Commission for Rural Communities

Tackling rural disadvantage

How are rural interests being recognised within Local Enterprise Partnerships?

The Commission for Rural Communities acts as the advocate for England's rural communities, as an expert adviser to government, and as a watchdog to ensure that government actions, policies and programmes recognise and respond effectively to rural needs, with a particular focus on disadvantage.

It has three key functions:

Rural advocate:
the voice for rural people, businesses and communities

Expert adviser:
giving evidence-based, objective advice to government and others

Independent watchdog:
monitoring, reporting on and seeking to mainstream rural into the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally

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Foreword

Much emphasis and focus has been channelled towards Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) since they were introduced in 2010, with the purpose of driving sustainable private sector growth and job creation.

In putting together this report, the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) has sought to build on our previous paper published in November 2010, which aimed to assist LEPs to ensure the interests and contribution of rural economies and communities was considered during their initialisation phase. As well as highlighting a range of specific work being taken forward by individual LEPs, and raising a number of challenges currently being experienced, this second report is intended to complement the Government's continuing drive towards ensuring policy and decision-making processes at national and local levels are 'rural proofed'.

Sound engagement with both rural and urban stakeholders will ensure LEPs have a strong sense of business priorities, appreciate the needs of all the main economic sectors, and know where to focus their energy and ideas. However, engagement is a means to an end, and LEPs' performance will rightly be assessed on what they achieve in terms of their main objectives concerning economic growth and job creation. It is important to acknowledge that, given their limited resources, many LEPs are understandably taking a targeted approach, aligned to a small set of priorities. However, in order to fully realise economic growth potential, it is essential that such priorities include rural consideration. And there are many good examples in this report of initiatives, on issues such as broadband and planning, that promise tangible benefits to businesses in rural areas. Ultimately, making a difference in this way is why LEPs exist, and how they will be judged.

The audience for this report is both the Government and LEPs themselves. In addition, I hope it is also of benefit to the many organisations and people that have an interest in ensuring the potential of rural economies is recognised and utilised by LEPs. My thanks go to all the LEPs, businesses, local authorities, and rural groups and stakeholders that gave up time to share views with CRC during the course of the past six months, both through our call for evidence, and a recent stakeholder workshop. Particular thanks also go to two specific LEPs, The Marches and Leeds City Region, who have worked directly with CRC and performed an invaluable role in shaping and guiding the report, and the activities that made up the wider project.

''As Chairman of the Marches LEP, I am very much aware that LEPs are taking different approaches towards accelerating business growth in rural and urban areas. There is much we can learn from each other and it is for this reason that I was delighted for the Marches LEP to be invited to work with CRC on this project. The work rightly recognises rural and urban interdependencies and has sought to gain a wide range of perspectives, ensuring that the final document provides insights of practical use to all LEPs, to Government and our partner organisations. I hope this work will help LEPs to build on what is working, to bring real benefit to their rural communities and businesses.'' **Dr Geoffrey Davies, Chairman, The Marches LEP**

''Leeds City Region LEP is a diverse city region, including inner city areas, rural-urban fringes and remote rural communities, and takes an inclusive approach to the whole of the city region. The LEP has been happy to contribute to the CRC's work, to outline how it has taken account of the rural agenda and to learn from the experience of others.''

Ben Rimmington, Director, Leeds City Region LEP

In assembling this report, it has been CRC's intention to act as a catalyst for drawing together some of the positive work being done by LEPs, as well as highlighting some of the issues and challenges being encountered. The report's structure and content, which is largely focussed around a range of case studies, is designed to reflect this, and the views of those CRC heard from. Responsibility for building on this work, and taking forward the actions included within the report, now rests with LEPs, Government and all those with an interest in rural areas.

Dr Stuart Burgess
Chairman, Commission for Rural Communities

November 2012

Executive Summary

Rural areas are present within the boundaries of almost every Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Even LEPs which would normally be considered urban often contain countryside which abuts or even impinges on their urban areas. Rural communities, and the businesses located within them, have the potential to contribute considerably towards the primary objectives of LEPs. In order to realise this potential, it is crucial that rural interests are recognised by LEPs as part of their work.

Approaches being taken by LEPs to include rural interests within their work

Rural voice

Organisational and governance arrangements include representatives from rural businesses and communities who are able to input into LEPs

Approaches include:

- LEP boards containing rural champions, who provide a focal point for rural representation.
- Presence of rural sub-groups, composed of representatives from rural businesses and organisations, which develop and recommend policies to promote the economic interests of rural areas and provide information to the main LEP boards to support their decision and policy making.
- Presence of rural representatives on other sub-groups (geographic, policy and / or sector based), including thematic business forums focussing on key issues for LEPs. Such representatives play a role in helping sub-groups to rural proof projects and policies.

Issues for consideration:

- Some LEPs, including some with highly rural characteristics, have not proactively reached out to or considered taking on advocacy roles for rural sectors, rural agendas or rural geographies, and some LEPs have not identified a rural stakeholder at board level or a rural link into wider advisory boards.
- Whilst both rural specific sub-groups and those bringing together specific economic sectors can be effective forums for ensuring rural interests are reflected in organisational and governance structures, this is only the case where they are effectively linked up with other parts of LEPs, including their main boards.
- The extent to which the rural voluntary and community sector (including town and parish councils) is represented on LEP Boards is mixed. Such sectors are crucial to economic growth, but are often unrepresented.

Rural stakeholders are able to input a 'rural perspective' into the work of LEPs

Approaches include:

- Establishment of formal links with external representative groups, including Rural and Farming Networks, Rural Community Councils and LEADER Local Action Groups. Such groups work with LEPs to address and represent the needs of rural businesses.
- Sub-contracting secretariat functions to external business organisations with robust links with the rural business community.
- LEPs utilising local authority links to rural stakeholders and groups.

Issues for consideration:

- Whilst some LEPs have established specific channels for feeding in rural considerations, others appear uninterested in rural matters. Some rural groups have experienced considerable resistance to attempts to engage.
- Some LEPs have no formal structure linking their business boards with rural stakeholders, and overall consult a relatively narrow and spatially unrepresentative range of stakeholders.
- At present the level of engagement and influence of Rural and Farming Networks is mixed.
- In some parts of the country there are a number of rural representative groups with similar agendas. As such, there is a risk of duplication of effort and diluting of rural messages.

Policies and evidence

Policies, programmes and activities of LEPs address rural interests, including the economic interdependence between urban and rural areas

Approaches include:

- Adopting a 'rural proofing' approach by embedding the rural agenda into action plans and objectives, and ascertaining the views of rural communities and businesses at the policy development stage.
- Taking a 'rural mainstreaming' approach where issues are generic across sectors or geographies, for example access to finance, business planning and management training.
- Developing rurally tailored approaches where specific issues are more prominent in rural areas, for example rural planning, affordable housing and tourism, and broadband 'not-spots'.
- Introduction of specific strategic objectives around the rural economy.

Issues for consideration:

- Some LEPs are not exploring sufficiently the positive benefits of urban-rural linkages, and incorporating these into their overarching strategies.
- Within some LEPs, there is not yet a sense of how their strategies have identified how development of the rural economy can contribute towards LEP priorities. Embedding and mainstreaming of key rural issues across LEP strategic priorities and areas of economic focus (beyond the visitor economy) has not yet been visible in some LEPs.

The evidence base for LEPs includes information and data on different types of rural area, at a small enough scale to fully reflect rural issues

Approaches include:

- Acknowledgement that different types of rurality exist for different settlement types (urban, town and fringe, village, and hamlet and isolated dwellings) and levels of sparsity.
- Specific bespoke research into the contribution of the rural economy.
- Thematic research which takes in rural considerations.
- Utilisation of local authority periodic economic monitoring of urban and rural areas.
- Provision of online data hubs which can be tailored to small rural settlements.
- Presence of dedicated research and data experts.

Issues for consideration:

- Some LEPs are minimising rural activity, on the basis of analyses which suggest that local priorities should lie in other parts of the economy.
- Accessing sound and comprehensive intelligence on businesses in rural areas is a challenge when so much official data has either been withdrawn (for example in the case of some former district council and Business Link datasets) or withheld due to data confidentiality fears.
- Collating and maintaining a comprehensive and coherent evidence base remains a challenge in the current resource climate, with funding being prioritised to assist where there is an identifiable need for robust evidence. As a result, many LEPs have not commissioned any major research and evidence work regarding the rural economy.
- A statutory duty still exists for local authorities to produce Local Economic Assessments. A question therefore remains as to whether LEPs are, or should be, formally producing evidence to support policy development.

Funding and business support

LEPs have used Government (and other) funding streams to target rural areas

Approaches include:

- Bringing unused buildings in rural areas back into economic use.
- Introducing machinery and equipment grant schemes to support rural businesses to expand.
- Providing funding to support superfast broadband schemes.
- Improvement of infrastructure and services to small rural business parks.
- Endorsing funding bids of other organisations.

Issues for consideration:

- Rural areas often lack the larger urban businesses which Government is looking to co-invest in. Government funding initiatives tend to be determined by the ability to deliver large scale growth, often with indicators such as delivering major job numbers and GVA increases. Within this context, a challenge remains for LEPs to justify smaller, rural-focussed schemes.
- Many Government funding streams are too large for smaller organisations to apply for, many of which are located in rural areas.

- The limited levels of core funding for LEPs risks undermining their resource base for developing tailored approaches to rural policy making, and limits their ability to create networks, for example, when trying to engage hard to reach rural businesses in isolated areas.
- A knock-on impact of the lack of engagement of LEPs with local voluntary and community sector organisations (see Rural Voice section) is that such organisations are often unable to access funds being channelled through LEPs.
- There remains a lack of clarity about how the work of LEPs overlaps with the activities of Local Action Groups under LEADER.
- The move from allocation of RDPE funding by RDAs to distribution by regional teams according to standard national criteria, appears counter to the Government's localism agenda.
- It is essential that lessons are learned and shared from the Rural Growth Network pilots, to allow the best initiatives to be extended to other areas.

LEPs are supporting small and micro enterprises in rural areas, including assisting them to overcome barriers to new business formation and growth

Approaches include:

- Introduction of business led mentoring and support schemes which help start-ups, for example through general sign-posting, access to finance and overcoming legal and regulatory barriers.
- Running networking events for small and micro-businesses in rural areas.
- Providing online mentoring support services to small and micro-businesses.
- Providing assistance to small and micro-businesses in utilising broadband.
- Creation of a dedicated business helpline for local businesses.
- Providing loans to small and micro-businesses in rural areas.

Issues for consideration:

- Many skills and business support schemes being run by LEPs appear to be targeted at larger, high growth businesses, which are more prevalent in urban areas.
- LEPs need to do more to acknowledge and understand the contribution that micro and land-based businesses make to rural areas. It is, however, acknowledged that it is often difficult for LEPs to access funding to support this.
- The impact of the withdrawal Business Link services, and their replacement with predominantly web-based services, has been highlighted by some parts of the business community as a matter of great concern, especially among remote, rural-based enterprises.

Further issues for consideration by Government and LEPs

City/urban-centric policy model

- The economic analysis that lies behind the LEP model, and the funding streams available to LEPs (City Deals, Enterprise Zones, Growing Places Fund etc), indicates that business in cities is central to driving economic development, leading the focus to rest predominantly in these areas. However, such economic analysis is defined in a

fairly limited and orthodox way, and does not take into account how city driven economies relate to their rural hinterland, and the overall connections between different parts of the economy.
- The current narrow policy focus on cities needs to broaden to both recognise and capitalise on all of the inherent assets of wider Functional Economic Market Areas.
- There is also a sense that LEPs reinforce current power structures which channel funding to big infrastructure projects and away from market towns, and the small and micro-business based economy.

Unclear remit for LEPs

- There are concerns that some of the messages coming from Government are creating an impression that LEPs represent the voice of local communities. Primarily, LEPs are business organisations. As such, whilst they represent one important sectoral interest, they cannot represent a unified voice for the community.
- The Government needs to provide more clarity around the role that LEPs have in contributing to environmental and social objectives, as well as economic growth, and how LEPs are to be appraised against such activities.

Limited resources

- Whilst recent funding announcements by the Government are welcome, the still limited resources available to LEPs mean that their area of focus is highly targeted, often around urban areas.

Difficulties with different sub-national boundaries

- The varying geographies of the numerous sub-national bodies now in existence (LEPs, Local Nature Partnerships, Rural Farming Networks etc) can make it difficult to create common strategic policies or ensure a balance of interests are represented in LEP decision-making processes. With boundaries fragmenting and overlapping in different ways, a clear focus on key issues such as business support and growth can be difficult to achieve.
- The Government has a crucial role to play in brokering the relationships between such bodies.

Priorities for action

Rural voice

- To ensure and maintain a rural input into policy and decision making, a rural champion should be present on each **LEP** board.

- **LEPs** should consider allocating places on their boards for non-business / local authority representatives, including those from the town and parish council sector.

- Each sub-group established by **LEP** boards should include rural representation. Ideally, rural needs should be considered as an integral part of all discussions and decision-making, not separately or discretely.
- Where **LEPs** have established specific rural sub-groups, their membership should be diverse, and should include economic, social and environmental interests. Furthermore, rural business representation should not be solely composed of the land-based sector.
- **LEPs** should engage a broad representation of stakeholders during the policy and decision making process – including those from a rural context. Outputs from consultation with rural stakeholders, as well as informing the work of rural-focussed sub-groups, should also be formally fed into the work of wider sub-groups, and main LEP boards.
- When seeking to deliver mutual, cross-border priorities, **LEPs** should seek to engage rural business groups that operate across LEP boundaries.
- **LEPs** should fully utilise the skills and knowledge of existing local networks in rural areas, including LEADER Local Action Groups.
- **Defra, BIS and CLG** should work together to ensure Rural and Farming Networks are formally acknowledged by all LEPs, and have a direct input into their work, including acting as a sounding board when developing future initiatives, and informing LEPs on 'grass roots' issues of particular relevance to rural areas.

Policies and evidence

- The **Government** should continue to encourage LEPs to rural proof their work, including promoting Defra's newly developed local rural proofing materials. This should include developing the role of Rural and Farming Networks in rural proofing LEP business plans.
- The **Government** should acknowledge a broader recognition of the role all places, including rural, can play in fostering economic growth.
- **LEPs** should ensure an understanding of the linkages between different economic sectors, rather than viewing them in isolation. Furthermore, **LEPs** should gain an understanding of urban / rural interdependencies, and foster links that benefit the whole of their areas.
- **LEPs** need to better recognise the role that rural areas play in enabling urban areas and economies to flourish, particularly through the natural resources they provide.
- Through active economic benchmarking and analysis, **LEPs** need to develop a better understanding of the contribution that the rural economy plays in the wider economy.
- **LEPs** should identify rural-specific stakeholders and mainstream bodies supporting rural businesses and encourage them to contribute their expertise, data and understanding into evidence gathering processes.

- To develop an accurate picture of rural businesses and communities, data gathering by **LEPs** should occur at the lowest possible spatial scale.
- The **Government** should ensure that statistics are collated by the Office for National Statistics at LEP level.
- To ensure the presence of a local evidence-base which includes both urban and rural areas, the **Government** should ensure LEPs have accesses to evidence from former RDAs and local Business Links.
- The **Government** should clarify expectations of LEPs producing Local Economic Assessments.

Funding and business support

- **Government** funding streams should incorporate a recognition of the particular needs and differences of rural economies – many rural areas cannot compete with large conurbations on employment / GVA impact. Non-spatially focused or biased growth incentives need to be developed, which recognise that growth can occur anywhere with the right conditions. There also needs to be a greater recognition / value attached to the aggregate impact of smaller enterprises, and also the contribution that rural areas make regarding ecosystem goods and services, tourism and food security.
- **Government** funding streams need to recognise that outputs in rural areas are likely to be more dispersed than in urban areas, especially for infrastructure-type projects.
- **Government** funding streams need to incorporate a focus on delivery for smaller places and organisations, including small and micro-businesses.
- The **Government**'s City Deal, Enterprise Zone and Growing Places initiatives should be opened up to different, non-coterminous economic geographies, including rural areas which share common issues for example Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Market Towns.
- The **Government** should ensure that RDPE grant programmes are properly integrated into the work of LEPs. This should include promoting to LEPs the advantages of community-led approaches to investment and delivery, such as the LEADER Programme.
- To address ambiguity and complexity concerning locally available funding streams, and broaden the number of organisations applying for funding, **LEPs** should seek to become centres of information for funding support and advice.
- **LEPs** should seek to provide small and micro-businesses in rural areas with appropriate support to help them realise their growth aspirations, including access to flexible finance, provision of face-to-face business support, and creating rural business networks.
- The **Government and LEP Network** should work together to continually identify best practice examples of the creation, development and support of businesses in rural areas.

Introduction

The core principle behind the introduction of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) was to create a shift in emphasis towards local areas, so that those who know what to do are empowered to act accordingly. This aligns with the Government's stated approach to localism, whereby people and organisations are given the freedom to agree what is right for their own localities, with limited direction from the centre. As such, all LEPs are different, and no geographies, governance structures or policy objectives are identical. Many LEPs are also in their relative infancy, with the first applications for LEP status being assessed only two years ago.

Rural communities are also not a unified whole. For example, those close to large urban areas may face very different challenges to those in more deeply rural areas. For all of these reasons, it would be wrong for this report to dictate one model or approach for all LEPs to apply in their work with rural communities. The report has therefore sought to include examples from a range of different LEPs, in acknowledgement that policy is best determined by those communities working across disciplines and interests to find solutions appropriate to their individual areas.

However, what is the case almost universally is that rural areas are present within nearly every LEP. Even those which would normally be considered urban often contain countryside which abuts or even impinges on urban areas. As outlined in the 2011 Rural Economy Growth Review, businesses in rural areas make a substantial contribution to the national economy. In England they generate around 22% of employment and 19% of Gross Value Added (GVA), equating to £200bn in 2008.[1] Rural communities, and the businesses located within them, therefore have the potential to contribute considerably towards the primary objectives of LEPs. In order to realise this potential, it is crucial that rural interests are recognised by LEPs as part of their work.

In November 2010 the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) published a report on Recognising Rural Interests within Local Enterprise Partnerships. The report was designed to provide assistance and support to LEPs in ensuring the interests and contribution of rural economies and communities was recognised. As such, the report contained a number of suggested approaches that LEPs might choose to adopt. Furthermore, the report also examined how rural areas were served by previous sub-national economic partnerships, and provided examples of good practice.

At a Defra LEP Round Table meeting in February 2012 a number of LEPs expressed an interest in CRC carrying out some follow up work on how rural interests could be further recognised and enhanced by LEPs. From May to June 2012 CRC ran a call for evidence to gain an understanding of the progress made by LEPs since their inception. 48 responses were received from a range of LEPs, businesses, local authorities, and rural groups and stakeholders.

The information received from the call for evidence was used to help shape a workshop for LEPs and others representing rural businesses and communities, as well as relevant

[1] http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/rural/the-rural-economy/regr/

Government Departments, held in September 2012. As well as providing an opportunity for LEPs to showcase their rural focussed work, the workshop also provided a chance for attendees to discuss, alongside relevant Government Departments, the issues and barriers they were facing in including rural areas within LEPs' work.

The purpose of this report is to bring together the views and information received from CRC's call for evidence, alongside those expressed at the September workshop. In all, a total of 20 LEPs have fed directly into the report.

The report is structured according to the three main themes:

Theme 1: Rural voice
Representation of rural interests on LEPs' organisational and governance structures, and rural stakeholders inputting a 'rural perspective' into the work of LEPs

Theme 2: Policies and evidence
Policies, programmes and activities of LEPs address rural interests, including through an informed evidence base

Theme 3: Funding and business support
How LEPs are using Government (and other) funding streams to target rural areas, including by supporting small and micro-businesses

Each theme begins with a number of example case studies, many of which align with approaches highlighted in CRC's original 2010 report. These are followed by a narrative on issues for consideration, based on feedback received from the call for evidence, and stakeholder workshop. Each theme concludes with a number of 'priorities for action' identified by call for evidence respondents and workshop delegates.

The report ends by outlining a number of further issues for consideration by the Government and LEPs, as well as some specific actions that LEPs could take to stimulate economic growth in rural areas.

Theme 1: Rural voice

Organisational and governance arrangements include representatives from rural businesses and communities who are able to input into LEPs

Case studies

Enterprise M3

- Enterprise M3 LEP has established a number of sub-groups, including a Rural Economy and Broadband Group (known as the Rural Delivery Group). Its aims are to develop and recommend policies and action plans to promote the economic interests of rural areas and provide information to the LEP board to support its decision making and policies.
- The main LEP board also contains a representative who runs a business in a rural area, and they act as a rural champion on the board. They also attend Rural Delivery Group meetings, linking back into the main board.
- The chairs of the various sub-groups, as well as key delivery partners, meet regularly as an Implementation Group. This also provides an opportunity for rural priorities and actions to be raised and identified, as well as other cross-sector issues.
- The LEP also includes representation from the New Forest National Park Authority. This ensures that protected landscapes and a high quality environment are recognised, including the economic benefits they present.

Dorset

- A number of business representatives are present on Dorset LEP's board. Recruitment was guided by a number of principles, including the need to obtain good representation of the geographical and thematic interests across Dorset. This resulted in board members with specific rural briefs, or briefs associated with sectors key to rural Dorset. Alongside this, there was also a general recognition that the LEP is about the whole of Dorset.
- A Rural Enterprise Group has also been established under the chairmanship of the rural enterprise champion on the main LEP board. This group provides a direct route for rural perspectives to be fed into the work of the LEP board, and engages with a range of rural interest groups, including the NFU, CLA, FSB, FE institutions, and various private sector business representatives.
- A number of other sub-groups, which include specific rural representatives, also provide an opportunity for rural businesses to inform and influence the work of the LEP board.

West of England

- West of England LEP has established a number of sub-groups, including a Rural Economy Sub-Group. The area covered by the LEP area is relatively small, with the majority of the population and businesses based in Bristol, Weston-super-Mare and Bath. The rural sub-group was developed to ensure that the LEP reaches beyond cities and towns.

- Typically, the rural sub-group develops policy and project ideas, which are then relayed for consideration by the main LEP board.
- Rural businesses are also represented on the main LEP board.

Cumbria

- Cumbria LEP uses a Rural Expert Group, made up of businesses from a range of sectors, which inputs into the LEP's overall strategy and evidence. There are also separate Agriculture, Land and Sea-based groups for the traditional rural economy. In addition, there are other groups for the Food and Drink, and Visitor Economy, both of which have rural representation.

Cheshire and Warrington

- The rural economy is one of six strategic priorities for Cheshire and Warrington LEP.
- The LEP also has a board member who leads on the rural economy, and a Rural Priorities Working Group which reports to this board member.

Buckinghamshire Thames Valley

- The Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP board has strong representation from rural businesses. The LEP has also formed three sub-groups / forums covering Skills, Infrastructure and Stakeholders. Through these forums, a broad range of businesses (including representatives from rural businesses and communities) are able to engage in the LEP's work.

Heart of the South West

- Rural businesses are represented on a LEP Executive Group, a Business Forum Executive, and a wider Business Forum (the primary method of engagement with the business community).
- The rural representatives present on these various groups play an important role in helping to shape and effectively 'rural proof' projects and policies.

The Marches

- The Marches LEP Board comprises 70% private sector (represented by 7 private companies) and 30% public sector (represented by three local authorities – Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin).
- There is a strong understanding of rural business sectors and the importance and value of rural heritage among the LEP board membership. A number of board members run businesses in rural areas, and one is a former national president of the NFU.
- The LEP's organisational structure includes three area-based Business Boards. The chairs of these boards provide a wider business sub-structure to the main LEP board. The membership of the Business Boards is representative of the sectoral make-up of the business base of each area, and also provides representative geographic coverage. They include the main business sector networks (including the Chambers of Commerce and FSB), and a number of rural stakeholders (including the NFU, CLA, the Rural Hubs Partnership, and a number of wider rural businesses).

Leicester and Leicestershire

- A local farmer and business person is a member of the LEP board. As well as taking a lead on rural business issues, they are also involved in all of the LEP's decision-making discussions.
- This board member is also a member of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP), which leads on rural economic issues on behalf of the LEP.

Worcestershire

- A number of rural stakeholders are members of the Worcestershire LEP Board. This includes the LEP Chair, who was previously the chair of the rural regeneration zone under the West Midlands RDA.
- The LEP has recognised the need to develop a strong mainstreaming approach to rural policies and programmes, and is beginning to work more closely with the new Rural and Farming Network, with a view to it feeding into the LEP.

Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire

- The Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire board membership includes a specific rural representative. Their role has included assisting rural tourism development in the Peak District.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly

- The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP board was recruited for the breadth of its experience, rather than being 'representative' of a sectional group (which they felt would be difficult to achieve). Five members of the board have direct experience and/or interest in rural economic issues.

Issues for consideration

- Governance and structures are important, but equally so is the willingness of LEPs to consult as necessary and heed the advice they receive. Both rural focussed sub-groups, and those bringing together specific economic sectors, can be effective forums for ensuring rural interests are reflected in organisational and governance structures. However, this is only the case where they are effectively linked up with other parts of the LEP, including their main boards. At present, this is not always occurring.

- Generic issues, such as job creation and transport, are often identified as priorities by rural sub-groups. However, such matters are usually considered to be more the responsibility of skills / infrastructure type sub-groups. It is therefore essential that when such groups are asked to include 'rural' in their discussions, this is properly acknowledged. At present, the extent to which this is being followed through is variable.

- Some LEPs, including some with highly rural characteristics, have not proactively reached out to or considered taking on advocacy roles for rural sectors, rural agendas or rural geographies.

- The construction and operational structures of some LEPs do not recognise rural interests. Some LEPs have not identified a rural stakeholder at board level or a rural

link into wider advisory boards. This is leading to a perception from some stakeholders that rural business interests are not considered a high priority.

- Some businesses feel that rural representation within some LEPs is tokenistic and often limited to agricultural interests. Although local authorities can to some extent take the 'rural pulse', this is questioned by some businesses. The fact that out of necessity some LEPs are primarily resourced by local authorities means that they are highly dependent on the quality of engagement these local authorities have with the private sector, particularly small and micro-businesses. Furthermore, a lack of rural representation (aside from local authorities) is viewed as a reason why some LEPs failed in their bids to secure Rural Growth Network pilot funding.

- Concerns have also been expressed over the extent to which LEPs can properly engage with people on the ground, with some LEPs only consulting a chosen few councillors who cannot be politically or geographically representative. In particular, there is scope for increasing the representation of district councils on LEP boards. District councils have an important role in increasing economic well being and prosperity but are at present detached from many LEPs.

- The extent to which the rural voluntary and community sector (VCS) is represented on LEP Boards is mixed. Where VCS input has been sought, this is often in a consultative capacity, rather than as a strategic partner. Furthermore, a disconnect has been highlighted between the Government's view that LEPs would include a broad representation of various organisations, including co-operatives, social enterprises, small and medium scale enterprises, charities and voluntary organisations, and the make-up of LEPs to date. Such sectors are crucial to economic growth, but are often unrepresented on LEP Boards. It is the view of one organisation that supports community and social enterprise that LEPs have had no impact on their work supporting rural communities.

- Representatives from some Associations of Local Councils have also expressed concern over the apparent exclusivity of LEP membership. Some have actively sought places on LEP boards and have been refused on the grounds that LEPs are bodies with an economic and strategic focus. This is despite town and parish councils having an important part to play in representing and supporting the needs of local communities, including those in rural areas, and the role they can play in assisting the economic development of rural areas.

Priorities for action

- To ensure and maintain a rural input into policy and decision making, a rural champion should be present on each **LEP** board.

- **LEPs** should consider allocating places on their boards for non-business / local authority representatives, including those from the town and parish council sector.

- Each sub-group established by **LEP** boards should include rural representation. Ideally, rural needs should be considered as an integral part of all discussions and decision-making, not separately or discretely.

- Where **LEPs** have established specific rural sub-groups, their membership should be diverse, and should include economic, social and environmental interests. Furthermore, rural business representation should not be solely composed of the land-based sector.

Rural stakeholders are able to input a 'rural perspective' into the work LEPs

Case studies

Leicester and Leicestershire

- The Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP) works closely with the Leicester and Leicestershire LEP, and performs the role of a rural economic delivery partner. LRP has a strong history of supporting the rural economy through grant programmes, training and networking. 5 of the 12 members of the LRP Board represent rural businesses (FSB, NFU, CLA and two local rural business people). Through these board members it is able to engage with a broad range of rural businesses.
- The rural economic priorities for the LEP and LRP are coterminous. LRP provides additional capacity to the LEP, and helps articulate the needs and views of rural businesses. As well as influencing the LEP's strategic priorities, LRP also develops and delivers actions on the ground. This includes taking steps to ensure rural businesses are represented within all consultation activity. Examples include a number of 'roadshow' events with local businesses, held across Leicestershire Districts, which have informed the LEP's Economic Plan.

Buckinghamshire Thames Valley

- Buckinghamshire and Thames Valley LEP has sub-contracted its secretariat function to Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF). BBF performs a range of rural functions: it facilitates the Buckinghamshire Rural Affairs Group (BRAG); it is the accountable body for the Aylesbury Vale and Milton Keynes, and Chilterns LEADER Programmes; it holds a national contract with the Forestry Commission to deliver the Woodfuel WIG; and it facilitates the Buckinghamshire Business Ambassadors.
- The relationship with BBF has enabled the LEP to access a number of rural groups, which they work with to deliver their objectives, and shape and mainstream their priorities.
- The BBF Secretariat is also represented on the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Local Environment Partnership (the emerging Local Nature Partnership), and the Buckinghamshire Third Sector Infrastructure Partnership. BBFs involvement is in recognition of the value of the natural environment and its links to a vibrant rural economy. Membership enables the LEP to develop joined up strategies for delivering sustainable economic development, protecting/conserving the natural environment, and ensuring Buckinghamshire's rural communities are not excluded from a range of services and opportunities.

Tees Valley

- Tees Valley LEP is a member of the local Rural Farming Network, which helps to ensure rural interests are reflected in the activities, actions and priorities of the LEP as well as providing a direct link to central government. A number of RFN meetings have also been held at the LEP's offices.
- The LEP has developed close engagement with Tees Valley Rural Community Council, including giving the RCC access to the LEP's various sub-committees. The RCC was also actively involved in the preparations for a Business Summit hosted by the LEP in 2012, helping to ensure the event met the needs of rural businesses. The LEP also invited the RCC to be part of a working group to develop a BDUK bid, and have supported the development of rural bids to the RDPE rural broadband fund.

The Marches

- The Rural Hubs Partnership, which amongst a number of other areas in the midlands, represents and supports rural businesses and communities in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire, provides a formal link to the Marches LEP. This enables rural stakeholders to interact and provide feedback on policy issues at the LEP's Business Board level.
- Herefordshire Council, which prepares some of the Marches policy responses, consults with a range of rural stakeholders, including the Rural Hubs Partnership, the NFU, CPRE and CLA.
- The LEP has also actively invited rural stakeholders to comment on and contribute to policy responses to Government and European Commission consultation documents on proposed economic development policies.

Worcestershire

- The Rural Hubs Partnership (see the Marches case study, above) provides a formal link to the Worcestershire LEP. This enables rural stakeholders to interact and provide feedback on policy issues at the LEP's Business Board level.
- When writing its business plan, the LEP also encourages rural stakeholders to express their suggestions and concerns on policy positions. In particular, it is the LEP's intention to use groups such as the Worcestershire Local Action Group and Rural and Farming Network as a sounding board on rural issues.
- Worcestershire Council, which prepares some of the LEP's policy responses, consults with a range of rural stakeholders, including the Rural Hubs Partnership, the NFU, CPRE and CLA.
- The LEP has also actively invited rural stakeholders to comment and contribute to policy responses to Government and European Commission consultation documents on proposed economic development policies.

Dorset

- Dorset LEP was actively engaged in discussions to establish a Rural and Farming Network, and has also helped shape the emerging Dorset Local Nature Partnership. In addition, it has also inputted into the work of the South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership, including assisting a bid to secure Lottery funding to enhance the landscape and derive economic benefits.

North Eastern

- Durham, Northumberland and Gateshead local authorities have taken a leading role on the rural agenda for the North Eastern LEP, including establishing the new North Eastern Farming Rural Advisory Network (NEFRAN).
- Strong links are developing between the LEP Board and NEFRAN. This includes a board member now attending the NEFRAN, and a nominated LEP officer being linked to its secretariat.
- The LEP has also played a key role in the successful bid to run a Rural Growth Network pilot.

Northamptonshire

- Northamptonshire ACRE, the rural community council for Northamptonshire, has developed close links with Northamptonshire LEP.
- The North Northamptonshire LEADER Programme is also chaired by a key member of the LEP.

Cumbria

- Cumbria LEP's approach to engagement is the same for both rural and urban stakeholders, and is conducted via email and telephone surveys, expert focus groups and meetings with various local stakeholder groups.

Cheshire and Warrington

- Cheshire and Warrington LEP's Rural Priorities Working Group, which reports directly to the LEP's Rural Economy lead member, has enabled the views and concerns of organisations such as the Cheshire and Warrington Rural Partnership to be heard, and fed into the LEP's work.

Business Peak District

- Via a Business Peak District Concordat Agreement, a strategic relationship has been established with the majority of LEPs covering the Peak District area. This has helped secure 'buy-in' from LEPs and other key partners to a set of priorities to grow the local economy, and provides an opportunity for Business Peak District to help deliver the various LEP's rural agendas.

Issues for consideration

- Regional rural representative groups which sought to engage LEPs at their inception have experienced differing levels of success in encouraging LEPs to factor rural issues into their work. Whilst some have established specific channels for feeding in rural considerations, others appear uninterested in rural matters. In between, there are examples where rural issues are nominally covered, but do not attract much main board attention. To an extent, the degree of interest in rural issues appears to depend on whether or not there is a local champion prepared to pursue the matter.

- Some LEPs rely on one-off events such as annual conferences, workshops, and online mechanisms for engaging rural stakeholders and their wider stakeholder base, with the agenda often set by public sector partners. In disparate rural areas, this may not be enough to gain a true picture. More effective channels need to be established to tap into other networks, and collect intelligence on a more regular basis.

- Some LEPs have no formal structure linking their business boards with rural stakeholders. In some cases, even where rural sub-groups are present, the primary rural representation is via local authorities, and there is a limited flow of information through to rural stakeholder groups.

- Some LEPs consult a relatively narrow and spatially unrepresentative range of stakeholders, and there is much reliance on such stakeholders to canvass the views of their partners concerning the LEP agenda. This is viewed by many as an inevitable consequence of the small size and resource of many LEPs.

- Some rural groups feel that engagement with LEPs is often one-sided, with rural organisations contacting LEPs in the hope of influencing them. Some have also experienced considerable resistance to attempts to engage. Furthermore, even where rural stakeholders are able to feed in their views to LEP boards, there is often little assurance that their input will be used.

- LEPs containing specific, formal rural representation via bodies such as National Parks, are on the whole more open to considering and including rural interest than those without such bodies. Such organisations can bring greater opportunities to align on policies and foster 'branded' partnership working.

- Rural and Farming Networks can provide a strategic overview of key issues and provide access to a range of membership organisations for specialist input. Some network chairs are attending LEP board meetings periodically to help ensure rural issues are mainstreamed within LEP delivery. But at present the level of engagement and influence of such groups is mixed.

- A key challenge also rests with rural stakeholders in demonstrating that rural areas make a meaningful contribution to the future prosperity and economic development and growth of their areas, and the country as a whole. Better links and relationships between existing rural partnerships, groups and forums within LEP areas is essential to this. In some parts of the country there are a number of such groups with, broadly speaking, similar agendas. This can lead to duplication and confusion. Some are also newly formed, for example in the case of Rural Farming Networks, and the extent of their roles and relationships is still evolving. There is a danger that, without better joined up working, there will be duplication of effort and messages will be diluted.

Priorities for action

- **LEPs** should engage a broad representation of stakeholders during the policy and decision making process – including those from a rural context. Outputs from consultation with rural stakeholders, as well as informing the work of rural-focussed sub-groups, should also be formally fed into the work of wider sub-groups, and main LEP boards.

- When seeking to deliver mutual, cross-border priorities, **LEPs** should seek to engage rural business groups that operate across LEP boundaries.

- **LEPs** should fully utilise the skills and knowledge of existing local networks in rural areas, including LEADER Local Action Groups .

- **Defra, BIS and CLG** should work together to ensure Rural and Farming Networks are formally acknowledged by all LEPs, and have a direct input into their work, including acting as a sounding board when developing future initiatives, and informing LEPs on 'grass roots' issues of particular relevance to rural areas.

Theme 2: Policies and evidence

Policies, programmes and activities of LEPs address rural interests, including the economic interdependence between urban and rural areas

Case studies

Buckinghamshire Thames Valley

- Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP aims to ensure that its policies, programmes and activities are rural proofed at the point of inception. Because Buckinghamshire is a predominantly rural area, and because the LEP's secretariat (provided by Buckinghamshire Business First) has strong links with a range of rural businesses, rural groups and communities, the LEP generally seeks to ascertain the views of rural communities and rural businesses at the point that policies are being developed.
- The LEP has also recognised that a continued focus on SME and micro-business growth and support lends itself to rural communities by default.
- It has also demonstrated support for the development of tourism networks that predominantly benefit rural businesses in Buckinghamshire, and encourages a business friendly planning framework.
- If their analysis indicates they have particular issues which necessitate a more tailored solution for rural businesses, they will generally seek to develop a tailored rather than mainstream approach. For example, it has recognised the need for rural broadband and has taken active steps to prioritise rural areas in its emerging Local Broadband Plan.

Enterprise M3

- M3 Enterprise has established a Rural Delivery Group to promote the economic interests of rural areas. To achieve this, the group brings together public, private and not for profit stakeholders to develop and recommend policies and action plans, providing information into the LEP board to support their decision-making and policies.

Leicester and Leicestershire

- The Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP) (see p.19) has been instrumental in ensuring Leicester and Leicestershire LEP's commitment and interest in rural issues.
- The LEP takes a dual approach to the development of rural policy. Where appropriate, it is mainstreamed, for example if issues are generic across sector or geography (access to finance, regulatory support, business planning, management training etc).
- Where there are specific issues which are more prominent in rural areas (rural planning, rural transport, specific sector support (for example land based, food and drink and rural tourism)), specific policies and activities are developed, for example the creation of a Rural Economy Planning Toolkit. Importantly, these do not stand alone and always append mainstream policies.

West of England

- As part of its discussions, West of England LEP has considered a wide range of issues of rural concern, including: planning policies in the emerging core strategies; the encouragement of local food production and consumption; infrastructure requirements; improving the linkages between urban and rural communities; the potential relationship with a future Local Nature Partnership; and the high costs of rural living adjacent to major conurbations.

South East

- The South East LEP Board has agreed four strategic objectives, one of which is 'strengthen the rural economy'.
- The LEP has also identified four 'enabling' activities, one of which – universal superfast broadband – has a particular resonance for rural areas.

Northamptonshire

- Northants LEP is working on a mentoring scheme involving women in rural enterprises (based on the LEADER Programme).

The Marches

- The Marches LEP is predominantly rural, meaning the rural agenda is embedded in the LEP's action plans, projects and objectives, as well as the Business Boards that feed into the LEP (see page 16).
- The LEP has three key strategic priorities: to accelerate business growth; to attract new business investment; and to stimulate key sectors.
- The Marches Planning Authorities have changed their policies and practices to promote growth and support those wishing to invest there. This compelling business investment offer is based upon a strong spirit of enterprise and opportunity that is matched by supportive local governance and an outstanding quality of life offer. The importance of protecting and enhancing the rural environment as one of the Marches key economic assets is at the forefront of the LEP's approach to business planning.

Tees Valley

- An Economic and Regeneration Statement of Ambition has been agreed by Tees Valley LEP and its partners, setting out how various ambitions can be achieved.
- While the focus of the LEP is inevitably towards the larger industrial and commercial drivers of the Tees Valley economy, there is an understanding that the area's rural communities have their own issues associated with, for example, unemployment, access, health and education. The LEP is seeking to understand these issues and acknowledge the higher cost of regeneration and economic solutions in rural areas.
- The Statement of Ambition recognises that the existing economy of the Tees Valley is still biased towards a small number of large scale employers, and that policies and actions must seek to create a range of employment opportunities across a range of sectors. It also recognises the need to prioritise existing deprived communities to ensure that no-one is excluded from the opportunities that Tees Valley could offer in future. This includes the rural East Cleveland area, where the LEP is working with relevant local authorities and housing providers to increase the supply of affordable housing.
- The overall contribution that rural areas make to the Tees Valley's quality of life, which is a fundamental part of economic growth, is recognised by the LEP, and it is

particularly keen to actively promote nature-based and outdoor activities, and heritage and innovation throughout the rural parts of the Tees Valley.

- The relative isolation of rural areas in the Tees Valley means that improving connectivity to allow residents access to the labour markets of key business centres is a key challenge. The LEP has produced a specific Transport Statement of Ambition to address this and other challenges. This includes approaches to connecting rural and urban areas.
- A key priority for the LEP is also to ensure that all communities and businesses, including those in rural areas, have access to high speed broadband. A number of measures have been taken by the LEP to address this, including co-ordinating the development of a Local Broadband Delivery Plan which will address the gaps in coverage in rural areas.

Leeds City Region

- Leeds City Region's strategic plan has been drawn up using a mainstreaming approach, which has sought to ensure that policies and economic approaches are inclusive to all areas. However, whilst it does not have a specific rural section, it acknowledges the important contribution that rural areas make to the city region's 'offer', including the fact that over three quarters of all businesses are located in rural areas.
- The LEADER Local Action Group Board in the city region, which has been working with the city region for a number of years, takes responsibility for topics that are of particular concern to rural areas (such as transport and housing) and representatives from the LEP Board sit on relevant panels.
- Rural areas have been included in the city region's strategy development. For example, one strand of the city region's Housing and Regeneration Strategy focuses on 'Supporting Rural Economic Renaissance', and the development of sustainable rural communities to support the city region's growth agenda.
- Leeds City Region is also involved in an EU funded project considering 'sustainable urban/rural fringes'. A conference was held in 2011 (with an accompanying report) on the added value that can be gained from recognising the importance of the rural-urban city region.
- The city region is taking a number of other actions that will support the rural economy including: improving connectivity through the delivery of the BDUK Broadband Strategy (this will support business growth in rural areas – figures show that rural businesses are growing at a faster rate than urban businesses); using data from business surveys to look at a model for identifying the factors behind the growth of rural micro-businesses; and promoting training, mentoring and apprenticeships to rural businesses, in partnership with the Yorkshire Rural and Farming Network.
- Furthermore, the large areas of attractive countryside (including parts of two national parks and two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and the many smaller market towns and settlements, add substantially to the city region's lifestyle offer, as well as supporting an important tourist industry. Rural tourism, both small scale (through farm shops and bed and breakfast) and larger scale (such as the Yorkshire Sculpture Park), has significant growth potential.

Cumbria

- Cumbria LEP aims to mainstream rural issues. For example, whilst taking advantage of opportunities such as the Rural Growth Network pilot, they are also aligning this with broader projects which cover the whole county.

Dorset

- The number one priority for Dorset LEP is the provision of superfast broadband, working with BDUK and Defra at the national level. The Dorset Broadband Plan has been approved, and rural areas will be the main beneficiaries of subsequent investment.

Issues for consideration

- A prerequisite to a strong economy is greater synergy between rural and urban areas. Currently, some LEPs are not exploring sufficiently the positive benefits of urban-rural linkages. As a consequence, such benefits are not appearing in the overarching strategies of many LEPs.

- Whilst the strategic priorities of many LEPs are just as relevant to both urban and rural areas, these need to be interpreted and developed within a rural context. In some LEPs, there is not yet a sense of how their strategies have identified how development of the rural economy can contribute towards LEP priorities. Embedding and mainstreaming key rural issues across LEP strategic priorities and areas of economic focus (beyond the visitor economy) has not yet been visible in some LEPs. Furthermore, it is unclear how the individual activities of some LEPs fit into a coherent and structured policy framework, inclusive of rural interests.

- Some LEP strategies have very little reference to rural, aside from passing reference to a 'rural fringe'.

- Some LEPs have no obvious rural programme, outside tourism. Whilst this is a key element of focus, there is a need for broader integration and recognition of other major aspects of rural economies, including food and farming.

- LEPs also need to better recognise that whilst rural areas do have commonalities (higher rates of business formation and entrepreneurship, low wages, poor access to services etc), each area is also unique, so what might work in one area of a LEP may not work in all.

- LEPs need to have a more developed understanding of social capital, such as charities supporting rural businesses or individuals by providing community transport to work. Furthermore, LEPs appear to be having little involvement in the growing number of community-owned shops, cooperative pubs and community food enterprises in England. As well as having positive social impacts, such work can also have a real economic impact, for example by helping to ensure rural businesses survive.

Priorities for action

- The **Government** should continue to encourage LEPs to rural proof their work, including promoting Defra's newly developed local rural proofing materials. This should include developing the role of Rural and Farming Networks in rural proofing LEP business plans.

- The **Government** should acknowledge a broader recognition of the role all places, including rural, can play in fostering economic growth.

- **LEPs** should ensure an understanding of the linkages between different economic sectors, rather than viewing them in isolation. Furthermore, **LEPs** should gain an understanding of urban / rural interdependencies, and foster links that benefit the whole of their areas.

- **LEPs** need to better recognise the role that rural areas play in enabling urban areas and economies to flourish, particularly through the natural resources they provide.

The evidence base for LEPs includes information and data on different types of rural area, at a small enough scale to fully reflect rural issues

Case studies

The Marches

- The Marches LEP has sought to acknowledge that different types of rurality exist for different urban, town and fringe, village and hamlet and isolated settlements, and for both sparse and less sparse rural areas. For example, the problems and challenges faced by a market town like Leominster are very different from those in the Golden Valley. The LEP has acknowledged the importance of understanding these differences, including the growing variety of types of businesses in rural areas.
- The LEP collects and makes use of business intelligence and data ahead of any decisions about where to target economic growth initiatives, at geographical levels that make economic sense to specific initiatives.
- Evidence on market towns, small rural settlements and remote rural areas is also collected on an ongoing basis. Such evidence is based upon Business Plan measures and outcomes.
- A strong evidence base has been crucial to the LEP's successful Marches Redundant Building Grant Scheme, which has secured over £10 in match funding from the private sector for every £1 spent by the LEP.

Tees Valley

- Tees Valley LEP provides a wide range of data and information via its Interactive Information Hub website. This can be can be tailored to build up a picture of rural areas in Tees Valley, and developed to meet the specific needs of businesses and communities in rural areas.

- This on-line interactive information hub provides data for all the wards in the Tees Valley, and provides comparative sub-national and national data where available. The website can also adapt to changing small-area geography, for example ward boundary changes.
- There are over 300 different indicators under topics that monitor Business Activity, Demography, Community Safety, Deprivation, Employment, Health, Housing and Income levels. Time-series data is also included to allow changes over time to be tracked.
- Information is also available, on request, for areas such as Parishes, Villages or bespoke communities. This is possible where data is held at Lower Super Output Area or at postcode level.

Leeds City Region

- Leeds City Region has undertaken research looking into the contribution of the rural economy to the city region. This included statistics on the percentage of businesses located within the city region's rural areas – which amounts to 76%.
- Whilst the city region acknowledges that it is difficult to differentiate many data sets between urban and rural areas, steps have been taken to achieve this. For example, a regular Housing Market Monitoring report for the city region considers data from rural areas separately, and shows, for instance how increases in rural house prices are driving the city region housing market.
- York, North Yorkshire and East Riding local authorities also carry out monthly economic monitoring which covers business, housing and labour market statistics on urban and rural areas.

Buckinghamshire Thames Valley

- Through Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF), the LEP has access to a dedicated Research Manager. This person is experienced in undertaking data analysis on rural areas, rural communities and rural business needs. They carry out a range of standardised research activities, as well as developing more tailored studies on particular rural issues. In adopting this approach, the LEP utilises both mainstream and tailored approaches to looking at rural issues.
- The evidence base for the LEP includes information and data on different types of rural area, and is at a small enough scale to fully reflect rural issues. In the past it has looked at particular settlement, town or village issues, and provided local partners and parish councils with data to help inform their decision making.
- Previously, the LEP has also commissioned bespoke rural research.
- Buckinghamshire Rural Action group is also committed to uncovering rural data and trends. This evidence base has been key to developing a refreshed Rural Strategy for the area, which outlines strategic policy priorities for Buckinghamshire.

North Eastern

- North Eastern LEP has acknowledged the importance of recognising spatial differentiations throughout its work, and has commissioned a 'North East Economic Review' jointly with Tees Valley LEP.
- Thematic research has also been carried out in some areas with a rural focus, for instance concerning transport.
- Some previous work also still carries weight, for example economic analysis carried out by the former city region.

Enterprise M3

- Enterprise M3 has collected evidence, and commissioned research, to support two specific priorities: rural broadband and challenges faced by small business parks; and opportunities to promote the use of wood fuel.

Dorset

- For the purposes of strategic economic leadership and action, the initial prospectus for the Dorset LEP divided Dorset into three 'spatial aspects': the Bournemouth, Poole, Christchurch conurbation, Weymouth and Portland, and rural Dorset.
- The prospectus was based upon a Local Economic Assessment which highlighted the issues and opportunities peculiar to rural Dorset. These were set within the wider economic context, thus establishing the importance of environmental assets, market towns, land-based businesses, and sectoral activity, whilst also acknowledging the challenges restraining rural development, such as the lack of suitable broadband speeds.
- The Local Economic Assessment, LEP prospectus and Framework 2012-2015, all identified a number of needs and challenges for rural areas. These included disparities in earnings, productivity, accessibility, competitiveness and service provision. The challenge to overcome the two-speed economy which currently exists across Dorset is also central to the workings of the LEP.

Worcestershire

- Worcestershire LEP has acknowledged the importance of understanding the differences between different area types, including the growing variety of types of businesses in rural areas, and their role in developing the economy and offering employment opportunities.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly

- The initial bid for Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP was based around evidencing the economic functionality of the area.
- The LEP's evidence base is developed by working with businesses and business agents, and developing an intelligence exchange with them.
- However, 'evidence' is not a primary function of the LEP itself. To ensure that the LEP strategy was properly evidence-based, the LEP strategy analysis was undertaken by an independent economic analysis agency.
- The LEP is supported on an ongoing basis by economic and community intelligence resources and analysis within Cornwall Council. This includes an 'integrated' approach to the issues, as well as topic specific research as necessary, for example the evolution of community network plans.
- In the main, surveys for data collection are not a tool used by the Council. A more common approach is accessing and analysing reports and data from official sources.

Issues for consideration

- The collection of data that specifically reflects rural areas and issues is vital to developing strategies and solutions. However, there are difficulties in doing this. Economic data is typically more available for administrative areas than for areas defined as 'rural'. There is also sometimes difficulty in attaining data for areas that

span across administrative boundaries. As a result, some LEPs are minimising rural activity, on the basis of analyses which suggest that local priorities should lie in other parts of the economy.

- Furthermore, regarding rural businesses, improved information is always needed on issues such as turnover and potential, and the location of businesses and sectors (particularly micro-businesses and SMEs that have the potential and desire to grow). However, accessing sound and comprehensive intelligence on businesses in rural areas is a challenge when so much official data has either been withdrawn (for example in the case of some former district council and Business Link datasets) or withheld due to data confidentiality fears. As a result, evidence collected by some LEPs does not always take account of crucial rural issues, such as rural wages typically being lower than urban wages, and high public sector economic dependency.

- On the whole, collating and maintaining a comprehensive and coherent evidence base remains a challenge in the current resource climate, with funding being prioritised to assist where there is an identifiable need for robust evidence. As a result, many LEPs have not commissioned any major research and evidence work regarding the rural economy.

- There are also questions about the extent to which some LEPs have the necessary expertise in economics to translate the data they hold into an assessment of the economic opportunities open to them. For example, the extent to which they able to:
  - Break down the economy by sector.
  - Understand the multiplier effects of investment in that sector, on other sectors (or companies).
  - Understand the spatial effects of investment (for example, investment in place 'x' is likely to generate work for unemployed people in place 'y').

- It is also noted that a statutory duty still exists for local authorities to produce Local Economic Assessments, although the deadline and guidance for producing them has been removed. A question therefore remains as to whether LEPs are, or should be, formally producing evidence to support policy development.

- When considering the demographics of their area, LEPs should consider using the ACRE/OCSI Rural Evidence resource, which, comprising straightforward annotated reports with tables and maps, shows the socio-economic picture of rural England, including its areas of deprivation, the economy and access to services. Furthermore, LEPs should also ensure consideration is given to data included within Defra's Statistical Digest of Rural England.

Priorities for action

- Through active economic benchmarking and analysis, **LEPs** need to develop a better understanding of the contribution that the rural economy plays in the wider economy.

- **LEPs** should identify rural-specific stakeholders and mainstream bodies supporting rural businesses and encourage them to contribute their expertise, data and understanding into evidence gathering processes.

- To develop an accurate picture of rural businesses and communities, data gathering by **LEPs** should occur at the lowest possible spatial scale.

- The **Government** should ensure that statistics are collated by Office for National Statistics at LEP level.

- To ensure the presence of a local evidence-base which includes both urban and rural areas, the **Government** should ensure LEPs have accesses to evidence from former RDAs and local Business Links.

- The **Government** should clarify expectations of LEPs producing Local Economic Assessments.

Theme 3: Funding and business support

LEPs have used Government (and other) funding streams to target rural areas

Case studies

The Marches

- The Marches LEP has sought to maximise available funding streams, initially through Start-Up and Capacity Funding to build the partnership and put in place a sound evidence base to determine actions, and subsequently in relation to key project areas for action. These include:
  - The Marches Redundant Building Grant Scheme, run by Herefordshire Council. This will see small business, including rural businesses, being given grants to bring unused buildings back into productive economic use. (Using Regional Growth Fund)
  - Delivering a Business Support project to provide additional business advice to small, growing businesses across the Marches. (Using European Regional Development Fund)
  - The Marches LEP machinery and equipment grant scheme, which supports rural businesses to expand. (Using Regional Growth Fund)
  - The Growing Talent in Rural Areas project, aimed at building graduate capacity and retention within the business community. (Using European Regional Development Fund)
  - The innovation voucher scheme, which supports businesses to undertake research and development work to develop new products and services. (Using European Regional Development Fund)
- Herefordshire Business Board's successful Enterprise Zone bid was also nominated by the Marches LEP. Although situated within the boundary of the City of Hereford, it is expected that rural areas will benefit indirectly through the additional supply chains and recruitment of labour created by the Enterprise Zone.

Worcestershire

- Worcestershire LEP is working with the Marches LEP and Herefordshire Council to extend the Marches Redundant Building Grant Scheme into Worcestershire. This will see small businesses, including rural businesses, given grants to bring unused buildings back into productive use.
- The LEP has also introduced an Enterprising Worcestershire Programme, which is focussing on providing start-up and growth support for all businesses in Worcestershire, including those in remote rural areas.
- Worcestershire County Council has also secured outline approval to set up a European Regional Development Fund funded loan fund to cover Worcestershire, Shropshire and Staffordshire. This is focussed on ensuring rural areas are not left behind when seeking access to finance.
- The LEP works with other LEPs as appropriate on both urban and rural programmes. For example, the LEP has joined forces with Herefordshire in submitting Regional Growth Fund applications to assist both urban and rural business, particularly to bring

redundant buildings back into use, a scheme previously operated under the Rural Regeneration Zone of the RDA.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly

- Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP has successfully developed a 'Business Boost Programme' from its Regional Growth Fund bid. This involves four investment funds totalling £17m to enhance growth potential, and is aimed at all businesses in all sectors. This includes areas of activity which are significant for rural businesses, such as the Superfast Cornwall Fund, Business Investment for Growth (aimed at high growth potential SME's creating jobs) and the Business Catalyst Fund (which focussed on productivity).
- The LEP has also been allocated £13m from the Regional Growth Fund to support businesses with below £50,000 turnover (largely rural), to help them understand and exploit the potential of Superfast Broadband.

Buckinghamshire Thames Valley

- Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP has allocated £6.2m of Growing Places Funding, and has established a partnership with Hertfordshire County Council to deliver a £16m Superfast Broadband Project.
- The LEP has also expressed support for the promotion of the LEADER Programme and rural business grants in Buckinghamshire.

Cumbria

- Cumbria LEP was successful in its bid to run a Rural Growth Network pilot, and expects the pilot to have a significant impact on the county's economy. They have also been able to match fund the pilot with European Regional Development Fund monies, to enhance the benefits in rural areas and extend the work to urban areas.
- The LEP has also played a role in endorsing funding bids from other organisations, for example, writing letters of support for organisations seeking funding for start-up businesses.

Leicester and Leicestershire

- Leicester and Leicestershire LEP has sought Regional Growth Fund funding to develop a rural programme, and run an SME grants programme in manufacturing.
- The LEP is also actively exploring how the Growing Places Fund can be used to improve infrastructure and services to rural businesses, especially broadband to small rural business parks.
- The LEP was short-listed for its Rural Growth Network pilot proposal, which focussed on the Food and Drink Sector. Whilst the proposal was unsuccessful, they are seeking to take elements of this forward through other means.

Dorset

- Dorset LEP was unsuccessful in its Rural Growth Network pilot bid, but an element of the submission has been successful in securing funding from the Growing Places Fund, and the broader aspirations are being considered against alternative funding streams.
- The LEP has also been involved in a number of submissions under the Regional Growth Fund. If successful, these will provide access to enterprise funding for the

whole of the LEP, and property investment/development funding for more remote rural areas.

Issues for consideration

- Whilst funding streams such as the Growing Places Fund, Regional Growth Fund and Enterprise Zones have been promoted across LEP areas, there has been little pro-active targeting of rural areas.

- One of the main challenges for rural areas is that they tend to lack the larger urban businesses which Government is looking to co-invest in. Government funding initiatives tend to be determined by the ability to deliver large scale growth, often with indicators such as delivering major job numbers and GVA increases. Within this context, a challenge remains for LEPs to justify smaller, rural-focussed schemes.

- Due to the need to make best use of scarce resources, many LEPs are operating tightly focused agendas that are heavily slanted to the core economic growth agenda. As a result, often through necessity, funding bids are often highly urban focussed and do not directly benefit the economy in rural areas. Furthermore, some LEPs view certain funding streams as being unsuitable for rural areas. This is particularly the case regarding the Enterprise Zone model.

- Many Government funding streams are too large for smaller organisations in rural areas to apply for. For example many rural businesses are of the small and micro variety, and find it difficult to put together large enough projects to bid individually for Regional Growth Fund funding. To address this, some LEPs have submitted 'package' bids to the Regional Growth Fund in order to meet the £1m minimum threshold, but this is not always possible.

- Guidance from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to some LEPs has also indicated that due to public sector dependency being higher in some urban areas, this should be the focus of any Regional Growth Fund investment.

- Many LEPs recognise the positive role that Rural Growth Network pilots could have, particularly in terms of providing opportunities to try different approaches to creating jobs and fostering economic growth in rural areas, and sharing good practice. However, some also feel there is a danger that Rural Growth Networks will be given preferential treatment, which could jeopardise growth in other rural areas. It is essential that lessons are learned and shared from the pilots regarding what does and does not work, to allow the best initiatives to be extended to other areas. Monitoring progress from an early stage and spreading best practice will be crucial to the success of the schemes. It is also important that the good ideas in unsuccessful bids do not go to waste, and that LEPs try to implement as many of their best and most imaginative ideas as possible, including by applying to other funding streams.

- In general, there are also concerns over a lack of engagement of some LEPs with voluntary and community sector organisations, including those supporting community and social enterprise in rural areas (see page 18). A knock on impact of this lack of engagement is that these types of organisations are unable to access funds that are

being channelled through LEPs, such as the opportunity to develop new Rural Growth Networks and the Regional Growth Fund.

- The limited levels of core funding for LEPs from Government risks undermining the resource base of LEPs for developing a more tailored approach to rural policy making, and limiting the ability of LEPs to create networks, for example, when trying to engage hard to reach rural businesses in isolated areas. The loss of funding from schemes such as the Market Towns Initiative, Rural Access to Services Programme and Renaissance Forum (previously distributed via RDAs), is thought to be compounding these challenges.

- Some LEPs are also not properly utilising EU funding structures such as RDPE. The European Commission's proposals for post 2013, with a Common Strategic Framework drawing upon funding from Rural Development, Fishery, and Regional Development, provide a strong funding opportunity for integrated rural / urban partnerships. Furthermore, the proposed Community Led Local Development model, based on the LEADER approach, will provide another possible funding source for LEPs.

- Whilst there has been some integration between LEPs and RDPE, in particular the setting up of the Rural Growth Network pilots, there is still a lack of clarity about how the work of LEPs overlaps with the activities of Local Action Groups under LEADER.

- The move from allocation of RDPE funding by RDAs to distribution by regional teams according to standard national criteria, appears counter to the Government's localism agenda. The LEADER model has been highly effective in ensuring local discretion over RDPE funding. Such an approach has been particularly beneficial to small businesses, which form the bulk of the rural economy, and it is important that such local methods continue in some form.

- Furthermore, there could be great mileage to be found in joining the bottom-up, community-led approach of, for example the LEADER Programme, to the top down LEP strategy approach. The community-led aspect of the LEADER Local Action Groups has proved that bottom-up delivery, targeting individual businesses, can be very successful in making an instant impact.

Priorities for action

- **Government** funding streams should incorporate a recognition of the particular needs and differences of rural economies – many rural areas cannot compete with large conurbations on employment / GVA impact. Non-spatially focused or biased growth incentives need to be developed, which recognise that growth can occur anywhere with the right conditions. There also needs to be a greater recognition / value attached to the aggregate impact of smaller enterprises, and also the contribution that rural areas make regarding ecosystem goods and services, tourism and food security.

- **Government** funding streams need to recognise that outputs in rural areas are likely to be more dispersed than in urban areas, especially for infrastructure-type projects.

- **Government** funding streams need to incorporate a focus on delivery for smaller places and organisations, including small and micro-businesses.

- The **Government**'s City Deal, Enterprise Zone and Growing Places initiatives should be opened up to different, non-coterminous economic geographies, including different rural areas which share common issues, for example Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Market Towns.

- The **Government** should ensure that RDPE grant programmes are properly integrated into the work of LEPs. This should include promoting to LEPs the advantages of community-led approaches to investment and delivery, such as the LEADER Programme.

- To address ambiguity and complexity concerning locally available funding streams, and broaden the number of organisations applying for funding, **LEPs** should seek to become centres of information for funding support and advice.

LEPs are supporting small and micro enterprises in rural areas, including assisting them to overcome barriers to new business formation and growth

Case studies

The Marches

- The Marches LEP has worked in partnership with Worcestershire LEP to submit a funding application to the European Regional Development Fund which will support micro-businesses.
- The LEP is also seeking to access funds to support existing and emerging industries in rural communities to obtain advice, training programmes and assist knowledge sharing. This will focus on new and traditional skills and businesses, which reflect the business profile and potential of rural communities and businesses. Wherever possible, support will be informed by those with experience of living and working in rural communities.
- A business-led mentoring scheme is now available in the Marches and provides help and support to those starting out in a new business venture, as well as to existing growing businesses.
- The LEP is also continuing to look for better ways to support small businesses in accessing finance, to enable them to grow and innovate.
- Herefordshire and Shropshire Rural Hubs are also working with the three Marches Business Boards (with support from the Marches LEP) on a proposal to identify micro businesses situated in the most rural areas, and provide sign-posting and business support to them, and also for rural-based start-ups.

Worcestershire

- As most businesses in remote rural areas are micro-businesses, the LEP is developing priorities and programmes around start-ups in remote areas, funded through the

LEADER Programme and other avenues. It is also developing actions to assist businesses to overcome the perceived legal and regulatory barriers that can hamper growth.

Buckinghamshire Thames Valley

- Through the Chilterns and Aylesbury Vale and Milton Keynes LEADER Programme, Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF) has been successful in establishing a number of networks which are designed to provide small and micro enterprises in rural areas with mentoring support and advice.
- In North Buckinghamshire, BBF has established the North Bucks Rural Network and in South Buckinghamshire has established the Chilterns Tourism Network. Both networks organise regular events, attracting over 70-80 rural businesses at a time.

Dorset

- Dorset LEP has established a website called Rural-Net, which provides a support network for small and micro-businesses.
- The Dorset Mentoring service (Dormen), which began in the county's rural areas, also operates across Dorset, and has been recognised as a national exemplar of business support.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly

- Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP has set up a sub-committee looking at finance for small enterprises as, largely due to its rural nature, this is the predominant business model in the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly region.

Cheshire and Warrington

- A broadband bid made by Cheshire and Warrington LEP includes a revenue programme to assist rural businesses to fully exploit the potential of the new infrastructure.

Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire

- Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire LEP has launched an 0300 business helpline based at Staffordshire County Council, which provides a signposting service for local businesses.

Issues for consideration

- Many skills and business support schemes appear to be targeted at larger, high growth businesses, which are far more prevalent in urban areas. Businesses in the most rural areas are, in the main, land-based or micro-businesses. They are inherently hard to reach and as such LEPs need to ensure their needs are understood and addressed. LEPs need to do more to acknowledge and understand the contribution that micro and land-based businesses make to rural areas. It is, however, acknowledged that it is often difficult for LEPs to access funding to support this.

- The current debate around growth needs to recognise the importance of replicating successful small and micro-businesses in rural areas, as well as turning small into medium, medium into large etc. There also needs to be an acknowledgment that a

significant amount of growth in a global context is taking place through struggling businesses and those on the edge of viability. It is important that LEPs take measures to ensure that such businesses are supported to become more resilient.

- The impact of the withdrawal of Business Link services has been highlighted by some parts of the business community as a matter of great concern, especially among remote, rural based enterprises. Mentoring and business advice programmes are now predominantly web-based, which can make such support more challenging for micro-businesses to access and understand. As a result, some LEPs have decided to spend some of their resources on providing local, face-to-face support to such businesses, to fill the gap left by the removal of Business Link.

Priorities for action

- **LEPs** should seek to provide small and micro-businesses in rural areas with appropriate support to help them realise their growth aspirations, including access to flexible finance, provision of face-to-face business support, and creating rural business networks.

- The **Government and LEP Network** should work together to continually identify best practice examples of the creation, development and support of businesses in rural areas.

Further issues for consideration by the Government and LEPs

City/urban-centric policy model

- The economic analysis that lies behind the LEP model indicates that business in cities is central to driving economic development, leading the focus therefore to rest predominantly in these areas. During the initial set-up phase, LEPs were heavily influenced by perceived urban-based Government policy (City Deals, Enterprise Zones, Growing Places Fund etc). Many LEPs are therefore focusing on driving growth through urban economies, with little recognition for the role that rural economies play. However, such economic analysis is defined in a fairly limited and orthodox way, and does not take into account how city driven economies relate to their rural hinterland, and the overall connections between different parts of the economy.

- The current narrow policy focus on cities needs to broaden to both recognise and capitalise on all the inherent assets of wider Functional Economic Market Areas, including a wide range of settlements and places. What makes a city is, in part, its hinterland, and the issues that come out of that are fundamental to sustainable economic growth. Rather than setting rural and urban against one another, there should be a move towards a more diffuse approach to recognising the multiple types and roles of places and their connectivity to one another. This would achieve much in furthering growth prospects in all parts of the country.

- There is also a sense that LEPs reinforce current power structures which channel funding to big infrastructure projects and away from market towns, and the small and micro-business based economy, which is what actually supports rural economies in the main. As a result, many LEPs are failing to utilise the potential contribution that such businesses could make to economic growth, through, for example, industries such as the high value food sector.

Unclear remit for LEPs

- There are concerns that some of the messages coming from Government are creating an impression that LEPs represent the voice of local communities. For example, at the 2012 National LEP conference, in reference to the Government's 2012 consultation on devolving major local transport schemes to local bodies such as LEPs, the Secretary of State for Transport stated that, "*With these proposed reforms we are seeking to give communities real power to deliver real improvements on everything from local roads and public transport schemes, to better pedestrian routes and new rail stations.*" Such comments risk doing LEPs a disservice by confusing their role. Primarily, LEPs are business organisations. As such, whilst they represent one important sectoral interest, they cannot represent a unified voice for the community.

- The Government's overall policy approach (reflected for example in the National Planning Policy Framework) emphasises the need for solutions to further all three

strands of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. However, when LEPs were set up they were specifically required to be business led and to have boards which reflected business and local authority membership. There was no specific requirement to involve or to engage with social or environmental partners. For example, LEPs do not currently play a role in delivering or saving vital rural services or driving innovations in rural service delivery, such as through community hubs. In some cases, individual board members have environmental or social interests or responsibilities. However, the method for appointing board members varies and it is often unclear to what extent they represent both the broad views of the business sector, and those of the wider community.

- The Government needs to provide more clarity around the role that LEPs have in contributing to environmental and social objectives, as well as economic growth, and how LEPs are to be appraised against such activities.

Limited resources

- Many LEPs and associated business boards are run on a voluntary basis with a small amount of secretariat support, usually from relevant local authorities. Local government representation is very welcome, as is the administrative support provided by certain parts of the business community. However, since this is again usually provided without charge, this is often (understandably) of a minimal nature.

- Whilst recent funding announcements by the Government are welcome, the still limited resources available to LEPs means that their area of focus is highly targeted, often around urban areas.

- There are also concerns over the limited resources available to support rural representation in LEPs' work. Whilst the formation and work of Rural and Farming Networks is encouraging, such bodies also receive no financial support. As such it can be difficult to maintain a robust connection with LEPs.

Difficulties with different sub-national boundaries

- The varying geographies of the numerous sub-national bodies now in existence can make it difficult to create common strategic policies or ensure a balance of interests are represented in LEP decision making processes. In some cases, for example with some Local Nature Partnerships, different types of sub-national bodies are likely to be in direct opposition to one another (economic vs environmental messages). The Government has a crucial role to play in brokering the relationships between such bodies. The Local Networks recently introduced by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, will be pivotal to addressing some of the challenges presented by these different structures, and ensuring a strong interface is present between different organisations.

- With boundaries fragmenting and overlapping in different ways, a clear focus on key issues such as business support and growth can be difficult to achieve. Different geographies can also make it difficult in practice for external partners to engage with emerging policy work. For example, in one particular region, there are six Local

Enterprise Partnerships, two Rural and Farming Networks and six Local Nature Partnerships. Their geographies are all different, and in the case of the LEPs, a number overlap one another. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are a case in point. These require joined up promotion if they are to achieve the national policy goal as one of the UK's biggest attractors of overseas visitors outside London. However, in the case of one AONB, there are 6 different LEPs present within its boundaries. This makes it very difficult to gain sufficient co-ordination to achieve this goal.

Specific actions LEPs could take to stimulate economic growth in rural areas

- Provision of affordable superfast broadband, including delivering the necessary infrastructure to secure this, is considered by many rural businesses to be the single most important objective that LEPs can work towards to promote rural inclusion, increase economic growth across rural areas, and connect rural communities to economic, social and cultural opportunity.
- The development of an efficient transport and infrastructure system is required in order to strengthen urban-rural linkages, and therefore release economic growth. LEPs should include within their business plans objectives to deliver improvements to physical infrastructure in rural areas.
- LEPs have an important role to play in promoting good quality land and premises for employment use, and the overall benefits of working in a rural location. LEPs should seek to provide support through the planning process (where there are economic benefits), enabling smaller development sites in rural areas and market towns, and encouraging the development of suitable commercial property in rural areas.
- LEPs should ensure that rural enterprises take advantage of the benefits of their location and are not unduly disadvantaged by the drawbacks of that location. For example, supporting inquiries into infrastructure that may be needed (such as centralised grain storage) and helping to find sources of funding for the investment required, and encouraging farm diversification to enable farmers to harness the strength of their location, environment and natural assets and skills.
- LEPs should maximise opportunities coming from the 'green agenda' and take advantage of the benefits and opportunities offered by the renewable energy sector.
- LEPs should seek to maximise employment opportunities for those living and working in rural areas, including increasing awareness of where industry is heading in future. This should include a stronger recognition of the need for skills and training development within the rural economy. Furthermore, LEPs should ensure workforce training is fit for tomorrow's business needs and should seek to strengthen real dialogue between businesses in their area and local training providers. This should include challenging the mismatch between the types of courses on offer, and the requirements of local businesses.
- LEPs should support the development of key sectors of the rural economy, including supporting the development of a more sustainable agricultural sector and a more competitive agri-food sector (including developing closer links with the agricultural college curriculum centred on farming and rural estate activities).
- LEPs should actively promote business interaction and opportunities that strengthen local supply chains, making the most of the types of enterprise in their areas. This might mean encouraging manufacturers and those in the construction sector to establish new, local supply chains that make use of locally-available agricultural outputs, for example wool and other renewable fibres for use in insulation and construction. Furthermore, LEPs should seek to utilise and enhance the benefits of small businesses working together to share distribution processes.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our appreciation to everyone that contributed to this report, and especially to the following:

Action for Market Towns
Action with Communities in Rural England
Advocates for Rural Enterprise
All Party Parliamentary Group on Local Growth
Aylesbury Vale and Milton Keynes LEADER Programme
Buckinghamshire Business First
Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP
Business Peak District
Campaign to Protect Rural England
Cheshire and Warrington LEP
Cheshire Association of Local Councils
Coast to Capital LEP
Community Action Hampshire
Community Council Berkshire
Community Impact Buckinghamshire
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP
Cornwall Council
Cornwall Rural Community Council
County Councils Network
Cumbria LEP
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire LEP
Derbyshire County Council
Derbyshire Dales District Council
Dorset LEP
Durham County Council
East Cornwall Local Action Group
Enterprise M3 LEP
Essex Rural Partnership
European Council for the Village and Small Town
Farming and Rural Issues Group for the South East
Farndale Free Range Ltd
Federation of Small Businesses
Hampshire County Council
Heart of the South West LEP
Herefordshire Council
Involve Yorkshire and Humber
Jacqui Casey, Shropshire Council

Leeds City Region LEP
Leicester and Leicestershire LEP
Leicestershire County Council
Leicestershire Rural Partnership
LEP Network
Lois Dale, Shropshire Council
Lotus Domes Ltd
Marianne Overton, Navenby and Branston District and the Cliff Villages
National Association of Local Councils
National Farmers Union
National Farmers Union in the South West
Natural England
New Forest National Park Authority
Norfolk and Suffolk Food, Farming and Rural Enterprise Board
North Eastern Farming Rural Advisory Network
North Eastern LEP
Northamptonshire ACRE
Northamptonshire LEP
Northumberland County Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Oxfordshire LEP
Peak District National Park Authority
Plunkett Foundation
Rachel Jones, Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
Rose Regeneration
Rural Business Centre and Norfolk YFC
Rural Community Council of Essex
Rural Futures
Rural Hubs Partnership
Rural Services Network
Sally Hinton, Leeds City Region
Shropshire Council
South West Rural and Farming Network
Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP
Swindon and Wiltshire LEP
Tees Valley Rural Community Council
Tees Valley LEP
The Marches LEP
Transition Network
UK Sustainable Development Research Network
Wessex Rural and Farming Network
West of England LEP
West Oxfordshire District Council

Worcestershire County Council
Worcestershire LEP
Yorkshire Food, Farming and Rural Network
Yorkshire Local Councils Associations

Should readers wish to contact any of the LEPs included within this report, contact details can be found at the following link http://www.lepnetwork.org.uk/leps.html

Commission for
Rural Communities

Unit 1 Saw Mills End
Corinium Avenue
Gloucester. GL4 3DE

Telephone 01452 627508
Email info@ruralcommunities.gov.uk
www.defra.gov.uk/crc

November 2012