

The Rural Economy – Shops, Pubs and Tourism

In March 2009, Cheshire Community Action (CCA) held another successful member led event, this time with the topic of Cheshire's Rural Economy, focussing on village shops, pubs and the visitor economy.

The current economic climate has been reported extensively in the local and national press. However, what is the real story for rural communities and what action can be taken to strengthen communities in these times of rapid change?

The aim of this event was to share information on economic issues that affect rural communities in Cheshire and to get an overview of the current issues both positive and negative that are happening as a result of the economic downturn.

Gaynor Bowen-Jones from Cheshire County Council (now an Officer for Cheshire East Council), presented the latest research: **“A Countywide Picture of Cheshire Village Shops and Pubs”** (March 2009). The report was commissioned by Cheshire County Council and the work was carried out by South Lakes Development Trust and Pub is the Hub in early 2009.

Some key findings from the report highlighted that rural pubs were vital to the social fabric and economy of villages but that the industry was under severe pressure. **In early 2008, across the UK, up to 5 pubs**

a day were closing down due to various factors, including the Licensing Act 2003 and the 2007 smoking ban. According to the Brewers and Licensing Retailers Report: “Rural Pubs an Appraisal” (February 2000), **the average pub injects £64,000 a year into the local economy** providing indirect employment for equipment and service suppliers.

However, as the number of other service outlets continue to decline such as shops, post offices and village halls, the role of the pub is becoming increasingly important.

With **36% of licensees in West Cheshire and 22% in East Cheshire reporting that they are unlikely to be still running their pubs in 5 years time**, there is now an urgent need to develop rural policy and identify ways in which the rural pub can be supported to diversify and provide services to help sustain isolated rural communities.

Cheshire Community Action, formerly Cheshire Community Council, is a local charity dedicated to helping you develop your local communities through self-help, encouragement and support.

We are committed to providing funding advice and support for projects which will protect and enhance the communities of Cheshire, Warrington and Halton, building strong and active communities.

Established in 1930.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Cheshire Community Action (formerly Cheshire Community Council)

Tel: 01244 323602

www.cheshireaction.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 1074676 • Company No. 3555199

The report supports the work of the **Cheshire Rural Retail Advisory Partnership** (coordinated by CCA) which supports viable rural retail services. This partnership has extensive experience working with Cheshire rural shopkeepers through joint working with South Lakes Development Trust. There are many issues affecting village shops and their ability to survive and develop in the future including: shop front presentation, merchandising, product range and adjustment of opening hours are all critical factors to meet the needs of a 21st century shopper. At the same time, communities need to understand the economic, social and environmental advantages of using local shops.

The report outlined a risk assessment carried out of rural settlements across Cheshire which highlighted the risks of losing local retail services altogether. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data showed **East Cheshire at the highest risk of losing retail services, with 71% of settlements having only one retail service and West Cheshire with 61% of settlements in the same category.**

Next Steps for Rural Shops and Pubs

- Rural Retail Advisory Partnership to provide **practical advice and financial support** to village shops across Cheshire
- Continue to develop the **Cheshire Village Shops Network** to act as a communication tool for rural retailers in Cheshire
- Develop a similar **web-based medium for rural pubs** in Cheshire
- Develop a **more coordinated approach between rural retailers and other service providers** in order to tackle the decline of rural services
- Further research to **identify physical opportunities** to combine retail services with pubs
- **Explore new opportunities** for innovative rural retail services e.g. cash points, ICT centres, libraries, parcel and prescription collection and drop-off points
- **Increase private sector involvement** with the Rural Retail Advisory Partnership to improve access to private sector support
- **Create networking opportunities for rural retailers** in Cheshire to share ideas and participate in business development training
- **Continue the annual research** to monitor rural retailers and keep up-to-date information

Visitor Economy

CCA invited Emma Clarke from Visit Chester and Cheshire (the Cheshire & Warrington Tourism Board) to present an overview of **Cheshire's visitor economy** in the sub-region. There are around **40 million annual visitors to the area worth £1.65 billion to the local economy.** This supports nearly **27,000 jobs** in Cheshire and Warrington, making it a significant sector of the local economy.

Visit Chester and Cheshire (VCC) have been developing and promoting more sustainable tourism practices across the sub-region. There is increasingly more evidence to show that businesses that are run ethically, morally and that actively reduce their environmental impact are much more profitable and competitive.

Food tourism - travelling to food events or to eat at special places - is increasingly popular. As well as promoting local produce, there are local food directories and websites which local businesses can also promote to visitors. These highlight farms, markets and other foodie attractions that can be visited. VCC has also set up local food trails to promote some of Cheshire's high quality local produce. In some rural areas VCC has **linked up with local bus services** which may assist in saving public transport to isolated rural areas.

Wildlife and natural tourism – this is a growing area for VCC and there are many organisations in Cheshire and Warrington that offer help to communities and businesses to protect and enhance their wildlife and natural environment.

If you would like further information on village shops, pubs or the visitor economy, please contact

John Heselwood on 01244 323602 or email john.heselwood@cheshireaction.org.uk