

ANNUAL REPORT ON RURAL REGENERATION**Report By: CABINET MEMBER FOR RURAL
REGENERATION AND STRATEGY****Wards Affected**

Countywide

Purpose

1. To advise Members of the annual activity in Rural Regeneration within Herefordshire.

Financial Implications

2. None

Background**Market Towns Initiative (MTI)**

3. **Ross-On-Wye**
MTI programme now commencing year 2. The focus has been on planning a live-work development coupled with a service/networking hub in partnership with Marches Housing Association. The project aims to support a viable live-work business cluster and help to revitalise the local economy. A feasibility study has been completed and gives a 'green light' to the project and a phase II development brief is the next planned stage (a confirmed site is yet to be designated). Other projects include, Shop Front Enhancement Scheme, Community Pride, Ross Live! (Arts project – filling the Ross Festival void), and Herefordshire Business and Technology Show business planning.

A working group has been set up to look at how to sustain regeneration post-MTI this may lead to the formation of a development trust or similar organisation if the need is identified. The partnership is also keen to work with retailers to create synergies between them – an initial meeting has taken place.

Ross Town Council is embarking upon developing a Parish plan. Two public meetings have been held and a steering group will be formed to drive the process with assistance from HC and HALC.

4. **Ledbury**
Key tasks include liaising with Ledbury and Area Development Trust and continuing to assist with local initiatives where appropriate. A new role is being developed for Market Towns Officer which will sharpen the focus of work in Ledbury and Ross-on-Wye. This will take the form of a more economic development focus and creating key points of contact between the Ledbury community and the local authority.
5. **Kington**
The Kington Area Market Towns Initiative programme ceased in March 2006 with the final project in the programme, the Place de Marines glass canopy, due to complete in December 2006.

The 'Redefining the Market Town' European Objective 2 funded programme continues to 2008 with all funds committed and specific projects for 2007/8 currently being finalised with the lead applicants to ensure they start and complete on schedule.

The Kington Area Partnership continue to consider the various options available to them for their future role and structure that will enable it to respond to regeneration issues in the area, and to properly represent the community.

6. **Bromyard**

The Bromyard Market Towns Initiative has now been completed (though the Partnership is considering Development Trust status as part of their succession strategy). This year the Initiative funded the creation of a community website (www.Bromyard.info). It was established as a Community Interest Company with the intention to provide website opportunities for all voluntary and community organisations in the Bromyard area. Other examples of projects include:

- Joint funders for the HOPE Centre - a holistic family centre providing day care for children, outreach facilities for social services and numerous training opportunities.
- A young people community transport project has provided a minibus for joint usage between the Queen Elizabeth School, the Bromyard drugs forum, local primary schools, the youth club and HOPE.
- A much requested skate park facility, championed by the youth of Bromyard, was completed with the assistance of MTI funding.
- Working in Partnership with the Council's Highways Department to provide new large brown tourism signs for all routes into Bromyard. 'Welcome to Bromyard' signs have also been funded, along with improved parking directional signage.

7. **Leominster**

The Leominster Market Towns Initiative completed its first year at the end of March 2006. A cumulative total of £86,037 was spent on five projects:

- The Leominster Training Centre - refurbishing the facility and purchasing new ICT equipment to ensure the Learn Direct Facility remained in Leominster.
- Commission to Staffordshire University to carry out independent research to identify the business needs for the Leominster Area. The report provided a business plan for a Business and Innovation Centre to be located on the Leominster Enterprise Park providing 'micro' business units. Negotiations are now taking place with AWM/RRZ regarding the provision of this facility.
- Convert the Leominster Grange Cricket Pavilion into a community café facility. This is to be a Social Enterprise operated by Marshfields, part of Social Services day care provision.

8. **Redundant Building Grant Scheme**

This scheme, funded by AWM through the RRZ and administered by Herefordshire Council, covers the Rural Priority Areas of Herefordshire, Shropshire & Worcestershire and the Zone. Grants are provided for the conversion or refurbishment of redundant buildings to bring them back into productive business use or enhance current business use. £1,129,675 of the £1.3m grant budget has now been committed to 43 projects, 27 of which are in Herefordshire. These projects will generate 352 new jobs and safeguard 94 jobs in the sub region. Two major projects

recently completed in Herefordshire. In June the Burton Hotel in Kington opened a new health & fitness centre with a pool and leisure facilities for the community and guests. The Bringewood, a country pursuits centre at Burrington will open its doors on 2nd June, 2006 and will offer clay pigeon shooting, off road activities, outdoor pursuits, hostile environment training and a venue for business conferences, wedding parties, and educational activities. Negotiations have commenced with AWM with regard to additional funding and a further £1.5m has been awarded and will extend the programme to 2011. In recognition of the scheme's success to date, it will also be rolled out to cover the whole of the 3 counties, expanding the eligible area by over 50%.

9. **Shop Front Grants**

As part of the Market Towns Initiative five Shop Front Grants Schemes were administered by the Council.

10. The Kington and Bromyard schemes have now been completed, finishing on 31st March, 2006. Bromyard achieved 12 shops supported over the life of the scheme and Kington achieved 11 shops supported over the 12 month scheme. Leominster is now into its second year with eight shops being offered grants. Ross has seen unprecedented numbers of shops applying for the grant, so much so that a further £17,000 has been applied for from AWM. So far, Ross has offered 14 shops grants with 2 applications being agreed in principle but further information required before finalising an offer.

All the above schemes have been supported through the Market Towns Initiative.

11. **Ross New Trader Support Grant**

This scheme has been piloted in Ross-on-Wye, where, at the time of the request for support had some 21 shops vacant in the Town Centre. This was a rate relief scheme to give new traders a helping hand in the first few months of their business life. It equates to £750 or three months equivalent business rates, whichever is the lesser.

12. It was launched on 1st October, 2005 and finished on 30th September, 2006. The scheme supported 8 shops in the sum of £3,960.13. The scheme is currently being evaluated and if it shows some demonstrable benefit to Ross then the recommendation will be to roll it out to other Market Towns.

13. **Parish Plans**

Through the coordination activities of the Parish Liaison Officer, Herefordshire Council has continued to support the development of Parish plans in the County. 10 new Parish planning groups were provided with advice and support last year, with ongoing support for 12 other Parish planning groups. This involved arranging contact with Herefordshire Council officers, coordinating Officer responses to draft Parish plans and promoting the value of Parish plans to service providers within the County. In partnership with Community First, a Parish Plans Surgery event was held at the Town Hall bringing together six Parish planning groups with 10 Herefordshire Council Service areas. In addition, five Parish plans were supported by the allocation of Small Project Fund grants of £1,000 through the Delegated Grants Team. From this year for the next three years, it has been proposed that £12,000 of the Small Project Fund should be ringfenced to support Parish planning groups with grants of up to £1,500 or 75% of their project costs, whichever is the lesser.

14. Out of 62 Parishes involved with Parish Planning 35 plans have now been completed. 11 of these have been adopted by Herefordshire Council's Planning Services as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

15. **Livestock Market**

During 2005/6 seven public meetings have taken place primarily to consult residents and other interested parties on the proposed relocation of the Livestock Market. The public meetings have been well attended (approximately 100 at each) and caused lively debate. A record of the meetings is made available via the Internet along with a list of "frequently asked questions". Once a preferred site is agreed, further detailed studies will have to be carried out on traffic, archaeology, and environmental impact to support the planning application.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report be noted

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None Identified