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<h1>REPORT TO EXECUTIVE</h1>			
PORTFOLIO AREA: ECONOMIC PROSPERITY			
Date of Meeting:		1st September 2003	
Public			
Key Decision:	Yes	Recorded in Forward Plan:	Yes
Inside Policy Framework			

Title: RURAL REGENERATION CUMBRIA
Report of: Head of Economic and Community Development
Report reference: ECD.25/03

Summary:

The Cumbria Rural Regeneration Company offers a unique opportunity to support rural issues throughout Carlisle and the County as a whole. This report outlines proposals to ensure full and effective engagement with the Company to ensure that the benefits of increased resources are utilised to address the needs of rural Carlisle. A number of projects and packages are being developed to seek support from the company, which are outlined in the report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended

[i] that approval in principle is given to develop a comprehensive programme of projects for submission to the RRC based on the Rural Strategy Action Plan.

[ii] the resource implications for the Council's capacity to support rural initiatives be put forward as part of the budget process.

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ECD.25/03

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON RURAL REGENERATION CUMBRIA

1.1 The Cumbria Rural Regeneration Company (known as Rural Regeneration Cumbria (RRC)) was established to take forward the proposals contained within the First Steps and Next Steps strategies. The RRC was formed in April 2003. Charles Woodhouse has been appointed as Chairman of the RRC with Chris Torkington as the Chief Executive. The Leader of Carlisle City Council, Mike Mitchelson is a member of RRC Board. The RRC has been awarded £42 million new funding from the North West Development Agency (NWDA) in addition to the £14.5 million already contributed through NWDA to rural Cumbria.

1.2 The Next Steps Strategy is a delivery programme of activity over the next five years from 2003 to 2008. The Strategy has eight strategic objectives:

- Broadening the Economic Base of Rural Areas
- Renew and Strengthen Sustainable Recreation and Tourism
- Assisting the Restructuring of Agriculture
- Primary Agriculture Support
- Rural Skills Development
- Development and Promotion of Countryside Products
- Sustaining the Rural Environment
- Social and Community Regeneration.

Each member of the RRC board has taken responsibility for one of the strategic objectives and the activities undertaken. The RRC has now developed an application procedure to approve financial resources and is keen to discuss project proposals with partner organisations.

2. CARLISLE RURAL SUPPORT

2.1 The City Council has recently published a Rural Strategy "Listening to the Rural Voice" which sets out a vision for rural Carlisle and a series of action plans which outlines projects and programmes that are happening or planned in the district. The Strategy and, in particular, the action plans will be key documents in order to highlight the priorities for rural Carlisle.

2.2 In order to co-ordinate the activities of the various stakeholder bodies involved in rural affairs in Carlisle, and to take forward the implementation of the Rural Strategy, the Carlisle Rural Support Group has been established. The Group is intended to bring together officers from the City Council, County Council, Voluntary Action Cumbria, Carlisle Parish Councils Association, Rural Regeneration Cumbria, Carlisle and Eden Local Strategic Partnership and Carlisle Housing Association. One of the early priorities identified by the group is the co-ordination of the parish plans work within the district. The group will also oversee the development of the Rural Office to be

established on the 5th floor of the Civic Centre.

3. The City Council is unique within Cumbrian district authorities in terms of employing a specialist Rural Support Officer (RSO). The officer is the City Council's adviser on rural affairs, supports the development of rural policy, supports the implementation of the rural strategy and works with communities to develop projects and initiatives in rural Carlisle. A key function of the post is to support the work of the Carlisle Parish Councils Association.
4. The current post-holder was recruited to cover the gap left by the previous Rural Support Officer who has been seconded to the Longtown Investment Partnership to manage the Longtown Market Town Initiative for a three year period until Sept 2006. The Council still meets 50% of the cost of the seconded post which means that the Rural Support Officer post is funded for only 18 hours per week. Temporary funds have been found to enable the post-holder to operate on a full time basis until the end of March 2004 after which (unless other funding is found) the post will revert to a part time position. At a time when the work-load on rural matters is increasing and when significant funds are being made available to address rural issues, this officer post will be an essential part of the Council's capacity to fully engage with the RRC and access the resources available for rural Carlisle.

2.5 A particular concern in rural Carlisle is the limited amount of professional support available to parish councils, project groups and other community organisations to develop project proposals and therefore access available resources. Considerable work has been undertaken over a long period of time to develop the relationship between the Parish Councils Association and the City Council. The reduction of the Rural Support Officer post to a part time position would further compound the issue of lack of professional support for project development and to the Parish Council Association.

3. IMPLEMENTATION IN CARLISLE

1. To date the dialogue with the RRC regarding the implementation of projects is being undertaken on a project by project basis. This approach has continued from the former Rural Development Programme (RDP) during a period when the council did not have a strategy to guide its interventions in the rural area.
2. A number of projects are therefore already in the system and the RRC was presented with a resume of existing and proposed new projects earlier in the year. These were presented in two groups, one which included Carlisle only projects and the second contained those which were intended to be implemented on a Carlisle and Eden Local Strategic Partnership wide level.
3. The first group of 'Carlisle only' projects already under development, included heritage-based proposals at Lanercost Priory and Brackenhill Tower near Longtown. These are relatively large, primarily capital, projects also requiring Lottery and European Objective 2 funding and naturally have a long lead in time. New ideas were also highlighted including those emerging from the Longtown Market Town Initiative and the support for the development of

rural healthcheck and Parish Plan support programme discussed below. There is currently only one Carlisle specific project, the Valley Mires project, [which is about access and interpretation of nature conservation sites] developed through East Cumbria Countryside Project that has proceeded to full application stage.

4. Amongst the 'LSP projects' there were also those which are still under development. Resources were secured under RDP for feasibility work into developing a tourism focused natural history programme and the expansion of the business tourism market. Full applications to the RRC are expected to result from this initial work. The largest potential project in this category is the Restoring Eden Project being led by the Eden Rivers Trust in partnership with a number of organisations including the City Council. One project concerned the development of composting facilities in the rural area with the private sector that is being progressed to full application stage.
5. The development of a structured dialogue with the RRC based on the evolving Rural Strategy will provide an opportunity to present a co-ordinated programme of project proposals. This is important if the RRC's resources are able to be fully utilised to support the type and scale of interventions outlined in the City Council's Rural Strategy. At one end of the scale the company can be engaged directly to support for example, large strategic infrastructure projects. At the other extreme there are individual, very small-scale actions which can be promoted through their delegated Community Regeneration Fund.

3.5 In terms of the smaller scale projects there is a need to ensure that information about the opportunities available for funding is provided in an accessible way to rural communities and this has been. This issue (for all rural funding) has already being highlighted in the Rural Strategy. There is also the need to facilitate rural communities to articulate and develop their priorities into action and this issue is discussed in more detail below.

3.6 In order to assist the process of community based groups accessing the resources 3 delegated grant schemes are being established by the RRC. These will be:

- Festivals Programme
- Community Regeneration Fund
- Project Development Fund

4. DEVELOPING A CO-ORDINATED APPROACH

4.1 As discussed above the RRC is able to offer support to range of type and scale of projects. The Company, however, has a limited development staff complement and will not be in a position to offer on-going and intensive support to develop individual projects. It will therefore be up to project sponsors and agencies to push forward the development of projects. Only a limited number of project sponsors will have the capacity to develop proposals without any support.

4.2 The same situation existed under the Rural Development Programme. Many rural projects had very long lead in times and due to the limited support available to help develop them. This also meant that some project ideas did not get developed at all.

4.3 The Rural Strategy provides a structure through which rural projects can be identified and promoted as a co-ordinated programme of action to the RRC amongst others. This will involve closer working with the Carlisle Eden LSP – made easier through the LSP officer's involvement with the Rural Support Group and access to a workstation within the 'rural office' when this is established on the 5th floor. The Rural Support Group including the RSO, provides the resource to facilitate the development of the programme and can therefore provide the RRC with: -

- Direct delivery and management of initiatives. The most obvious example of this type of project is the development of Parish Plans undertaken by Parish Councils. It would be much more efficient for the City Council to support the development, submission and management of a single comprehensive multi-annual bid for the whole District.
- Project development work. Capacity to develop rural projects is seen, as has already been mentioned, to be a major barrier to progressing rural regeneration. This is a problem from the very smallest, through to the larger potentially European fundable, projects. This work has been shown to be vital to the successful development of projects.
- Project co-ordination. This role will allow the most effective and efficient use of resources providing both economies of scale and increased impact.
- Promotion of RRC support. Large areas of rural Carlisle have not had access to the type of development funding now available. The support structures in place in Carlisle will offer an ideal mechanism to "get the message out" particularly to community based organisations about the new opportunities the RRC offers.
- Matching community needs to RRC priorities. This role provides a structured approach to accessing RRC resources and cuts across some of the other roles. Not all rural needs can be met through the RRC and by using the skills of the Rural Support Team and their networks it will, however, be possible to package or develop proposals in ways in which they will more closely fit with the RRC's priorities.

4.4 The City Council's support to the above proposals will primarily be through the role of the RSO (although the extent to which this support can be given will depend on whether the post is funded full or part time from April next year) and via the Rural Support Group. The basis upon which projects will be funded is still subject to discussion with the RRC and any resource implications for the Council will need to be identified. Members will be engaged in this approach and the wider Rural Strategy process through the link to the Overview and Scrutiny process and the regular briefings to the Leader and Portfolio Holder.

5. CONSULTATION

5.1 Consultation to Date

Consultation to date has taken place through the Corporate Regeneration Team and with individual project leaders. In addition the Carlisle Rural Support Group has been consulted on the proposals in the report. [This includes the Carlisle Parish Council's Assoc.] Contact has also been made directly with the RRC both through a joint meeting of the Chief Executive of the City Council and the RRC and also at operational level to ensure the proposals outlined are within the scope of the RRC's remit.

2. Consultation proposed

Ongoing dialogue will be undertaken with RRC to take forward project proposals.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended

[i] that approval in principle is given to develop a comprehensive programme of projects for submission to the RRC based on the Rural Strategy Action Plan.

[ii] the resource implications for the Council's capacity to support rural initiatives be put forward as part of the budget process.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The recommendations reflect need to engage with the RRC on a number of different levels. The recommendation will ensure that good quality projects and packages are developed to utilise available resources. The formation of the RRC is a unique opportunity for Cumbria and must be capitalised on to demonstrate the need for resources in rural Cumbria.

8. IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – RSO post will revert to a part time position from end March 2004 which will impact on staff resources available to implement rural policy.
- Financial – Financial implications will be assessed on a project by project basis. Small scale contributions to projects will be met through base budgets. Larger scale requests for City Council resources will be co-ordinated through the annual budgeting process linked to the Rural Strategy.
- Legal – No implications
- Corporate – The engagement with the RRC will be cross cutting and involve several Business Units. It will be important to ensure a co-ordinated approach is

developed. This will be through the Corporate Regeneration Officer Group

- Risk Management – Risk management issues will be dealt with through individual projects.
- Equality Issues – No implications
- Environmental – Environmental implications will be dealt with on a project by projects basis.
- Crime and Disorder – No implications