

Sustainable Rural Communities A Toolkit

“Traditionally, planning and housing policies have focused development at key locations based on the availability of public transport, shops, facilities and services. It is the view of the Local Area Agreement housing working group that planning and development processes need to be more sophisticated if we are to encourage a more sustainable approach that recognises how places and communities really work in practice. If a more rounded approach is to be successful, then housing, planning and development professionals need to agree on the process by which sustainability assessments are made and implement this approach consistently.

In order to address this position, the Project Partners have identified the need for a more sophisticated approach (within the planning system) to addressing the ‘sustainability’ of rural settlements. Such an approach (set out within a toolkit (s)) must be relevant across a range of spatial levels - from the smallest, most scattered hamlet to larger market towns. As stated in the brief, it must be ‘easily applicable, replicable and capable of being monitored in house’.

The need for the work was identified through development of the Devon Local Area Agreement (2005 - 2008). The work has been commissioned by a wide range of organizations (from within and beyond Devon)¹ in order to inform Local Development Frameworks, community planning and specifically the Devon Local Area Agreement 2008 - 2011).

This report sets out the findings from Stage One of the Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities project. It contains an analysis of policy and practice relating to the application of sustainable development principles to rural communities. It is based on an extensive literature review and has been used to inform thinking around the form, style and guiding principles of the ‘Toolkit’. The report also contains a wider analysis of toolkits and the measurement of social capital.

The project is now into the design phase. A draft toolkit and user guidance is due to be released for consultation (4 week period) in early July 2008. It is anticipated that the final version will be available in September 2008.

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¹ Commissioning Partners for the project: Devon County Council, Devon Strategic Housing Group, Torridge District Council, West Devon Council, SWAN, Commission for Rural Communities, South West Regional Assembly, Housing Corporation and SPARSE (the Sparsity Partnership of Local Authorities)