



SOUTH EAST LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP

RURAL STRATEGY 2015 - 2021

MARCH 2015



FOREWORD



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Chair – SELEP Rural Subgroup

The South East of England has the most buoyant economy in the UK and a vibrant rural sector underpins this success.

The rural areas provide a huge variety of enterprise and opportunity based on thriving agriculture and horticulture, thousands of small businesses from food production to high technology from forestry to pharmaceuticals, world leading scientific research, colleges and skills, renewable energy and much, much more.

East Sussex, Essex and Kent are famed for their varied and beautiful landscapes, areas of outstanding natural beauty, wonderful coasts, marshes, downs, valleys and wooded countryside. Here we find history, wonderful gardens and rare protected environments enjoyed by residents and tourists alike. There is a rich mix of old and new, small and large businesses and leisure destinations, historic market towns and ancient villages.

This document sets out the South East Local Enterprise Partnerships (SELEP) Rural Strategy to enable continued economic growth, absorb the development of new infrastructure, business and urban expansion and to manage the rural environment to provide clean air, water and safe and nutritious food for the growing population. Protecting our precious landscape and habitats, safeguarding our rural communities and supporting the factors that make the South East such a good place to live and work are primary objectives.

The creation of SELEP means we can work together to make effective use of new ideas supported by business, technological and social innovation. This will unlock the economic growth potential of our rural areas and deliver additional jobs through the creation and expansion of businesses to ensure our rural areas thrive.

This strategy is a framework through which the LEP partnership can address the fundamental issues for our rural economy, communities and environment.

Many people have given their time and expertise freely in the production of this document and I would like to thank everyone who has taken part.

The strategy will continue to develop and adapt to the pace of change in the most varied and dynamic sector – the SELEP’s rural areas.

The South East LEP was established in 2010 as one of the 39 LEPs across the country to provide “clear vision and strategic leadership to drive sustainable private sector growth and job creation” (Local Growth: Realising every place’s potential 2010).

The South East Local Enterprise Partnership is the business-led, public/private body established to drive new economic growth across East Sussex, Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend and Thurrock. As well as being the biggest LEP outside of London, it is also one of the most local. The LEP operates a fully devolved structure with increased reach into local communities through local delivery partnerships and boards.

By 2021, across the SE LEP area, our aim is to:

- Generate 200,000 private sector jobs, an average of 20,000 a year or an increase of 11.4% since 2011
- Complete 1000,000 new homes, increasing the annual rate of completions by over 50% compared to recent years
- Lever investment totalling £10 billion to accelerate growth, jobs and homebuilding

The LEP’s Growth Deal has already won almost £500 million of investment with more to come. A further £180 million has been secured through the European Structural Investment Funds including the £14 million EAFRD Rural Programme.

Matched by private and public funds, this investment will support a programme of activities that will transform our transport and business infrastructure. Our Growth Deal also brings new influence over rail, skills and housing programmes.



Peter Jones CBE,
Chairman, South East LEP

“Our distinctive countryside and working rural environment are part of what makes the South East unique. Recognising the particular needs of our rural areas, SE LEP wishes to support new business and jobs to grow our rural economies and sustain our local communities.”

VISION

The SELEP vision for its rural areas is one of a growing rural economy with a highly skilled workforce in full employment. Creating opportunities for the establishment of new businesses, the development of existing ones, increased job opportunities and a thriving culture of entrepreneurship support this vision.

The SELEP rural economy is a rich mixture of traditional and innovative land-based businesses including farming, horticulture, viticulture, forestry and rural tourism, along with a broad range of non-rural businesses which collectively provide an exciting mosaic of economic opportunities.

Good access to services, improving skill levels, the availability of affordable housing and reduced journey times to work are essential elements of the vision and to ensuring a good quality of life in rural communities. The effective stewardship of the countryside and the natural environment are crucial to the long-term health and wellbeing of the economy and our communities.

The strategy covers a wider remit than those factors which can be influenced directly by SELEP funds and activities, but recognises the links and interdependence between economic, social and environmental aspects of life in its rural areas.

Issues of strategic concern across the SELEP geography are highlighted and there is acknowledgement that the detail of these issues may vary from area to area leading to the implementation of different solutions. The federated structure of the SELEP allows freedom for individual areas to identify the most effective interventions to be made to deliver strategic outcomes.

In acknowledgement of this the strategy identifies activities and outcomes which may be instrumental in achieving strategic aims, but does not attempt to prescribe an exhaustive list of suitable actions.

INTRODUCTION TO SELEP'S RURAL AREA

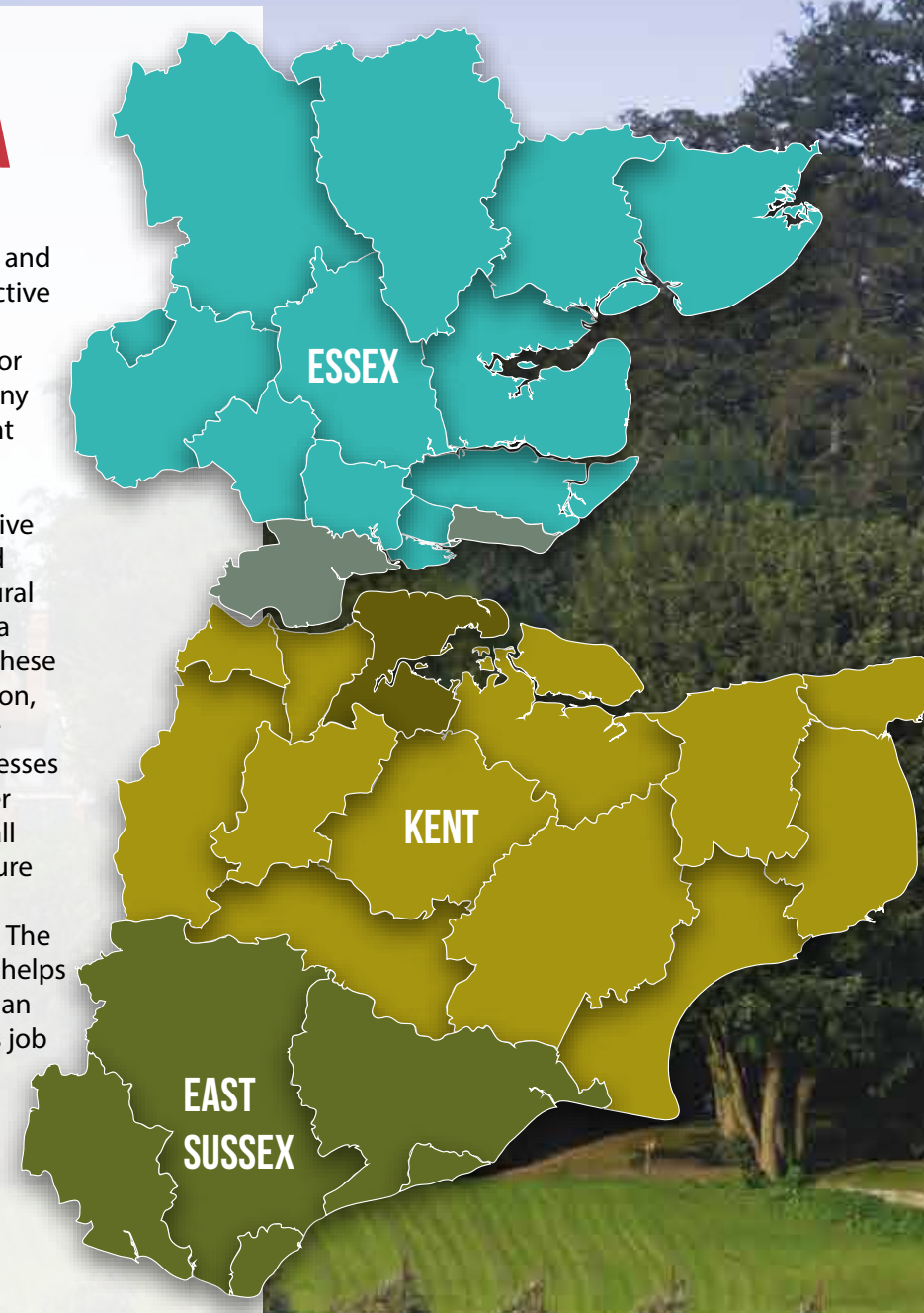
The population of the South East LEP is 3.97 million with 936,000 people living in the rural areas. Each of the three county areas and unitaries within SELEP have their own particular mix of rural land-use, environments, rural and non-rural businesses and communities all of which contribute to the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of the area.

The SELEP rural area is comprised of an extensive mix of outstanding natural and farmed landscapes. Natural landscapes include the North and South Downs, Romney Marsh, the Essex coastline, North Kent Marshes, the Seven Sisters coastline and significant areas of ancient and commercial woodland. The area also contains the Kent Downs, High Weald and Dedham Vale Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) along with part of the South Downs National Park.

Farmed landscapes range from the fertile cereal growing areas in Essex to the mixed farming areas of Kent and the livestock farms of East Sussex. Horticulture, viticulture, forestry, top and soft fruit production and diversification initiatives (open farms, golf courses, holiday accommodation, etc.) all contribute to the rich mix of economic activity.

The area also contains a wealth of cultural and heritage sites, historic buildings and attractive towns and villages. The rural tourism offer is considerable with significant potential for future development. The prosperity of many smaller towns and villages rely on a vibrant rural economy.

24% of all employed people in the SELEP live in rural areas and 31% of all self-employed people are located in these areas¹. Non-rural businesses located in the rural area make a significant contribution to the economy. These include businesses in the retail, construction, finance, hospitality and public sectors. For example more than a third (36%) of businesses in Kent are based in the rural area and over 50% of these are non-rural in nature². Small and micro businesses are a particular feature of the rural economy and the number of people who are self-employed is growing. The creation of business clusters in rural areas helps support business start-ups and generates an entrepreneurial culture which encourages job creation and economic growth across all sectors.



REFERENCES - 1. ACTION WITH COMMUNITIES IN RURAL ENGLAND (ACRE) RURAL EVIDENCE PROJECT SEPTEMBER 2013. 2. KENT RURAL DELIVERY FRAMEWORK 2007

ESSEX



75 SITES
OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

350 MILES OF COASTLINE

**RICH
HERITAGE
OFFER**



4000 MILES
OF PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY



**THRIVING FISHING
SECTOR**

60% OF SELEPS
ARABLE FARMS ARE IN ESSEX



**72% OF THE LAND AREA IS
CLASSIFIED AS RURAL**



**RICH AND
VARIED
ENVIRONMENT**



KENT



54% OF RURAL RESIDENTS
COMMUTE TO WORK
IN URBAN AREAS

74% OF RURAL BUSINESSES
EMPLOY 0-5 PEOPLE

10% OF LAND IS WOODLAND



150,000
PEOPLE WORK IN
KENT'S
RURAL AREA

2767
FARM HOLDINGS



**EAST MALLING RESEARCH
MAJOR SCIENTIFIC FOCUS
FOR UK HORTICULTURE**

36% OF KENT'S
BUSINESSES
BASED IN
RURAL AREAS

**46,000 PEOPLE EMPLOYED
IN LAND-BASED SECTOR**

**OVER 50%
(18,000+)**
OF THESE BUSINESSES
ARE NON-RURAL

62% OF LAND AREA
IS FARMED

HIGH QUALITY CULTURAL OFFER

EAST SUSSEX

**LARGE POTENTIAL
FOR RENEWABLES**



**AGRICULTURE
ACCOUNTS FOR
67%
OF LAND USE**

**RICH TOURISM
OFFER**

1747
FARM HOLDINGS

40%
OF FARMLAND
USED FOR
LIVESTOCK
GRAZING

THRIVING VITICULTURE SECTOR



**AVERAGE HOLDING SIZE IS
64 HECTARES**

**DIVERSE NATURAL
ENVIRONMENT**

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

17% OF THE LAND
AREA IS
WOODLAND



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The focus of the strategy encompasses three fundamental areas of interest each of which are interconnected:



RURAL ECONOMY

RE1 - Provide support for rural businesses and businesses in rural areas to improve access to 'business critical' infrastructure, resources and professional support to enable growth and development

RE2 - Optimise the growth and development of the Agri-tech, Agri-food and Forestry-tech sectors to support sustainable food production, maintain plant and animal health and support and enhance natural habitats

RE3 - Support the development of sustainable rural tourism to maximise the rich cultural, historical, landscape, health and wellbeing visitor offer



RURAL COMMUNITIES

RC1 - Support development and provision of enhanced levels of connectivity across SELEP to provide adequate infrastructure for rural communities, businesses and national businesses

RC2 - Develop the skills of the rural workforce and provide opportunities for people to work, learn and achieve

RC3 - Build 'community capital' in our dispersed communities, villages and market towns



RURAL ENVIRONMENT

REn1 - Support development of a more efficient low carbon and sustainable rural economy

REn2 - Safeguard our natural assets, heritage and quality of life. Respond to the needs of the environment, biodiversity and our cultural assets.

REn3 - Support sustainable development and planning to provide a sustainable future

RURAL ECONOMY

RE1 – Provide support for rural businesses and businesses in rural areas

ACTIVITY

Provision of skills development and training, business advice, mentoring, marketing expertise, business management and access to existing and new office space, providing the opportunity for businesses to grow in situ and to attract new appropriate businesses.

This will take place through the Growth Hubs located across the SELEP area. Business navigators with specific rural business expertise will lead this strategic initiative.

Develop hives of industry and entrepreneurship across the SELEP area.

Encourage knowledge transfer partnerships between education providers and business.

OUTCOMES

- Entrepreneurial culture within which people are able to establish, develop and grow or relocate their business with access to a well-trained workforce in a rural location.
- Increase in the number of business start-ups.
- The creation of sustainable employment opportunities in rural areas which in turn supports thriving communities.
- The creation of skills hubs based at Writtle, Plumpton and Hadlow colleges to deliver a coordinated approach to provision of and access to apprenticeships and employment opportunities.
- Development of qualifications and frameworks to support higher and technical skills acquisition

RE2 – Optimise the growth and development of the Agri-tech, Agri-food and Forestry-tech sectors

ACTIVITY

Help deliver the Government's Agricultural Technology Strategy by supporting the activities of East Malling Research, Plumpton, Hadlow and Writtle land-based colleges, local food groups including 'Produced in Kent' and relevant businesses in developing, adopting and exploiting new technologies and processes. This includes spin-off based research through links with universities and companies.

Support the development of the Agrifood sector by addressing the lack of capacity in production and supply, addressing the shortfall in analytical services and developing a unified 'local food' offer for the region.

Develop a SELEP food policy to raise awareness of new markets, maximise productivity and encourage new entrants to the sector to address skills and labour shortages.

Develop international partnerships for sharing best practice and enhancing skills development.

OUTCOMES

- Increased levels of land-based research and development leading to direct knowledge transfer between robust science and its commercial application.
- Increased use of environmentally sustainable, low carbon plant and animal production methods.
- Development of a network of incubator units available for short-term rent to enable SMEs to develop and test food products, scale-up production and assess markets.
- Increased awareness of regional, national and international markets for local food and drink producers.
- Development of Food Enterprise Zones across the SE LEP to unlock the potential of local food and farming businesses, boosting local economies and attracting more investment.

RE3 – Support the development of sustainable rural tourism

ACTIVITY

Raise awareness of the 'cultural and heritage offer' across SELEP through links with tourism professionals, tourism businesses and other stakeholders to encourage information sharing, identification of opportunities for joint working and development of a strategic approach to enhance the tourism offer.

Raise the profile of LEP-wide attractions and link specific areas of interest such as art, history and culture to provide an enhanced visitor experience. Historic parks and gardens are a particular feature of the area.

Provide training and support programmes for businesses to maximise promotion, co-ordination and marketing of the tourism offer.

OUTCOMES

- Working in partnership at a strategic level across the SELEP will create a coordinated tourism offer.
- Increase in visitor numbers, particularly 'overnight stays', creates enhanced spend profile.
- Broadened tourism business base creates sustainable and enhanced employment opportunities.

RURAL COMMUNITIES

RC1 – Support development and provision of enhanced levels of connectivity in rural areas

ACTIVITY

Champion the interests of rural communities and businesses to support provision of effective levels of telephony and broadband, electricity and water supplies, waste management and road and rail infrastructure.

Raise awareness of the vital importance of providing efficient and reliable utilities in rural areas to maximise business effectiveness and support good quality of life in rural communities

OUTCOMES

- Work with government departments, national organisations and regulatory bodies to identify effective routes to support enhanced provision.
- Optimising the potential of new technologies, enhanced levels of communication and professional networking creates opportunities for business growth and start-ups.
- Encourages greater level of digital inclusion through rollout of broadband to the last 5% of rural communities

RC2 – Develop the skills of the rural workforce

ACTIVITY

Working in partnership with key providers ensure there is easy access to skills and training courses within local and dispersed communities

Support the development of local business hubs to act as a focal point for upskilling and reskilling people of all ages and enhancing their access to jobs

Develop a skills and growth framework in consultation with SME's and microbusinesses

Service providers to work with schools to identify career paths for students in Years 8 and 9. This includes appropriate apprenticeships in traditional rural crafts/skills and across all business sectors

OUTCOMES

- Skill levels in rural communities improve leading to a more flexible and adaptable workforce
- Individuals are able to find employment and provide a stable quality of life for themselves and their families.
- Individuals are able to identify business opportunities and potential economic activity.
- Core career pathways specific to rural business needs available to students.
- Improved access to transport for post-16 year olds attending further education courses.

RC3 – Build 'community capital' in our dispersed communities, villages and towns

ACTIVITY

Support initiatives which enhance the provision of affordable rural housing to meet local needs

Support development of the facilities and services required for an ageing population

Support initiatives to ensure access to services makes effective use of modern technology e.g. text alerts, enhanced on-line access, community e-networks, etc.

Develop the entrepreneurial potential and resilience of rural communities

OUTCOMES

- Increased access to affordable rural housing available in rural communities.
- Pilot innovative ways of delivering services to rural communities including education and training via web/digital channels.
- Elderly people able to remain in their homes for longer and maintain a good quality of life.
- Reduced level of demand on support services.

RURAL ENVIRONMENT

REn1 – Support development of a more efficient low carbon and sustainable rural economy

ACTIVITY

Develop and promote :

A SELEP ‘Intelligent Renewables Programme’ to provide independent, professional support targeting wood fuel, biomass, solar roofs and anaerobic digestion.

The use of low carbon and resilient farming systems (better use of nutrients, matching the needs of the crop and low input production methods).

Increased use of renewable energy (wood fuel, local heating systems, anaerobic digesters and improved woodland management).

Efficient management of water supplies (reduced abstraction, low level irrigation and minimised use of water in commercial crop production).

Better use of on-farm energy and fuel including investigation of closed loop systems.

OUTCOMES

- The installation of renewable technology in the right place which is optimal for the business and de-risked as it will not be difficult in planning terms
- Woodland owners enhance management of their asset and secure sustainable markets at a local level.
- Farmers identify opportunities to produce crops using more sustainable methods to reduce inputs and their carbon footprint.
- Development of the coppice industry leads to the creation of jobs – some of which will be in hard to reach rural communities.
- Raised awareness amongst rural businesses of the need to use sustainable methods of heat and energy production.

REn2 – Safeguard our natural assets, heritage and quality of life

ACTIVITY

Develop links with Local Nature Partnerships, AONB's, Wildlife Trusts, Natural England, the Environment Agency, other environmental partners, rural businesses and landowners to identify opportunities for co-operation and partnership working to support and enhance natural habitats

The rural environment and economy benefit from a wide range of leisure and sporting activities and these will be encouraged to generate further benefits to habitat and landscape management and the spin-off service and tourism sector.

OUTCOMES

- Support for natural habitats delivered within a joined-up strategic framework leading to higher levels of environmental sustainability.
- Sharing best practice leads to development of effective ways of working and enhanced partnerships between environmental and business organisations.

REn3 – Support sustainable development and planning to provide a sustainable future

ACTIVITY

Provide information and advice on best practice for sustainable development.

Fund research and development in this area.


Establish an understanding of ‘Natural Capital’ and ‘Ecosystem Services’ and promote the health benefits associated with these.


Support local funding of sustainable development activities.

OUTCOMES

- Reduction in C02 emissions.
- Enhanced health and wellbeing.
- Increased number of companies involved in the sustainable development sector leading to provision of additional jobs.
- Provision of long-term environmental benefits e.g. soft landscape flood prevention, improved aquifers, increase in biodiversity, etc.

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