

The rural economy¹

1. Introduction and summary

CPRE wants to see a thriving, diverse and productive countryside which is valued by all.² Economic development enables rural areas to prosper and more people to live and work in the countryside. Providing high quality work can help to tackle rural poverty and improve access to services. CPRE believes that for new economic growth³⁴ to be sustainable it must create wealth and jobs and meet social needs without damaging the countryside. However, economic growth, social needs and environmental limits must be reconciled not traded off against each other. A high quality rural environment is vital for public well-being and is an integral part of a strong and resilient rural economy.

At the same time, rural areas face a number of major pressures:

- Economic developments, such as retail and business parks, are making the boundary between urban and rural areas less clear
- larger-scale developments, encouraged by the growth agenda, can undermine other businesses by making places less attractive
- more extreme weather events threaten key rural infrastructure and the viability of farming and horticulture
- natural assets vital for food production, water quality and wildlife, such as the most fertile farmland and soil, are poorly valued in public policy and are being lost or degraded
- increased demand for extraction of natural resources can damage the countryside.

To achieve the CPRE's aims and address the challenges rural areas face, good planning and policy development are essential. They can deliver the appropriate scale of economic development in the right locations without unnecessarily damaging the countryside. This document sets out in a series of principles how CPRE believes this can be done. These principles offer a framework for policy and planning decisions which can be used across the country by enabling branches to take local circumstances into account. A rural growth checklist is included to help branches assess whether new development for economic growth is sustainable and can be supported. Background information and explanatory text is available in Appendix 1 which accompanies this note.

2. Principles for the rural economy

2.1 Valuing a high-quality countryside

P. 1 The English countryside, its high quality and beauty should be recognised for their intrinsic value, as well as for their potential to sustain social, economic and environmental development over the long term.

P. 2 The capacity of the countryside to deliver multiple natural goods ('ecosystem services') needs to be maintained and enhanced by developing new ways to manage use of land which protect the beauty and quality of the countryside.

P. 3 Rural economic development should be strongly supported where it makes a positive contribution to maintaining and growing the local stock of valuable natural assets which underpin long term prosperity.

P. 4 Developments must be sensitive in their scale and purpose to the distinctive character of their surroundings, reflecting the topography, geology, and historic patterns of land use and settlement.

2.2 Planning for a thriving rural economy

P. 5 Local strategies and planning policies should support economic development in rural areas which provides good quality jobs, helps to improve local skills and services and contributes towards sustaining a high quality environment and the well-being of the local community.

P. 6 Development in rural areas should, as far as possible, make optimal use of existing infrastructure and previously developed land and should maximise re-use, renovation and refurbishment of building stock.

P. 7 Maintaining the stock of existing buildings suitable for economic purposes and achieving their best use for the long-term is vital, despite pressure for their conversion to housing as a short-term boost to the economy. Underused employment sites should be better promoted and effectively safeguarded from conversion to housing.

P. 8 Policies and practice should support local processing businesses that add value to primary produce sourced from the local area and which increase benefits to the local economy through local multiplier effects.

2.3 Housing the rural workforce

P. 9 Vibrant rural communities need a greater supply of affordable housing, available in perpetuity, to meet the needs of the local workforce on low pay.

2.4 Fostering local business

P. 10 In rural areas, the focus should be on the development of a diverse economy of micro, small and medium-sized businesses, which build strong connections to the local area and support other local businesses upstream and downstream. These should be preferred to large-scale developments which are out of character with their surroundings and encourage unnecessary commuting.

P. 11 Large-scale development should be assessed for its potential impact on the diversity and long-term health of the economy of the rural area within which it would be located, as well as its potential benefits to local jobs and services. Where more appropriate, it should be directed to market towns or larger centres of population.

P. 12 Market towns should be championed and supported to develop their full potential to support rural businesses as a hub for networking, innovation, training and services, as well as providing a suitable location for businesses which outgrow existing premises.

P. 13 The provision of smaller-scale infrastructure needed for the processing and supply of local primary produce to the area, such as small abattoirs, dairies, pack-houses, and food distribution hubs should be supported.

2.5 Linking sustainable leisure and tourism with the landscape

P. 15 Rural policy should manage tourist and recreational facilities to avoid over-concentration, which strains infrastructure, causes traffic congestion and, potentially, environmental damage. Excessive or badly planned development, which damages the character and qualities of landscape that are central to its appeal to visitors, should be avoided.

P. 14 In certain areas, where natural and other rural assets are under-valued, sensitive development for new leisure and visitor uses should be considered. This could also divert visits from over-heated areas and honey pot sites so reducing the strain on their infrastructure and services.

2.6 Realising the potential of community enterprises

P. 16 Community-owned businesses and social enterprises should be positively supported to allow the rural economy to grow and to improve the quality of life and environment for rural communities.

2.7 Getting the infrastructure right

P. 17 Creative transport solutions should be developed to offer affordable and practical alternatives to the private car for rural residents and visitors. These include promoting better rural rail and bus services integrated with car sharing and encouraging cycling and walking on rural roads and the rights of way network. Rights of all road users to use shared space of rural roads should be recognised and enabled through traffic calming.

P. 18 The roll-out of digital services, such as fast broadband, particularly in hard to reach rural areas should be accelerated. New mobile masts and broadband equipment should be carefully designed and sited to avoid damage to the character of rural areas.

2.8 Safeguarding farmland

P. 20 BMV land has long-term strategic importance for stability of food supply and should only be permanently capped or developed as a last resort.

2.9 Sustainably managing woodland

P. 21 Use of woodlands should be promoted for a range of sustainable economic uses, including as a local source of renewable heat and other crops and for quiet recreation.

3.0 Sustainable rural growth checklist

This checklist is intended to assist branches in assessing whether new development for economic growth is sustainable and can be supported:

- Would the development contribute to sustaining vibrant local communities, provide a net gain in local jobs, improve or sustain local services and generate local spending? Will it strengthen the diversity of the local economy or could it weaken it?
- Will the development contribute to an increase in the quality of work and skills for the longer term?
- Would the development directly or indirectly conserve and/or improve the rural landscape, biodiversity or other natural goods (ecosystem services)?
- Will the development make better use of and/or enhance local assets, e.g. by re-using redundant buildings or under-utilised employment sites?
- Does the development proposal respect the setting and character of the area in terms of scale and massing of buildings, design and materials used? If not, but unavoidable, what mitigating measures are proposed?
- Does the development require permanent loss/capping of BMV land or of valuable pasture where BMV is locally scarce?
- Does the development operate within local environmental limits, for example by considering demand for water in areas of low rainfall/over abstraction, air pollution from transport, noise impact on ambient levels, flood management and use of sustainable drainage systems?
- Has the cumulative impact of the development been assessed alongside other proposed or previous development, such as visual and noise impact, demand on infrastructure and services and housing need?
- Does the development set a high standard for resource efficiency in materials used in construction and use and waste generated - such as re-use of building, low carbon materials, renewable energy supply, low fuel and water consumption - and are materials locally sourced where possible?

- Is access to the proposed development suitable for the scale of activities and anticipated traffic type and volumes, including by sustainable forms of transport?

4. How to engage locally

The points below suggest ways branches can engage locally to ensure CPRE's views on rural economy issues are addressed:

- Does your Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) have a rural sector topic group which CPRE could join?
- Has your Local Nature Partnership built a relationship with your LEP to help to bring environmental issues to the fore in the LEP's economic growth planning?
- If your branch is working on a Neighbourhood Plan (NP), does it address sustainable development of the rural economy following the principles here? Does the NP identify areas of local landscape valued by the community and warranting protection and promotion?
- Have you identified valuable local economic assets and recorded these on a community assets register?

Essential further reading

CPRE, Rural Economy Policy Guidance Note: Appendix 1

CPRE/ NALC: *How to shape where you live: a guide to neighbourhood planning*

CPRE/ NALC: *Planning explained*

CPRE/ NALC: *Supporting communities and neighbourhoods in planning*

CPRE Policy Guidance Notes on Housing, Transport, Shale Gas and Onshore wind turbines

CPRE, *Planning Campaign Briefing 8 - The Rural Economy*, October 2012

CPRE Transport Toolkit www.transporttoolkit.org.uk

CPRE's *Vision for the future of farming*, January 2012 and accompanying sector specialist farming reports on arable, beef and sheep, dairy, horticulture, pig and poultry

CPRE, *2026 A Vision for the Countryside*, May 2009

My Community Rights, *Understanding the Community Right to Bid*

<http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Understanding-the-Community-Right-to-Bid.pdf>

¹ The definition of 'Rural' used in this Policy Guidance Note (PGN) follows that by the Commission for Rural Communities, based on population density in Commission for Rural Communities, *Defining Rural England*, CRC49, July 2007, p6

² CPRE, *2026 A Vision for the Countryside*, May 2009, p.16

³ 'Economic growth' must be sustainable, understood in the context of sustainable development, that is 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' from World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, 1987.