

Supporting Leicestershire's Rural Economy - A Sector Scoping Study

- Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

This Sector Scoping Study provides a range of detailed recommendations to be considered by the Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP) and its key partners to facilitate the growth and development of the rural economy in Leicestershire. This will result in strengthening existing activity, forging new opportunities, and, most importantly, providing more joined up sector support for existing and new enterprises across the County.

Leicestershire – a good place to do business....

In reviewing current socio-economic trends for Leicestershire, the County shows itself to be good place for businesses to locate, and provides a strong foundation for the five sectors of the economy analysed by this study to grow and expand. Of the five sectors considered through the study, Equestrian and Outdoor Recreation and Land Based sectors are all more significant to the Leicestershire economy than the Region. Knowledge, and Food and Drink sectors are the largest in terms employment of the five sectors considered in this study. The study has reaffirmed many of the outcomes arising from the 2006 Leicestershire Rural Economy Baseline report which identified the opportunity to add value and expand niche markets and create new products in the County. Support focused on the five sectors will contribute significantly to ensuring this vision is realised.

Whilst there are high levels of employment and economic activity across the area, there are also significant challenges which need to be addressed. In the face of the current economic climate, it will be important for the outcomes of this study to support enterprises in each sector, and encourage investment, expansion and growth for the benefit of the County.

...with strong foundations to build on key strengths and opportunities....

Leicestershire has significant strength on which it can more forward with delivering sector support across the County. Firstly, it has a good tradition of partnership working that aims to work more effectively together to deliver improved services to rural areas – the Leicestershire Rural Partnership is recognised across the Region as a '***model of good practice***'.

There are a number of factors which can support and facilitate the growth of each of the five sectors:

- The County has a strong tradition and history with high quality countryside and natural assets.
- An entrepreneurial, proactive and resourceful business community.
- A significant growth in distinctive and unique brands, particularly in Food and Drink.
- There are significant geographic and area based opportunities across Leicestershire – the chance to facilitate improved networking and collaboration.
- A strong location for businesses – a central and accessible County.

- Unexploited potential across the County – for example, to facilitate improved integration between the sectors and a more co-ordinated, robust tourism offer.
- To take greater advantage of urban rural interdependencies.
- To seize new opportunities to kick start local procurement of food and drink and renewable energy generation, for example through public private partnership.

...and a range of opportunities across the five sectors....

Of the five sectors considered to be key in developing a sector support programme, it is suggested that, initially more detailed assessment is given to focusing on the needs of Land Based Industries, Food and Drink, and Equestrian and Outdoor Recreation sectors. These sectors are well defined, have well established business networks (such as Leicestershire Equestrian Enterprise Partnership) and specific funding opportunities like the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). The results of the business survey and stakeholder consultations support this view, indicating that through more co-ordinated delivery, further expansion and growth of these sectors will be achieved.

With regards to the Renewable Energy and Knowledge Based sectors, it is considered that more detailed research is required to define these sectors for Leicestershire, to facilitate the development of a long term strategy for both sectors.

The Seven Key Themes of Future Sector Support....

As part of any programme of sector support, seven themes have been identified that will encourage growth of identified sectors, facilitate collaborative engagement between businesses, and, where appropriate, lever RDPE funding into the County.

- An Information Hub – improved provision of information to the business community – where to go in Leicestershire or around the five sectors.
- Facilitating improved access for key sectors to RDPE – to break down the barriers and work to achieve greater cross collaboration amongst business in the priority sectors.
- Networking and Collaboration – to move beyond a grant support programme – better utilisation of other funding streams and focusing on strategic, business issues.
- Supply Chain Development – improving the connections between supply chains (customers and suppliers) across the county.
- Marketing, Promotion and Awareness – providing support for improved and more bespoke marketing, promotion and awareness of business activities for each sector.
- Embedding Knowledge, Innovation and Design – establishing a comprehensive training and skills programme that develops knowledge across all priority sectors in the county.
- Infrastructure Grants – to target infrastructure support towards key market failures within the rural economy that are infrastructure related.

