

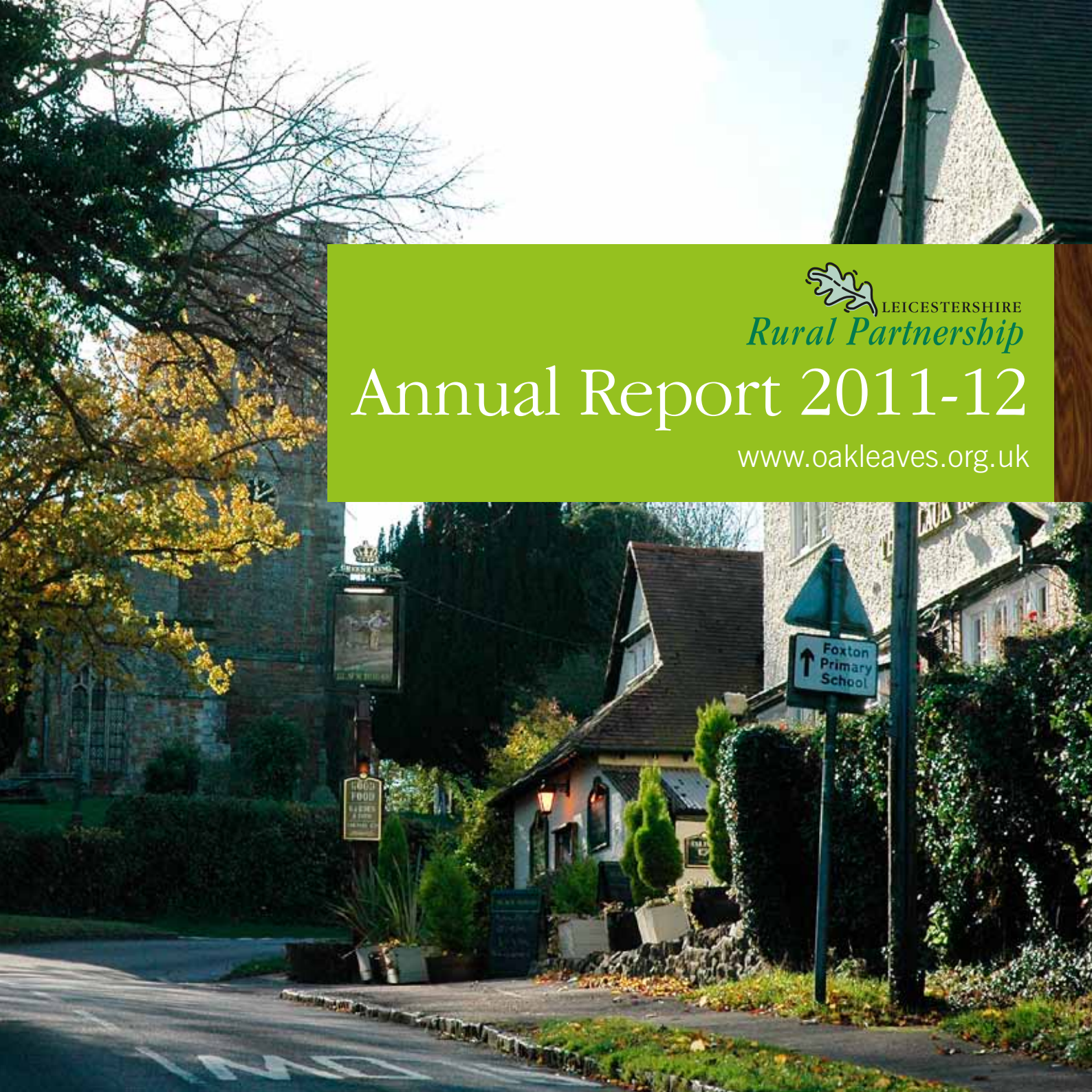


LEICESTERSHIRE

Rural Partnership

Annual Report 2011-12

www.oakleaves.org.uk



Chairman's foreword



In many ways the past year has been an interesting and challenging one, but also full of great achievement and new opportunities.

Despite the difficulties of diminishing budgets, the economic downturn and changes in organisational structures, the Leicestershire Rural Partnership has successfully adapted to these more austere times and still maintained its excellent reputation for delivering high quality projects and services throughout rural Leicestershire.

Funding cuts will inevitably have a profound impact on the way public services are delivered and economic growth is secured. Nevertheless the LRP has over the past year, worked to align itself to new working and commissioning arrangements, including the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership in order to maximise its impact and influence. It has also continued to successfully lobby and respond to relevant consultations on behalf of rural residents and businesses.

Through consultation, the LRP has refreshed the Leicestershire Rural Framework and identified 7 BIG priorities to take account of the national and local policy direction, changes to the economic situation and the needs of local communities. The LRP will help to deliver these priorities by supporting targeted commissioning activity in rural areas. The LRP will support agencies and bodies who work with rural communities and businesses, and look to work with localities to help deliver their rural priorities in the coming year. Together with other partnerships, the LRP will encourage the localism agenda and the growth of Big Society in rural Leicestershire.

Overall the LRP has faced the challenges and planned robustly to continue to build on its good work, and following a peer review last summer the LRP has now restructured to enable it to function in a more streamlined and dynamic way. It is now recognised as a cross-cutting group in the Leicestershire Together structure and its priorities have been adopted within the Leicestershire Together Outcome Framework 2012/13.

I am pleased to share with you some of our achievements from the past year. The LRP will continue to ensure that Leicestershire has a strong, effective and united voice to influence others and best support our rural communities into the future.

Lesley Pendleton CC
Chairman of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership





Leicestershire Rural Conference 2012

Foundations for the Future

On 1st March 2012, over 100 business, community and public sector representatives attended the LRP's biennial conference, this year entitled '*Foundations for the Future*', and held at Scaford Hall, near Melton Mowbray.

The key note speaker Adam Henson (BBC 1's Countryfile presenter) set the conference off to an enthusiastic and inspirational start talking about challenges and opportunities for farming including opportunities for diversification.

This was followed by an update from Sarah McAdam, Head of the Rural Communities and Policy Unit at Defra on rural policy function and how this fits with broader national priorities. Louise Driver from the LRP then linked everything back to a Leicestershire perspective and launched the Leicestershire Rural Framework 2011-14 which outlines our Big 7 priorities for the coming year.

In the afternoon delegates took part in a range of interactive workshops:

- Supporting rural growth
- Broadband
- Big society
- Thriving communities
- Communities and business carbon reduction

A number of actions were taken from these sessions to help form the LRP work programme for the coming year - a key part of which is a programme of twice yearly forums which will begin in September 2012.

All aspects of the conference received very positive feedback and all elements from the speakers, venue and practical arrangements came together to make an informative, enjoyable and useful day for all concerned.





Village Shop Support

The **Vibrant Villages programme** which came to a close in March 2011 invested £123,544 into village shops in Leicestershire. The programme levered £422,477 of private sector investment, supported 55 businesses in total and created or safeguarded over 90 jobs.

Following on from its success the County Council launched its new **Village Shop Support** service in November 2011. The new service is focussed on ensuring that Village Shops and Post Offices can receive expert retail advice (provided by Kerching Retail) to help improve their profitability so as to retain these vital services within our rural communities. The service has already supported over 60 businesses.

Case study:

Under new ownership, **Kibworth Post Office** had an opportunity to re-establish itself, protecting it from potentially closing and moving the sorting office to Market Harborough.

Kerching worked with the new owner to redesign the store in a modern and fresh way, introducing new products and services, whilst maintaining the charm and character of a village Post Office. The retail space was increased significantly to allow for broadening of the product range. The Post Office was also successful in getting a grant of £3,000 to help fund extensive work on the store's interior.

For more information on the Village Shop Support service visit www.kerchingretail.com/vss or call Kerching on 01455 203 206.





Rural economy

INSPIRE

Our highly successful INSPIRE programme operated from November 2009 until March 2012.

The project had three broad strands which combined to make a comprehensive rural economic programme:

Town and Centres Business Partnership Development

This aimed, through a benchmarking toolkit among other things, to develop existing businesses and improve public satisfaction in their town centres as places to shop, visit and do business. All towns who took part in this used the information to assist business, for example, by negotiating to reduce rents. The programme was so successful that towns are now going to fund the benchmarking themselves with the original target of 90 businesses assisted, exceeded.

Business Growth and Sustainable Communities

The aim of this element of the programme was to enable the LRP to deliver projects, events and workshops, to help overcome sub-regional barriers to growth and give support to topical issues as they arose.

Recognising the importance of e-commerce and e-marketing to SMEs competing in today's markets, over 130 businesses were supported through ICT workshops to improve their competitiveness and increase their profile on the web.

Local businesses identified planning processes as a barrier to economic growth. In response, a Rural Economic Planning Toolkit has been developed which supports applicants and assessors reach common ground on the economic benefits and overall suitability of business planning applications in rural areas.

Infrastructure Investment Grants

£150,000 has been invested through the programme (funded by the former East Midlands Development Agency (emda) and LCC) to support growth in rural businesses. This has levered £287,000 of private sector investment and has created or safeguarded 68 jobs across the county. Sectors that have been directly supported in this and related ways include tourism, land-based, food and drink and equestrian.

Case study:

In 2011, through the Inspire Programme, a grant was awarded to help develop a Skills Centre for adults with disabilities.

A redundant farm building at **Greenfields Farm** in the village of **Seagrave** has been converted into a hive of activity offering a lovely workshop/meeting room for activities, a large kitchen, toilets and washroom, and office space. It is an innovative agricultural and horticultural-based project that combines care, training and meaningful day time activity. There are many activities available including animal welfare, gardening, horticulture and food preparation to name a few.

The centre is at the heart of the Seagrave community and is home to the local older people's luncheon club once a week, with centre members serving up delicious home-made meals. They also make local produce such as jams, chutneys, cakes and hanging baskets which are available in the new village shop – another project supported through INSPIRE.

Stables - the new village shop in Seagrave with a beautiful room above, hosts a number of events and is available for hire. Food can be provided as the local village pub - the White Horse is adjacent. The shop is open at hours to suit the local community and sells a range of local produce, some from Greenfields Farm including chutneys and jams and home-baked bread.

Equestrian Business Support Events

Through the INSPIRE programme, extensive work with Leicestershire's equestrian sector highlighted that equestrian businesses have a large number of support needs other than securing financial investment.

It was therefore decided that the capital grants programme would be accompanied by two Equestrian business support events, held at **Witham Villa Riding School** in Cosby. These featured an ambitious agenda which included the topics of ICT, policing, security, marketing, business law, brideways, the work of the British Horse Society and much more.

The events proved to be a huge success with over 60 businesses attending in total.





Big Society

Rural Advice Service

In October 2011, the Rural Partnership launched its Big Society Rural Advice Service which is delivered by the Rural Community Council (Leicestershire and Rutland). Funded by Leicestershire County Council, the service provides advice, guidance and signposting on community action planning, project development and a range of rural issues that affect our communities.

During this time, the service has dealt with over 500 telephone and e-mail queries and provided face-to-face support to over 35 communities through a range of different projects. Enquiries have covered a broad range of subjects from Jubilee beacons to neighbourhood planning and speedwatch schemes. A number of useful toolkits for community groups are also available on-line at www.ruralcc.org.uk/rural-advice-service.

Two events have provided information on boosting enterprise and Big Society initiatives.

- The Village SOS Roadshow held in Melton and jointly organised with the Plunkett Foundation gave information on social enterprise and setting up community enterprises.
- The Rural Action Seminar included information on the services provided to support small village shops as well as other funding opportunities for community projects.

Training sessions, delivered around the county have also helped to de-mystify confusion between Parish Plans and Neighbourhood Plans while identifying a variety of different issues that are of concern to communities due to current changes to the planning system.

Grant Fund

The Big Society Grant Fund, launched by LCC to help support organisations/projects to develop ideas and initiatives to deliver Big Society at a local level, has already awarded over £250k to projects in rural Leicestershire.

More information can be found at www.leics.gov.uk/big_society or Tel 0116 305 7269.

Big Society

Community transport

Access to work and training for people in rural Leicestershire has continued to be a high priority for the LRP. The “Wheels 2 Work” scheme now has a pool of 24 scooters available in rural districts of the county. These are available for young people to hire for up to six months helping them to access work and training.

This scheme has helped over 100 young people throughout the county enter and sustain employment or education in the last two years.

For more information about the wheels to work scheme go to www.leics.gov.uk/wheels-2-work.

Multi-Access centres and libraries have been helping people get back into work, training or attending interviews by part-reimbursing bus fares for Leicestershire residents to whom cost is a barrier. Funding has been allocated to the main libraries in all of the districts to ensure everyone has access to the scheme. Reimbursements are done quickly and easily and examples of training include CV writing, IT for beginners, food hygiene and forklift courses plus many more.

Since November 2010, over 70 people have taken advantage of this scheme. For further information on rural transport go to www.leics.gov.uk/rural-transport.





Appleby Magna

Rural affordable housing

Leicestershire's rural communities are benefiting from an increased provision of affordable homes. In 2011 alone, more than 40 homes were built and declared available for local people in our parishes.

This development is focussed on 'Rural Exception Sites' (small developments of affordable homes situated outside the village envelope which can be prioritised for those with a strong local connection).

Areas to benefit include Appleby Magna(8 units), Croft(6), Diseworth(6), Heather(12), Long Whatton(9) and Wymondham(5). This enables villagers to stay near their support networks rather than being forced to find suitable accommodation elsewhere, enhancing the sustainability of their community. Each scheme benefited from extensive work from the Rural Housing Enabler (part funded by LRP) alongside local communities and key partners.

Together we are making a difference to the lives of people in rural Leicestershire.

Case Study: Appleby Magna

The homes in Appleby Magna (top left) were built by a local building firm and tenanted last March. The bungalow is now occupied by the vicar of the Parish who had previously been struggling to afford to remain in the village. This home was allocated to her because of her strong local connections. A local couple now live in the shared ownership home enabling them to continue to live near their family.



Case Study: Diseworth

The north side of the site at Clement's Gate, Diseworth was completed last autumn. The three bedroom detached house (top right) is now occupied by a local family with three children who were previously in a small flat in Loughborough. Both sets of parents are resident in the village. The bungalow is occupied by two elderly brothers from the parish.

New Homes Bonus Funding (NHB)

In 2011/12 Leicestershire County Council invested £530,000 of New Homes Bonus (money from central government to incentivise and reward house building), along with £100,000 from Blaby District Council and £87,000 from Melton Borough Council for affordable homes in Sapcote (12 homes) and Somerby (7 homes), respectively.

£500,000 has also been committed for 2012/13 to potentially support five sites in Harborough (3), Blaby (1) and North West Leicestershire (1).





Improving broadband

The internet is transforming the way that we live, work and play. It is driving business innovation and growth, ensuring that people can access services, and is opening up new opportunities for creative learning.

Not all businesses and communities, however, are able to take advantage of these opportunities. Whilst some areas are able to access super-fast broadband and a range of digital services, others in rural areas struggle with the most basic of internet functions.

It is estimated that around 92,000 premises in Leicestershire do not have access to super-fast broadband, of at least 24Mbit/s. Leicestershire County Council has initially allocated £4m to match the Government's £3.1m to help ensure at least 90% of Leicestershire premises have access to super-fast broadband, with the final 10% guaranteed 2Mbit/s.

A broadband survey, conducted in March and April 2012 received over 4,600 responses. This demonstrated the importance of improving broadband in rural areas to improve access to services and help businesses grow.

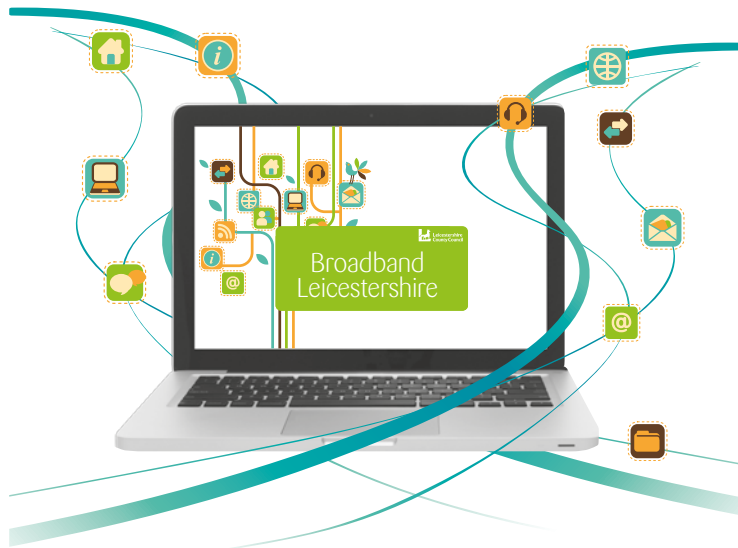
Over the next 3 years the LRP will be helping to ensure rural communities and businesses receive improved connectivity. The LRP is ensuring effective engagement with rural communities and businesses, and is helping to identify priority sectors and areas for deployment.

It is expected that most deployment will not commence until 2013. Ahead of this there are opportunities for communities within rural areas to increase demand and develop



innovative community-led solutions. The LRP is helping to develop these and will share best practice with other communities. A number of active communities are being supported to improve connectivity, including Diseworth, the Vale of Belvoir and the Leire area.

For more information please visit www.leics.gov.uk/broadband.





Carbon reduction

LRP partners have successfully pursued a challenging range of carbon reduction targets in their own operations. In addition there have been a range of community-based programmes which have supported an array of activities. These include:

- **The Communities Cutting Carbon initiative** run by the Rural Community Council and De Montfort University worked with ten core communities across Leicestershire (see www.ruralcc.org.uk/climate-change for more information about the project and an archive of achievements).
- **Community Climate Change Grants** run by Leicestershire County Council gave 15 grants towards feasibility studies and renewable energy projects in community buildings across Leicestershire.
- **Making North West Leicestershire a greener district** is one of the District Council's key priorities and the **Green Footprints Awards** recognise the achievements of schools, young people, the community and businesses who have met the challenge of choosing greener ways to live and work.

The County Council worked with 20 schools in 2011-12 in a pilot project to improve environmental performance in schools management. The Schools Collaboration on Resource Efficiency (SCoRE) successfully supported the schools in a 9% reduction of energy consumption and the project is now developing into a scheme part-funded by schools, from the savings generated.

LRP Management Board 2012

Leicestershire County Council

Harborough District Council (District Representative)

Leicester & Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership

Rural Community Council (Leicestershire & Rutland)

Federation of Small Businesses

National Farmers Union

Country Land & Business Association

Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils

Andrew Granger & Co (Business Representative)

Thank you to all our other partners who have contributed to our work over the last 12 months.



If you require this information in an alternative version such as large print, Braille, tape or help in understanding it in your language, please contact 0116 305 7973.



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