consider each of these enterprises individually and develop Business Plans for both looking at future viability and aspects of future business growth.

We will work with existing and new partners to co-design new services that can earn income and demonstrate a wider social, environmental and economic impact. Opportunities might arise from implementing the Right to Challenge to take over public services and asset transfer where local authorities are empowered to transfer the ownership of land and buildings to voluntary organisations so they can run as local community enterprises. In other areas of our work we need to develop stronger partnership links in order to create new opportunities. We will keep in touch with new funding opportunities and partners through our strategic links.

Key to success will be ensuring that both staff and directors have the right skills to deliver effective governance, new programmes and more commercial approaches. It is recognised

that there is a need to recruit new directors to refresh the skills base of the Board and ensure that all aspects of the organisation's work are represented.

Staff roles will need to be reviewed to ensure alignment with any new strategic direction and that appropriate training support is given for the challenges ahead. Staff will be expected to work as teams with Team Leaders co-ordinating project delivery in order to access the range of expected skills and knowledge held by specialist staff. Some work will require staff to work more directly with specialist consultants, who will be used to fill gaps in specific knowledge areas or to enable extra resource capacity at busy times.

We will use a consultant to review all levels of communications (corporate and project level) across the organisation, social media, website, CRM, membership engagement, community and volunteer engagement and social impact measurement. From this we will develop and implement a strategy setting out our approach and expectations for the involvement of stakeholders, communities and volunteers in our work.

#### **In the next five years, we will:**

- Investigate new business models including working with others, combining services and possibly merging. [2017 – 2020]
- Develop and implement a Funding and Income Generation Strategy for the next five years. [2017]
- Develop staff skills to respond to the challenges and requirements of this strategy, refreshing the staff appraisal programme and future training plan. [2017]
- Recruit new Directors to refresh the skills base of the Cambridgeshire ACRE Board with at least one new member elected annually. [2017 – 2020]
- Develop and implement a new Communications and Engagement Strategy. [2017 – 2020]
- Develop a Business Plan for the Payroll Service in order to consider its growth and financial sustainability. [2017]

- Develop a Business Plan for the Neighbourhood Planning Service in order to ensure financial sustainability. [2017]

*Photo Credits:*

*Photo of Ouse Washes on page 9 courtesy of Bill Blake Heritage Documentation, all rights reserved, [www.bill-blake.co.uk](http://www.bill-blake.co.uk)*

*All other photos courtesy of Pete Johnstone, [pj.elements](http://pj.elements), [www.pjelements.co.uk](http://www.pjelements.co.uk)*



Cambridgeshire ACRE  
(Action with Communities in Rural England)  
72 Market Street  
Ely  
CB7 4LS

01353 860850  
[enquiries@camsacre.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@camsacre.org.uk)  
[www.camsacre.org.uk](http://www.camsacre.org.uk)

Company limited by guarantee No. 3690881  
Registered charity No. 1074032  
Registered office: As above

VAT Registration no 838 5035 17

Publication date: March 2017