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Rural Insight Survey 2011

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Foreword

“Not another rural survey” one might be forgiven for thinking as the “Rural Insight” document comes silently down the electronic highway. In this case, however, any sense of ‘we’ve been here before’ is dispelled as you get into the first few pages of this concise and attractively produced document.

For one thing, the Rural Insight survey has a strong ‘community’ orientation which makes its findings invaluable given that, curiously, there is surprisingly little corroborated evidence on this key dimension of rural life. In the ‘Big Society’ age the results reported here will be invaluable to politician, policy maker and practitioner alike.

Another valuable aspect of the report is that the numerical results (which are quite surprising in some cases and test some conventional wisdoms of rural life) are clearly and properly presented with raw numbers and response rates.

The results are well interpreted for the reader – as well as being judiciously interspersed with the qualitative comments of respondents that brings the survey to life whilst also providing useful practical insights on rural problems. One useful aspect of the analyses is that a number of responses are divided between ‘rural dwellers’ and ‘rural intermediaries’ the latter translating roughly as professionals or representatives views on rural issues.

This clever device brings out, for example, the significance of parish councils, voluntary groups and the church to rural life and the less strong

perception of the roles of district and county councils. “Localism” is alive and well and waiting to be sent into even more action in rural England!

There are three valuable ‘stand-out’ conclusions to be drawn from the survey. First, rural dwellers really do seem to have different views on some topics compared with their urban counterparts. Second, people in rural areas are up for volunteering to support the social life of their communities but less so to replace services that it is proposed to cut.

Thirdly, that the rural economy is perceived as becoming increasingly less sustainable. Policy makers in all spheres of rural governance should pay careful attention to such findings.

Anyone who cares about or has responsibility for the social and economic underpinnings of rural communities is urged to delve into the body of Rural Insight in detail for there is much here that will be of relevance and value to them.

Rose Regeneration and Ruralcity Media are to be congratulated for adding something new and positive to the rural evidence base. They suggest this is a ‘baseline’ study thus indicating still more useful evidence to come. This can only be good for the kind of local rural policy making we expect to emerge over the next few years.

Professor John Shepherd

*Director, Rural Evidence Research Centre, Birkbeck,
University of London June 2011*

Preface

The Rural Insight survey, conducted by Rose Regeneration and Ruralcity Media with support from the Rural Services Network (RSN), presents an interesting and informative view on issues impacting upon rural communities, businesses and residents.

The approach to the survey was innovative. It asked respondents to categorise themselves as a Rural Dweller or a Rural Intermediary with questions set specifically to draw out the particular insights of each type of respondent.

The survey sought insights into:-

- Rural Community Experiences and Perceptions of Service
- Accessibility of Services
- The Distinctive Nature of Rural Areas
- The Challenges of Rural Living
- The Rural Idyll – Myth or Reality?
- The ‘Big Society’ and its rural context
- Current Service Delivery Arrangements
- Rural Challenges and Rural Sustainability; and
- Sustainable Rural Communities?

The views received chime strongly with the sentiment expressed in the Rural Services Network Rural Services Manifesto 2010 and beyond. In the introduction to that document we said:-

“Whilst recognising urban/rural interdependencies, and indeed the common issues which both types of areas face, we stress that rural areas are not just a retreat for the rich and the elderly. Nor are they – despite the importance of both – only inhabited by farmers and tourists. Britain’s countryside is a living and working part of the British economy, society and culture. The warmth and picturesque beauty of our rural countryside are often the ideal place to start a young family or a new business. With a rich history and strong cultural traditions, this manifesto seeks to secure, protect and enhance rural communities whilst ensuring that the importance of the countryside to our shared economic and social prosperity continues to grow.”

“Collectively, rural communities can be undermined by the loss of key services, including village schools, shops and pubs, post offices and small hospitals. Centralised or regionalised policy-making, driven by the instinct to rationalise or consolidate provision, mitigates against local service provision. The loss of such services not only affect the long-term viability of a community, but also directly impacts upon the quality of life of its residents.”

The respondents to the Rural Insight survey have clearly identified how rural places differ from urban places in several significant ways. They have also clearly identified the challenges facing rural communities – and also the distinctive advantages of living in rural communities.

I agree with the Rural Insight survey conclusion that these views provide scope to re-assert the idea of rural as a distinctive categorisation and a distinctive theme in policy planning- not as special pleading or ignoring rural and urban connectivities – to re-focus thinking on a distinctive rural agenda within overall public policy planning.

Many of the proposals contained in the Decentralisation and Localism Bill currently before Parliament have the potential to help address some of the challenges – if some of the bureaucratic limitations in the current draft of the Bill are removed or significantly amended.

The second key finding of the Rural Insight survey – that while rural communities value volunteering they do not exhibit significant enthusiasm for the delivery of more services locally by community groups – is a challenging issue.

The scale of the public expenditure reductions in rural areas is clearly a major issue with its consequential impacts on services, employment and, therefore, the rural economy. This is seriously impacted by the high cost of motor fuel such that service costs increase whilst budgets decrease, thereby exacerbating the detrimental budget impacts.

I recently heard of a small village with a large number of holiday homes. Because of motor fuel increases, owners of second homes were not visiting the village anything like as much as they did. The consequence is that the local pub/restaurant and village shop may no longer be financially viable. And it demonstrates that the impact of the challenges have not yet been played out.

This Rural Insight survey is a useful reminder of the issues, concerns, opportunities and threats facing rural areas – as well as some of the benefits of rural living.

I commend it to readers.

Graham Biggs MBE FCIS

*Chief Executive, Rural Services Network
June 2011*

Rural Insight Survey 2011

1. Introduction

The Rural Insight survey is a comprehensive overview of the opinions and experiences of rural England and its inhabitants.

Drawing on extensive contacts with rural communities and organisations, the Rural Insight survey canvassed the views of more than 1,300 people. The conclusions highlight the economic, social and environmental opportunities and challenges surrounding rural issues.

The survey is a joint initiative by economic development practitioners Rose Regeneration and Ruralcity Media. Together, we develop and promote fresh ideas to inform local, sub-regional and national policies so they benefit rural people and the countryside.

Ivan Annibal, *Rose Regeneration*
Johann Tasker, *Ruralcity Media*
June 2011

2. The survey sample

Some 1,348 responses were generated by the survey and were collected using an online e-survey approach. This represents a 7.5% response rate which for a survey of this nature provides a very positive overall sample.

The table below shows how the distribution of the sample across the regions of England compares with the distribution of rural population across England as a whole. The sample provides a good overall match in relation to the following regions: East, East Midlands, North West, West Midlands and

Yorkshire and Humberside where the distribution of responses is within 1.5% of the distribution of the proportion of rural England living in those regions. There are greater variations in relation to the North East (-2.3%), South East (-5.8%) and South West (+8.6%).

Answer Options	East	East Midlands	North East	North West	South East	South West	West Midlands	Yorkshire & Humberside	Totals (rounded)
Ranking of region in terms of percentage of population which is rural	2	3	5	8	4	1	7	6	
% of population which is rural	42	38	30	18	32	49	21	25	
Absolute number of rural dwellers	2,239,793	1,574,242	756,747	1,266,106	2,560,902	2,435,610	1,126,049	1,252,344	13,211,793
% of overall rural population of England in region	17	12	6	10	19	18	9	9	100
Total survey responses relating to a region	209	172	47	110	167	336	110	111	1,262
% of overall survey sample	16.6	13.6	3.7	8.7	13.2	26.6	8.7	8.8	100

The overall number of responses from each region matches still more effectively onto the ranking of each region in terms of the

percentage of its population which is rural. The match is as follows:

Answer Options	East	East Midlands	North East	North West	South East	South West	West Midlands	Yorkshire & Humberside
Ranking of region in terms of percentage of population which is rural	2	3	5	8	4	1	7	6
Ranking of region in terms of survey sample size	2	3	7	6=	4	1	6=	5



North
East

North
West

Yorkshire
& Humberside

East
Midlands

West
Midlands

East

South
West

South
East

“

Almost 40% of respondents had links with their parish council. Just under 20% had links with other councils and just under 14% with community groups. A significant proportion were also linked to churches or places of worship.”

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Survey respondents were asked to self categorise between Rural Dwellers and Rural Intermediaries.

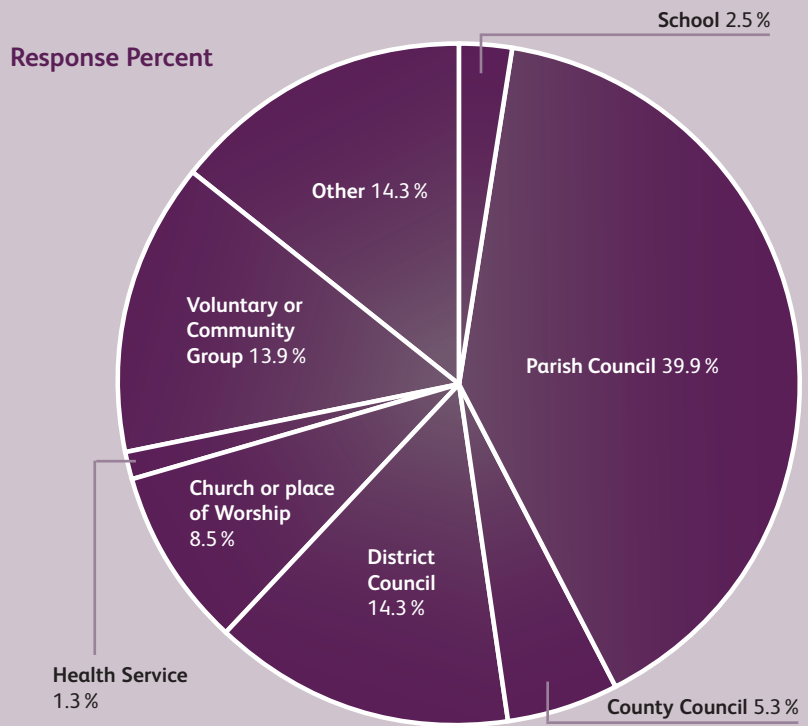
- **Rural Dwellers** were asked to respond as an individual, but drawing on their expertise as someone with a professional or representative view of rural issues.
- **Rural Intermediaries** were asked to respond drawing on their expertise as someone with a professional or representative view of rural issues.

While the core of the survey was the same for both categories of respondents, some questions were set specifically to draw out the particular insights of each category of respondent, seeking their perspectives as either rural practitioners or rural dwellers. Where respondents felt they could respond equally in well in relation to each category, they were invited to complete both surveys.

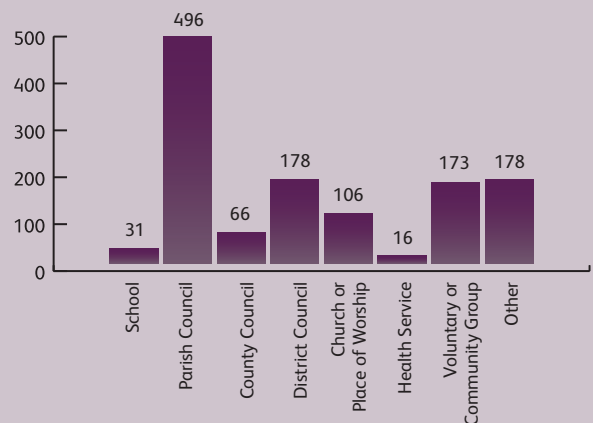
Almost 40% of respondents had links with their parish council. Just under 20% had links with other councils and just under 14% with community groups. A significant proportion were also linked to churches or places of worship.

The relatively high proportion of faith organisations may well be accounted for by the inclusion of recipients within the sample from “Rusource” (an information network developed initially for faith and farming organisations). The high proportions of South West respondents may be linked to the previous work of Ruralcity Media and Rose Regeneration which has had a significant focus in the South West.

WHICH CATEGORY OF ORGANISATION ARE YOU MOST INVOLVED WITH? PLEASE GIVE ONE ANSWER ONLY



Response Count 1,244 answered question



Rural Dwellers were asked about the nature of the community they lived in. The vast majority of rural dwellers came from settlements with populations under 3,000.

The vast majority of rural intermediaries came from organisations operating at the local level.

The survey generated a very rich collection of comments reflecting a comprehensive commentary on many aspects of rural life. Throughout this report we have used these comments extensively as “rural voices” to amplify and add colour to its results.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR COMMUNITY?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Village (under 3,000 people)	83.8 %	471
Village (3,000 people +)	8.2 %	46
Town (under 10,000 people)	4.1 %	23
Town (10,000 people +)	3.6 %	20
Town/City (40,000 people +)	0.4 %	2

562 answered question

WHICH BEST DESCRIBES THE FOCUS OF YOUR ORGANISATION?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
National	7.1 %	50
Regional	10.7 %	76
Local	82.2 %	574

700 answered question

3. Rural community experiences and perceptions of services

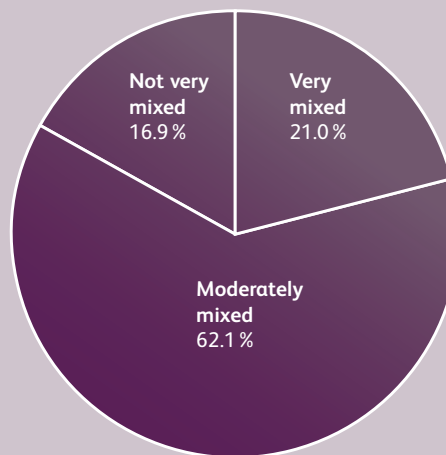
It has been suggested that the impact of high house prices, relative lack of local services and employment and higher than average proportions of elderly people has made a significant proportion of rural settlements inaccessible and exclusive. We tested this by asking rural dwellers how mixed they felt their communities were. The majority of rural dwellers felt that their communities were moderately mixed socially. Interestingly, only 21% felt their communities were very mixed.

Both rural dwellers and intermediaries said it was difficult to live in rural England with a low level of wealth and particularly without access to a car. Some 92% felt it was moderately difficult or difficult to live in rural England for those over 60.

We went on to broaden our enquiry about the nature of rural England by asking respondents about their view of the most important services to their communities. A clear set of priorities linked to “core” village services emerges through the survey with village hall or community building rated highest overall – the other core services with ratings between 44 and 51% were: Post Office, Primary School, Shop, Public Transport and Affordable Housing.

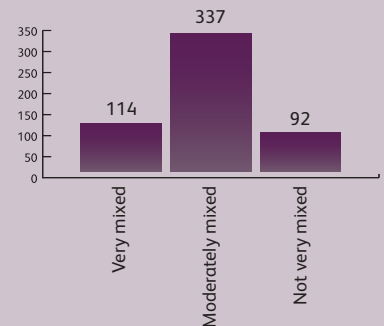
HOW WELL MIXED SOCIALLY WOULD YOU SAY YOUR COMMUNITY IS (IN TERMS OF THE AGES, WEALTH AND BEHAVIOUR OF THE PEOPLE LIVING THERE)?

Response Percent



Response Count

543 answered question



HOW EASY DO YOU THINK IT IS TO LIVE IN RURAL ENGLAND:

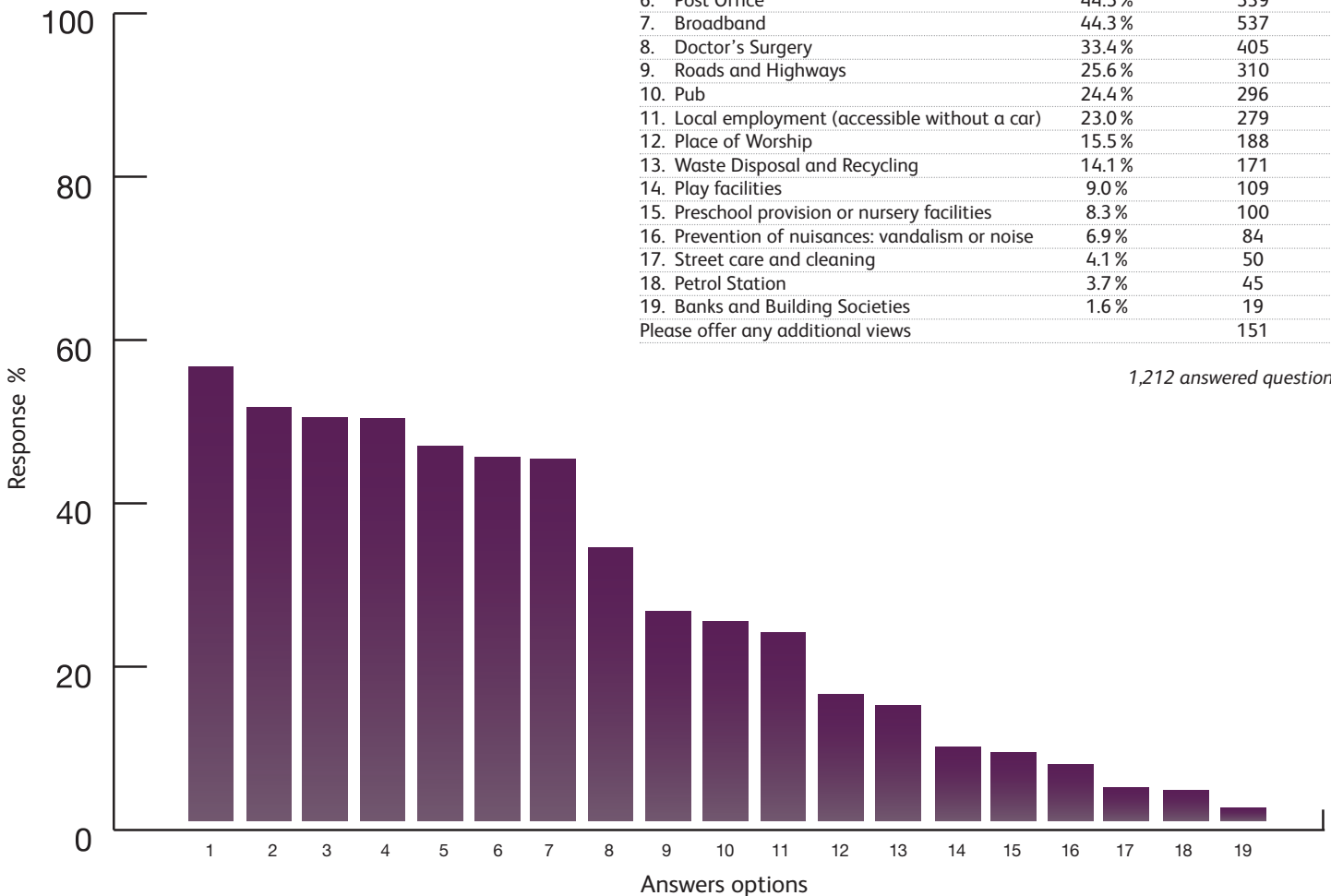


It is interesting that a clear core of services was identified from the comprehensive list set out in the table below. Stakeholder views (capturing positive and negative experiences) about each of the key elements are set out on the following pages:

**WHAT ARE THE FIVE MOST IMPORTANT SERVICES TO YOUR COMMUNITY?
TICK UP TO FIVE SERVICES.**

Answer option	Response %	Response count
1. Village Hall or Community Building	55.6%	674
2. Public Transport	50.6%	613
3. State Primary School	49.4%	599
4. Shop	49.3%	598
5. Affordable Housing	45.9%	556
6. Post Office	44.5%	539
7. Broadband	44.3%	537
8. Doctor's Surgery	33.4%	405
9. Roads and Highways	25.6%	310
10. Pub	24.4%	296
11. Local employment (accessible without a car)	23.0%	279
12. Place of Worship	15.5%	188
13. Waste Disposal and Recycling	14.1%	171
14. Play facilities	9.0%	109
15. Preschool provision or nursery facilities	8.3%	100
16. Prevention of nuisances: vandalism or noise	6.9%	84
17. Street care and cleaning	4.1%	50
18. Petrol Station	3.7%	45
19. Banks and Building Societies	1.6%	19
Please offer any additional views		151

1,212 answered question



“

The church is used as a "village hall"/ community building. It has immense value in that sense. The number of people who use it regularly as a place of worship is small. ”

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

24. There is almost no public transport - the school bus, and once a week to the local market town. I believe that some form of transport system would make a lot of difference.

25. It is very hard for people without a car to get to a bank, unless someone offers them a lift. Not just the old, but people who are infirm too.

26. There is no accessible public transport so without a car we could not work.

27. Public transport is vital to access any services outside reasonable walking distance for those with limited mobility (from whatever reason).

28. If there is adequate passenger transport, then some of the services do not have to be immediately local, ie within walking distance.

29. Public transport not easily available due to distance from bus stops. Small village - few facilities.

30. We are very remote and people have to be independent here and willing / able to meet the extra costs of living without public transport and local facilities.

31. Our public transport is so minimal as not to merit listing. We don't have any of the other facilities you list.

32. Public Transport, though free for elderly, is outrageously expensive for families with children wanting a day on the beach or in local towns.

33. Once a day we have a bus - otherwise we drive or walk. There are no cycle tracks away from quite dangerous roads.

PRIMARY SCHOOL

11. Also important are the village hall, broadband, place of worship and primary school.

12. We are officially a town with a high School but the population is 1,700.

13. Secondary school - most local children attend the one secondary school in Neston, which I feel helps bind the community.

14. We have a church primary school – not a state school – which is also crucial to the life of the villages.

15. We are a brand new village and are awaiting the development of our primary school which will really place a heart in the community. It is being much anticipated by residents.

POST OFFICE/SHOP

1. Outreach Post Office service is available at local shop.

2. Local shop, Post Office and primary school have closed.

3. We have lost our shop and Post Office. Public transport is hourly and serves only part of the village. Other than two pubs we have no amenities. Being a rural community we do not have banks and there is very little local employment without owning a car.

4. Post Office provides access to range of services, including money, local information, chance for social engagement.

5. Local Postman (on a bike) with local knowledge (now sadly replaced with man with a van).

6. The only other facility in the village is the pub - no Post Office, shop or anything else.

7. As in many villages the Post Office operates from the shop, both mutually beneficial.

8. We are lucky enough in the two of the parishes I have responsibility for, to have a shop and Post Office combined.

9. Bakery and attached cafe which is a meeting place and a place where messages are passed on and needs of individuals made known.

10. We have opened a new community shop. We work vigorously to bring further community-driven services such as an accessible and properly-equipped, safe playpark.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

16. Need investment to account for very large growth in new housing estates.
17. Lack of social housing and local employment.
18. The size of the village is just right, any larger and there could be all kinds of problems with traffic down the country lanes and anti-social behaviour.
19. Winchcombe/small market towns can offer a template/basis for a 'sustainable community'.

VILLAGE HALL/COMMUNITY BUILDING

20. All we have in this community is a village hall and the church. THE CHURCH IS THE COMMUNITY CENTRE.
21. The church is used as a "village hall"/community building. It has immense value in that sense. The number of people who use it regularly as a place of worship is small.
22. Potentially, having a decent Village Hall or other Public building could allow greater utility and also serve as place of worship and/or School and/or Playgroup and/or Doctor/Health Care drop in centre.
23. Although there are community building the village hall is shared with the school and no longer meets the needs of the community.

BROADER INSIGHTS

The comments listed above give a sense of the importance which respondents attach to the services listed and in a number of cases their feelings about an absence of such services. Further on in the report we consider how sustainable overall rural England is and whether communities are becoming more or less sustainable.

Every community is different and it is unrealistic to seek to make a blanket judgement in terms of this issue. We have tried to focus therefore on key factors which respondents have identified as impacting in particular on rural communities. We have grouped them accordingly rather than seeking to suggest there are black and white distinctions between rural and urban places. The comments below reflect some of the broader statements made by respondents who took the opportunity in identifying key rural services to comment on the wider context within which services operate.

34. Without access to good employment, access to any other services or conveniences is difficult because of the costs.
35. Facilities that provide a service and add to the cohesiveness of the community are the most important.
36. Opportunities for social interaction for all ages this does not need to be just through a Post Office, School or pub. Youth club, WEA, WI etc...

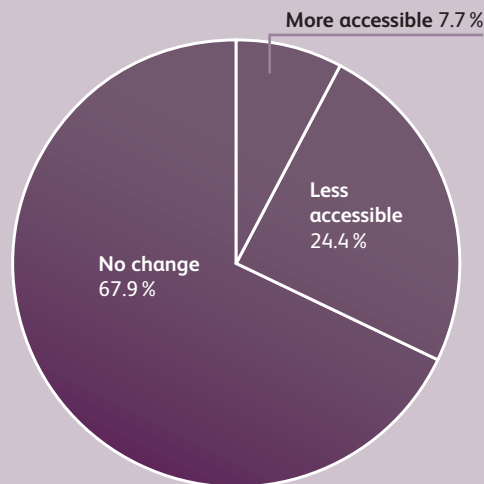
4. Accessibility of services

The majority of rural dwellers felt that there had been no change to the accessibility of rural services over the last 12 months, although a quarter felt they had become less accessible, while only 7% felt they had become more accessible. A number of reasons can be identified from responses to other questions within the survey for the view that services have become less accessible including: the impact of the recession on Post Office and Pub Closures; declining public transport services in some areas and the challenges of making the move to more e-enabled services work in rural communities with poor broadband access.

Further insights around accessibility of services are provided by considering the impact of key economic changes on rural communities in more detail. Rural Dwellers identified increases in unemployment and wage cuts/freezes had had some or a large impact on rural communities over the last 12 months. Although a majority identified no reduction in accessibility to services, 63% felt there had been a reduction in the level of public services and two-thirds reported an impact from a loss of facilities.

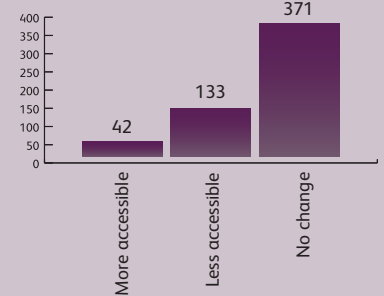
HAVE SERVICES GOT MORE OR LESS ACCESSIBLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

Response Percent



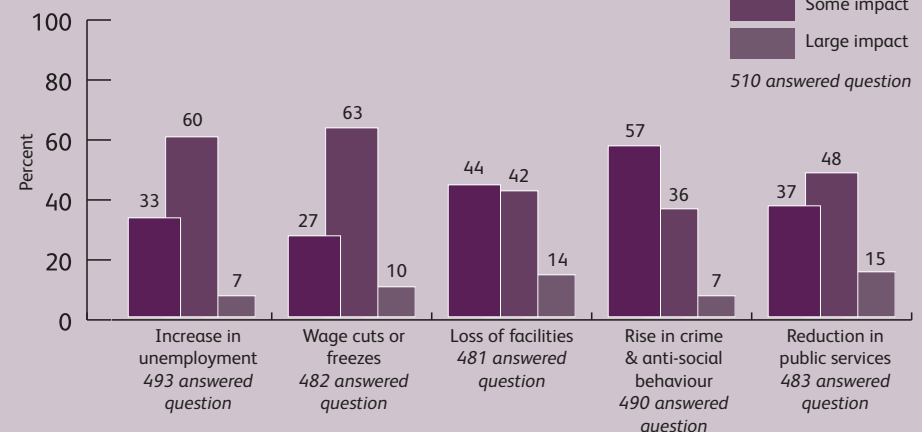
Response Count

546 answered question



HOW MUCH IMPACT HAVE THE FOLLOWING ISSUES HAD IN YOUR COMMUNITY OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

Response Percent



BROADBAND/INTERNET

Almost all rural dwellers respondents had access to the Internet both at home and work. A significant number of respondents had no public access to the Internet in their communities.

Work by Rose Regeneration in West Devon has identified that significant community benefits can be achieved by providing Internet access at the neighbourhood level in rural areas. ***This is a very interesting area worthy of further policy consideration – particularly where connectivity might be enhanced through linking such provision to public sector network nodes in venues such as schools and libraries.***

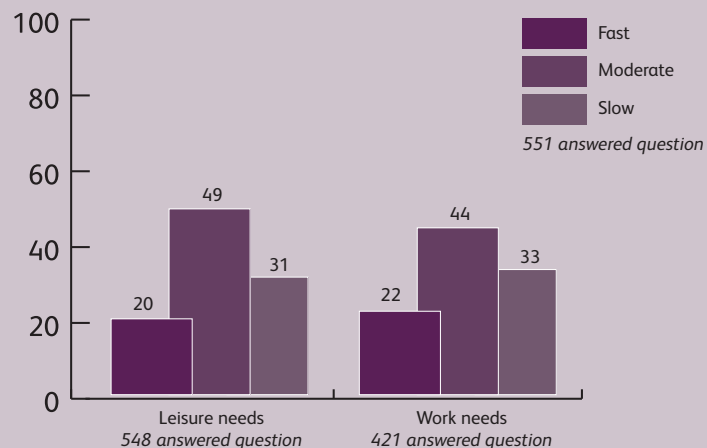
The potential of libraries in this context is already being exploited by some residents as set out in the narrative comments on broadband connectivity identified below.

The majority of rural dwellers experienced moderate or slow Internet speeds in meeting their leisure and work needs.

DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO THE INTERNET:



IF YOU HAVE AN INTERNET CONNECTION AT HOME, HOW FAST IS IT IN MEETING YOUR:



“

In my village landline-based broadband is virtually non-existent. Residents have to use a more expensive wireless-based option. ”

It may have been assumed that respondents to a survey based on an e-questionnaire would have good and satisfactory experiences of the Internet. The narrative comments submitted by them alongside their direct responses to the questionnaire reveal a widespread level of dissatisfaction with their experiences of using the Internet, however 132 respondents shared their experiences in more detail. A sample of comments received is set out below:

37. Three IT people in this neighbourhood could offer four full time jobs if they had 20mb plus. We have 1mb.

38. In my village landline-based broadband is virtually non-existent. Residents have to use a more expensive wireless-based option.

39. Appallingly detrimentally slow.

40. We are never considered as important in rural areas as far as Internet connections are concerned. Those who provide it still have a fixed mentality that "work and business " in urban areas should be a priority.

41. Good broadband speeds would do more to help rural communities remain viable than anything else.

42. Actual Internet connection is exceedingly slow, unable to do work from home on a regular basis.

43. We pay for a faster speed than we are currently able to receive.

There were some interesting examples of individuals finding community solutions to the challenge:

44. When the home computer fails, I find the local library computer system excellent.

45. We have a small local wireless/satellite community project which delivers download speeds of 1.15mb and upload speeds of around 0.51mb. It is all that is possible due to distance from exchange and ancient local BT wiring.

46. We have good broadband because we got 250 signatures to say that we would use it.

47. Local library access is excellent, as is library itself to be honest.

5. The distinctive nature of rural areas

Rural Intermediaries felt that the top five rural and urban areas differences were:

- access to services
- housing challenges
- economic profile
- environmental challenges
- demographics.

The high percentages applied to each option of difference suggest that these respondents feel there is a very strong distinctive difference between rural and urban areas. The narrative comments of respondents offer valuable insights about points of difference (and from some perspectives similarity) in more detail. They can be grouped as follows:

DIFFERENT ACCESS TO SERVICES

48. Re access to services, public transport is a key issue in rural areas; villages often have such a poor service that it means people cannot access doctors or dentist appointments at certain times; shopping is an issue; even applying for jobs is a major issue if you do not have your own transport.

49.

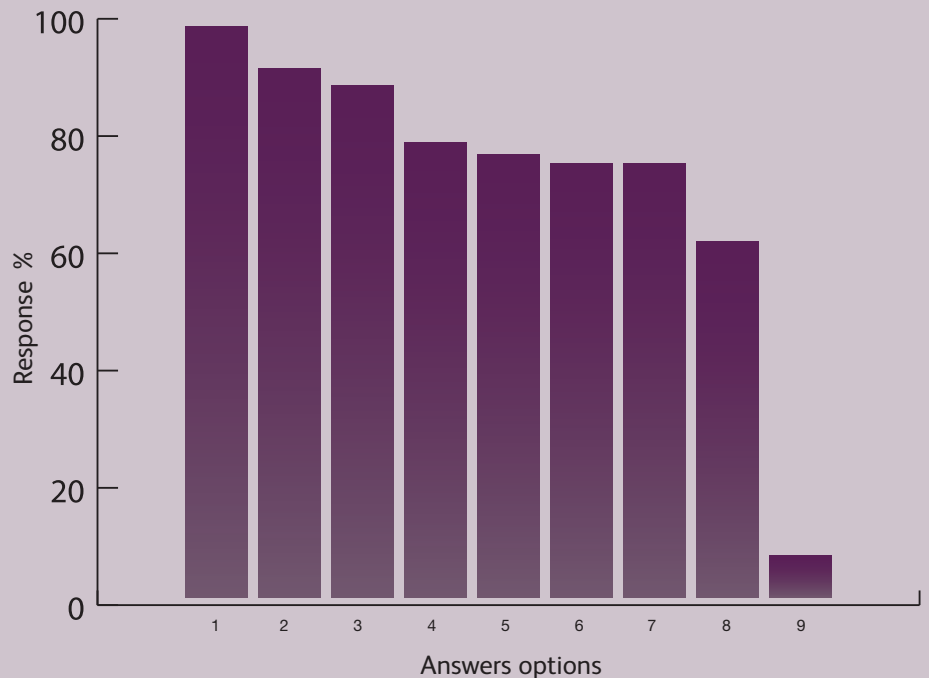
1. Access to ICT
2. Access to Transport
3. Access to further education

50. Different access to transport and health/ social care facilities/carers etc. Resource/ funding imbalances i.e, town v parish.

51. Perceived response from the police in relation to urban and rural crime.

52. Different transport requirements.

HOW DO RURAL AREAS DIFFER FROM URBAN AREAS? TICK ALL THAT APPLY



Answer option	Response %	Response count
1. Different access to services	97.4 %	648
2. Different housing challenges	90.2 %	600
3. Different economic profile	87.4 %	581
4. Different environmental challenges	77.7 %	517
5. Different demographics	75.6 %	503
6. Different deprivation	74.0 %	492
7. Different community or social values	74.0 %	492
8. Different ethnic mix	60.8 %	404
9. Other	7.2 %	48
If "Other" please specify		72

665 answered question

The Rural Services Network drew out some of the empirical distinctions between rural and Urban England in its response to the Regional Growth Fund Consultation:

GVA

The economies of rural areas are frequently mis-understood because of commuting flows. Rural dwellers make a significant contribution to urban GVA through commuting to work in urban areas – measuring GVA at workplace rather than residence undervalues the economic contribution of rural areas.

Wage levels

Judging relative affluence in terms of residential income (which are buoyed up by the wages of rural-urban commuters) masks the low wage employment structure of rural England. Using workplace wage calculations shows that wages in rural England are 14 % lower than in urban England.

Public Sector Jobs

Rural England is proportionately more dependent on public sector jobs than urban England. 6 of the top 25 first tier local authority areas in terms of the overall ranking of public sector jobs are predominantly rural. Others such as Kent, Essex, Hampshire and Lancashire have significant rural populations.

Unemployment

Traditions of self-reliance and difficulties with access to key employment services such as Job Centres mask the economic challenges faced by rural areas. These can be discerned through looking at the correlation between wages and JSA claimants in rural areas. JSA claimants made up 3.01 % of the workforce in May 2010 and

average wages were £440 per week. In urban England the figures were 4.27 % and £498 respectively. It would be reasonable to expect a correlation between low wages and high JSA claimants: with little difference between the minimum wage and unemployment benefit (especially when combined with other family benefits), you would expect to see high levels of JSA claimants where wages are low. This is because there is limited incentive to work for only a small amount of additional cash. The fact that the opposite is the case in rural areas (i.e., that wages and JSA claimants are both low) suggests that people are finding ways of supplementing their low wages without recourse to the state.

Employment structure and scale

Rural England has a higher proportionate stock of businesses but a lower level of employment and business revenue turnover than urban England. Intervening to overcome the impact of sparsity on economic performance could make a major contribution to future economic growth. In 2008 the Commission for Rural Communities report “England’s Rural Areas: Steps to Release their Economic Potential” set this out in detail: “In 2005, England’s rural areas hosted at least 476,000 VAT or PAYE registered enterprises. These contained firms in all industrial sectors. They earned £304 billion and employed 2.96 million people in rural premises. This represents at least 27 % of England’s enterprises; 13 % of employment, but only 9 % of the country’s business revenue or turnover.”

“

It is sometimes forgotten that people in rural areas do not always have easy access to natural greenspace or woodland, as much of it may be in private ownership with restricted or no access allowed ”

53. Rurality, especially remoteness, adds cost to service delivery. One of our advisers could make several calls to businesses in an urban location in the time taken to get to a single business in a rural location. Lower productivity.

54. Limited access to mains gas causing fuel poverty.

55. Access to cultural activities.

56. Access to different education opportunities, access to health care including dental health.

DIFFERENT HOUSING CHALLENGES

57. Sustainability issues around second homes / holiday homes and 'ghost village' syndrome out-of-season. For many rural areas in the far South West – remoteness, distance and cost of travel.

58. True rural areas not really understood by central or county government who think that ever-so-pretty villages are genuinely rural when they're mainly dormitories for people from nearby towns whose attitude and requirements are quite different from those of countrymen.

DIFFERENT ECONOMIC PROFILE

59. Economic profile could be similar to urban. Local Economic Assessment has revealed that the structure of our rural economy aligns to urban with a diverse range of businesses. Need to provide support in addition to support of land-based businesses. Deprivation may well be similar as urban but much more difficult to identify (c.f. IMD, priority neighbourhoods).

60. Different employment/skills profiles (linked to economic profile) – individuals often require a mix of skills sets to facilitate portfolio employment and the varied demands of working in small organisations.

61. Lack of economic agglomeration.

62. Different travel to work patterns, different access to Internet.

63. Transport difficulties combined with low local employment opportunities, Lack of Post Offices and local general stores due to the economic climate.

64. We are "tourist" dependent. We are losing services to urban based supermarkets.

DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

65. Different noise / light pollution concerns.

66. Better environment.

67. It is sometimes forgotten that people in rural areas do not always have easy access to natural greenspace or woodland, as much of it may be in private ownership with restricted or no access allowed.

DIFFERENT DEMOGRAPHIES

68. Different age mix, different expectations.

69. There is a big attitude difference that gives pre-eminence to resisting change/undervaluing change by the older population - coupled with isolation, frustration and nil opportunities for young people to mix amongst themselves in non-school environments.

DIFFERENT DEPRIVATION

70. Different inequalities.

71. Hidden deprivation and mental health issues often caused by loneliness and isolation; with a reduction in local services these people often fall through the net in terms of being offered or seeking help/treatment.

72. Perceived as well off and not in need of help and support.

73. Different isolation leading to rural stress.

74. Low level of self esteem reluctance to use ones own survival kit.

DIFFERENT COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL VALUES

75. They a fundamental sense of community, however, if the right support mechanism (generally through grants to charities, social enterprises and voluntary organisations) are not in place people can feel very isolated and disconnected.

76. As geographical entities they tend to have a greater social cohesion and an ethos of self-help and support, but deprivation is scattered and more difficult to reveal and deal with.

77. I'm not sure about community or social values because I think that there are common human values, but my understanding is that urban culture has changed enormously in past decades.

78. I think there are different expectations, an assumption that, actually, they are forgotten by the authorities and will have to get on with it themselves

79. Different social interaction due to less density of population. Greater focus on preservation and providing access to the community for visitors .Less access to facilities including schools, day centres, employment, shops etc.

DIFFERENT ETHNIC MIX

80. Needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

81. Fewer religious denominations.

Notwithstanding these views on differences the key challenge is to make a judgement about how important they are in relation to quality of life and the impact they have on service delivery. Territorial distinctions at a geographical level can only go so far in informing decision making and planning.

In some quarters commentators would suggest that every place is distinctive and that to put a focus on grouping places under labels such as "rural" or "urban" runs the risk of masking true social distinctiveness. It could be argued that this is an underlying theme in the Government's Local Growth White Paper, subtitled: "Realising Every Place's Potential" which states: "Underlying our new approach is a strong belief that the role of the individual matters as much, if not more, than the role of place"

There is certainly a need to understand how "place" affects individuals and vice-versa – indeed further on in this survey the role of individuals in driving rural sustainability crops up significantly. It is not a straightforward process to disentangle one completely from the other and a number of insightful respondents to this question offered interesting views in this context:

82. While all the above apply I would argue that the differences are small. They relate to perceptions and how places function. For balance comparison should be with urban and gradation between. We have done some work on rural disadvantage that gives greater insight to the issue. Available on our website advantagewm.co.uk - Rural Disadvantage Indicator (2010).

83. We have found that at a high level, rural economy, deprivation and issues are similar to those in urban areas. When we have looked at fine grain data there is significant rural economic contribution, hidden pockets of deprivation and access to services issues such as healthcare, retail and skills training etc.

84. Although the challenges may be the same, the way they are measured and addressed differ.

85. Differences exist within districts, from village to village, there is a cultural norm, but it is lumpy.

86. Sparse rural to dense urban is a gradation, but it is not uniform.

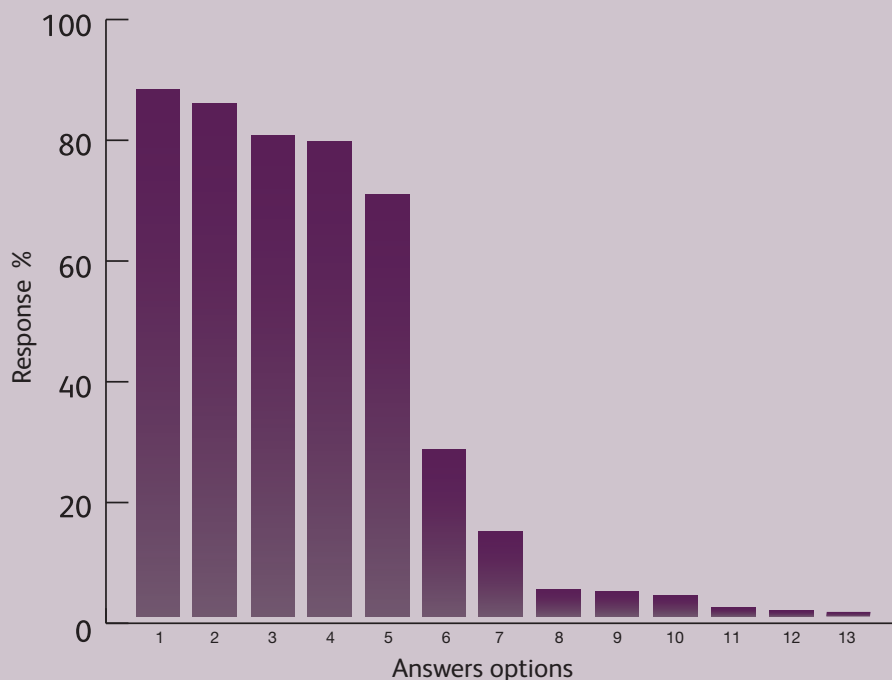
6. The challenges of rural living

Rural Intermediaries saw the following five areas as the biggest disadvantages of living in rural communities:

- Poor access to public transport
- Unaffordable housing
- Poor employment opportunities
- Poor access to services
- Poor proximity to employment.

These five disadvantages were perceived to exist by around 70% of respondents – the other disadvantages were all rated far lower with the next highest being poor leisure opportunities at 27.7%. This suggests a very clear and distinctive set of views amongst respondents that the five highest cited challenges form a distinctive core of answers to this question.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST DISADVANTAGES OF LIVING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES? TICK UP TO FIVE RESPONSES.



Answer option	Response %	Response count
1. Poor access to public transport	87.3 %	542
2. Unaffordable housing	85.0 %	528
3. Poor employment opportunities	79.7 %	495
4. Poor access to services	78.6 %	488
5. Poor proximity to employment	69.9 %	434
6. Poor leisure opportunities	27.7 %	172
7. Poor proximity to family or friends	14.0 %	87
8. Poor quality of education	4.5 %	28
9. Poor life choices	4.2 %	26
10. Poor sense of community	3.5 %	22
11. High level of crime	1.3 %	8
12. Unattractive surroundings	0.5 %	3
13. High level of pollution	0.3 %	2
Other (please specify)		47

621 answered question

“ Affordable housing would be available if farmers were allowed to convert redundant farm buildings into housing for young members of families etc. ”

Additional narrative comments offered by respondents included:

POOR ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT

87. You have to depend on transport whatever you need – if you have 3 children and no transport no money and need a doctor, or the shops for provisions or nappies, you're in difficulty. Where is the support if you have no family to support you?

88. Expense of car use, which is well nigh essential, both for pensioners and the young employed.

89. Depends on access to transport.

90. Overpriced public transport, lack of Post Office and similar facilities.

91. Poor access to cultural activities in other areas for people who don't have access to private transport.

UNAFFORDABLE HOUSING

92. Too many commuters increasing traffic, not participating in life, wanting urban facilities in a rural location and increasing cost of houses for local people.

93. Poor life choices for some who cannot afford to move.

94. Affordable housing would be available if farmers were allowed to convert redundant farm buildings into housing for young members of families etc.

95. High costs of living, housing and the fact that all must be accessed by car.

96. Second homes can reduce the community sense, also make first time home ownership impossible.

POOR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND POOR PROXIMITY TO EMPLOYMENT

97. No support for rural entrepreneurs, no incentives to provide services in rural areas (a recent study of sustainability in three Lincolnshire Villages by Professor Gerard McElwee of Nottingham Trent University found that this was a sustained theme in all three communities).

98. Important to re-use old farm buildings for employment purposes, important to provide better broadband.

99. There is no university in Herefordshire or south Shropshire which means most 18+year olds move away. Consequently, there are fewer high tech companies, and fewer 18-30 year olds living in these counties.

POOR ACCESS TO SERVICES

100. We fear another round of school and library closures having lost four rural fire stations. Leisure opportunities have to be self-made and double rating relief is capped so we are not adequately recompensed for what should be the responsibility of the higher authorities. Anti-social industries tend to get dumped on our doorsteps as we are fewer to complain than the urban population and there is more open land to put tips, motorways, HS2 rail and incinerators. Access to health care can be very difficult and involve long, costly and tedious journeys.

101. Access to services is a key issue for young people particularly if they have limited access to taxi facilities through parents.

102. Carrying what often seems like an disproportionate amount of the Council Tax in terms of access to services.

103. The choice of education - we are only in the catchment of one primary and one secondary school. Neither suit us - the secondary is a sports college and does not do separate sciences - our daughter hates sport and loves science. This pattern is repeated across the provision of all services in rural areas - you have to take it or leave it: no choice, low expectation, higher prices and lower standards.

While there are clearly some significant and distinctive problems faced by rural communities the survey also reveals an alternative and intriguing set of views suggesting none of these disadvantages should be seen in simple black and white terms:

104. Too many people want to live the rural idyll without realising that it requires a fundamental lifestyle change not just a change of location/scenery. The more affluent can make the choice but they usually also have the mobility (multiple car ownership per household) to enable them to access the services and facilities they need, when they need it, relatively easily.

105. Of course, rural communities are quite resilient and can provide measures to overcome varying levels of disadvantage. The Big Society is a necessity in rural Kent...but then, it always has been.

106. Lack of ability to disengage with other local residents, lack of option to be anonymous. Generally pettiness.

107. A lot of the above would not be seen as 'disadvantages'!

108. I have said both 'good life choices' and 'poor' ones because the answer will depend upon your financial situation and professional status: the rural idyll comes to the affluent. Poverty of choice to those with few advantages.

109. People who choose to live in rural areas tend to accept all these disadvantages in exchange for the peace and quiet and contentment of rural life.

Further on in the analysis of this survey we reflect on the complex nature of rural communities and speculate on how representative community and parish groups are. We raise the question of whether the voice of less confident and less affluent rural dwellers is effectively heard or perhaps even sought after.

7. The rural Idyll – Myth or reality?

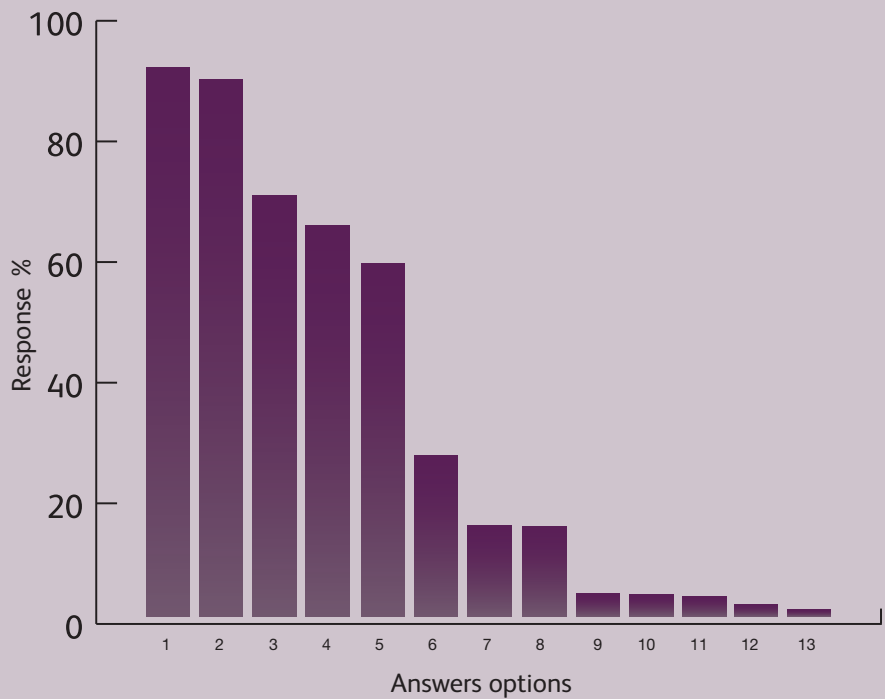
RURAL ADVANTAGES

The biggest advantages of living in rural communities cited by rural intermediaries were:

- Attractive surroundings
- Sense of community
- Good life choices
- Lack of crime
- Lack of pollution.

These five issues formed a core cluster of identified advantage linked to living in rural communities. All scored 60% and above, with the next most recognised advantage scoring 26.6% (Close proximity to family or friends).

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST ADVANTAGES OF LIVING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES? TICK UP TO FIVE RESPONSES.



Answer option	Response %	Response count
1. Attractive surroundings	91.0%	565
2. Sense of community	88.9%	552
3. Good life choices	69.7%	433
4. Lack of crime	64.7%	402
5. Lack of pollution	58.5%	363
6. Close proximity to family or friends	26.6%	165
7. Access to good education	15.0%	93
8. Good leisure opportunities	14.8%	92
9. Access to public transport	3.7%	23
10. Affordable housing	3.5%	22
11. Close proximity to employment	3.2%	20
12. Good access to services	1.9%	12
13. Good employment opportunities	0.8%	5
Other (please specify)		58

621 answered question

Key narrative insights/reflections from respondents are set out below:

ATTRACTIVE SURROUNDINGS & LACK OF POLLUTION

In these hard headed and some would venture cynical times a number of the reflections cited about attractive surroundings have a truly pastoral quality.

110. Peaceful surroundings.

111. Enjoyment of nature.

112. Often, a therapeutic visual environment.

113. Involvement in farming and the natural cycle of life - not a rural idyll, but growth and endings and life and death. Opportunities for children to experience these.

114. Most "townies" seem to need to escape the 'Rat-race' - they come to the countryside! Living in it is like a constant 'working holiday' - you need very little else to make life satisfying!

115. Peace and quiet. Green-belt protection from inappropriate development (sometimes).

116. It is worrying how the really important material elements in life seem to be missing from rural life apart from contentment in God's paradise which is probably why most people like living there.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

This "advantage" generated mixed comments, some of which suggest "community" is not a simple universally easy and positive concept in rural places.

117. Kindness of people and the fact that they make time for one another.

118. The "sense of community" depends a great deal on whether you join in with things - sense of community relies on participation in that community.

119. I tick sense of community, but at the same time this only happens with a small proportion of the community or possibly in "cliques" and not as a whole single unit, but I do also think the sense of community is probably far greater than that of urban areas.

120. Sense of community used to be a big advantage but this has been lost with the closure in recent years of the Post Office and local shop. The school and pub are some way from the village in isolated spots and there is now no 'centre' to the village.

121. Once upon a time much of the above may have related to rural communities, but increasingly many of the advantages formally enjoyed by those living in rural communities have been eroded, and not replaced. This has led to increasing isolation. Also many more people retire to rural areas so that the percentage of people over retirement age within the population has increased exponentially.

122. Much depends on the individual community and the circumstances, experiences and desires of each person living within it. Nobody should be disadvantaged because of rurality, but plenty are.

“

Let's face it: when you live in rural area, the services you get are much less than that of a Town - but I think crime is lower so your life is more stress free. ”

GOOD LIFE CHOICES

- 123. Good place to bring up children.
- 124. Less stress and a slower pace of life.
- 125. Let's face it: when you live in rural area, the services you get are much less than that of a Town - but I think crime is lower so your life is more stress free.
- 126. Being in a rural community allows me to be at the heart of the farming community in which I work and which provides my income.
- 127. Healthy living. Large range of outdoor activities - walking, running, biking, fishing, golf etc.

LACK OF CRIME

- 128. Relative lack of crime depends to some extent on a Youth Club and no disaffected youth.
- 129. Some villages are more sustainable than others and have retained a certain employment base. Crime is less than in towns but fear of crime is higher because people know that help is a long time coming - if ever. We now have over 500 affordable homes built for local people but it only a small proportion of those needed.
- 130. Cities have more serious crime and a more dangerous place to bring up children.

The responses to this question demonstrate, as with the section on the greatest disadvantages of living in rural England, that while there is agreement on a distinctive set of advantages, there are significant number of ways of considering their nature and character.

Close and cohesive rural communities for example are seen as a strength but come with obligations around participation if their benefits are to be realised. When considered in the round with the points raised around community within the disadvantage section, they can sometimes be perceived as too intrusive and stifling.

A number of commentators have also suggested that while a consensual core of both disadvantages and advantages can be associated with living in rural England they are not necessarily unique to rural areas. This again raises the challenging balance of sifting out the rural context underpinning these issues rather than seeing them as only relevant in a rural context.

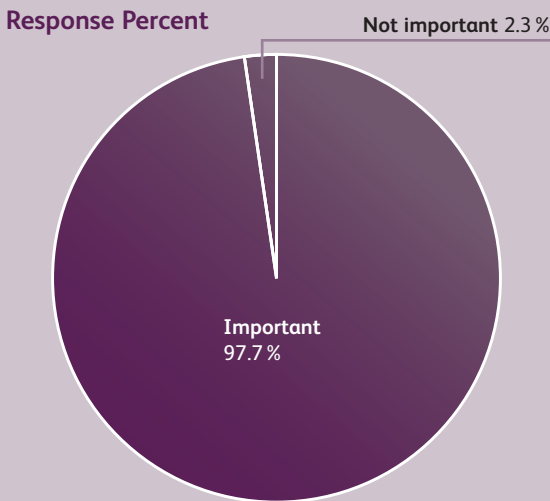
8. The “Big Society” and its rural context

In planning this survey we wanted to consider, in the context of the current discussion about the “Big Society” whether distance from services had led to the development of greater social capital providing fertile ground for the extension of local and informal approaches (ie not state organised) to delivering services.

Almost all rural intermediaries a majority of whom have links with one or other tier of local government (County, Unitary, District or Parish) thought the informal provision of services was important. It is interesting to reflect whether this is a natural and long held view within this group of respondents and what level of impact the Coalition Government’s emphasis on the idea of the

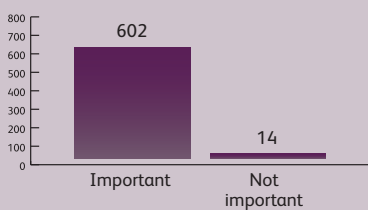
Big Society has had in underpinning it. Results from all respondents combined, showed significant provision of informal community support. Four areas of activity were most significant: Community safety, Play activities for children, Leisure/entertainment, help for the elderly.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE INFORMAL PROVISION OF SERVICES (IE BY THE COMMUNITY THEMSELVES) TO RURAL AREAS?

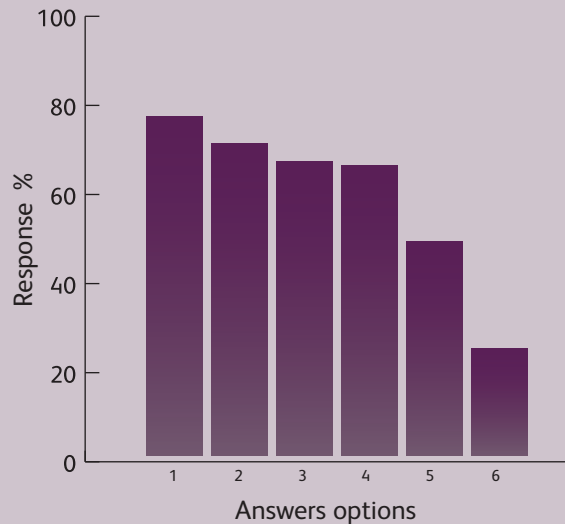


Response Count

616 answered question



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE PROVIDED INFORMALLY BY THE COMMUNITY?



Answer option	Response %	Response count
1. Community Safety or Neighbourhood watch	76	1,109
2. Play activities for children	70	1,093
3. Leisure, Entertainment or Arts activities	66	1,073
4. Help for the elderly	65	1,079
5. Car or Transport support	48	1,068
6. Bartering or informal working and trading	24	1,002

1,143 answered question

Narrative responses to this question provide some fascinating insights.

One emerging theme is the link between ICT and enhanced community cohesion, raising interesting reflections on the likely impact in this context of poorer broadband facilities in a number of rural communities.

Responses also suggested it was often a small number of dedicated individuals who sustained successful examples of informal service provision. This raises the very interesting question of what underpins a successful sustainable community and to what extent rural contexts, both social and geographical, impact on it. Some communities are more enterprising than others and capturing the essence of what makes them successful in a rural context offers significant opportunities to realise the potential of the Big Society.

At the other end of the spectrum a number of responses suggested that it was not simply positive circumstances but sometimes economic hardship which drove successful local solutions to the challenges of rural life. We set out the narratives from respondents on these issues below:

131. From my experience in a small village - these things are OK until the principal "organiser" falls out with one, some or all her neighbours! Those neighbours are then effectively "cut off".

132. Our community has many long standing and large families who help each other as well as other members of the community. You can always call on a neighbour in times of need here, and also the community pulls together in celebratory and sad times.

133. The digital world could help so much more in providing communication about lift or car sharing and job searching. Our community is particularly good at sharing by word of mouth and text to look out for suspicious cars.

134. You have nothing here which speaks of teaching people to use the technology which is available to them. This is essential for a large proportion of the rural community.

135. There is a strong social element in the village performed by a handful of people who give their time willingly. I believe there is also a strong church community which may help with welfare issues.

136. The community would collapse without the informal support network.

137. Communication - parish gossip, newsletter, Email info for specific interest groups. With no pub, school or shop having communication somewhat organised is important.

138. A relatively low waged, high unemployment economy creates the need and means for the "informal economy" - from a huge increase in allotments to a growing volunteer community and a fairly open "black" economy.

139. 'Informally' in all these areas means by socially responsible individuals - not by any organised associations.

140. People tend to turn to those they know of, in or adjacent to the community, for services such as garden tidying, home maintenance, 'helping out'.. and the communication this facilitates assists in spotting when individuals are becoming 'vulnerable'. I'm thinking such an effect

should be more widely recognised and facilitated.

Relying on informal approaches to service provision also raises, as in the comments below, the challenges of ensuring effective coverage of provision for all communities.

141. Some communities provide some of the services listed above - but many within Cornwall & Devon would benefit from more universal coverage.

142. My answers relate to my own community but the answers must depend on the nature of the local the community. Some communities do all of these voluntarily or with some public funding others do none of them either through lack of resources, need or interest.

143. It is difficult to quantify the extend of volunteering in rural communities as it does not fit in with the government's criteria of a set number of hours a week. It is done as and when the need arises and some solutions are innovative and should be more widely known.

144. Very difficult to generalise - there are big differences between one community and the next. Also, some of these services (eg transport support, help for elderly) are or could be provided to an extent by the community as an addition to services provided by statutory bodies, but not to a level that would be an effective replacement for current levels of 'formal' service provision. As provision would / does depend on local willingness to get involved, there would be / are big variations in what would be / is provided in different communities.

“ Most councils try to apply urban thinking to the rural economy and do more damage than good”

The current nature of informal service provision has different roots and character to a comprehensive provision of public services at the neighbourhood level:

145. You refer to the informal economy which implies there is something in it for the person providing the service, as in time banking type schemes, whereas the great majority of people who volunteer and provide services do so for no personal gain.

The level and nature of informal support is often conditioned by people's age and circumstances:

146. We have many older volunteers doing a range of work in the community but not many from the 40/50 age range.

147. People do not have the time or resources in our area to provide much in the way of informal services such as those often provided in more wealthy areas, often by women who do not need to work and therefore have the time on their hands to give freely of their time backed up by their own transport and other resources. If you are unemployed and not well off in a rural area and if you do not have access to a car any input is limited.

Some informal activities can build community cohesion rather than arise because of it:

148. I do not think that neighbourhood watch is needed so much for policing purposes but for keeping an eye on where help is needed in sparsely populated communities.

There is scope to think about providing services to villages as groups and by understanding their interdependence – rather than seeing them in simple hierarchies:

149. The difference between communities is vast. Some are proactive, some focus on different themes more than the others. Some appear to do very little. The size of rural communities also varies and interdependencies exist.

Red Tape – but more importantly even seeking to legitimise the informal provision of services to enhance local sustainability involves looking closely at the grain of communities rather than taking a “one size fits all” approach.

150. Life isn't all about economics! The countryside provides something money cannot buy and it should not be allowed to alter without careful consideration. The necessity to survive invents/evolves the way of life - regulation, without understanding, prevents it.

151. Most councils try to apply urban thinking to the rural economy and do more damage than good.

152. Volunteering is already in operation in rural communities. It cannot be expected to carry out local government functions unfunded, and unsupported. There are those who willingly give their time - and there are those who never will. The Big Society can't make leopards change their spots.

153. These are already provided in some communities. Organised volunteering should not displace informal volunteering.

The above comments raise a fascinating question about the current direction of community development. To date it has concentrated on encouraging volunteering and development for specific but very often non universal service reasons. If the “Big Society” is to take up the slack in relation to reducing state provision for these services a new approach to stimulating and supporting informal community activity is required:

154. Community can provide a great deal - but cannot take sole responsibility for most of these areas. There needs to be ‘official’ provision, which the community can supplement in many areas - help for the elderly, which may require specialist skills and a great deal of time.

155. Community involvement is very important but unobtainable in my opinion at the present time, due to lack of volunteers. These could only be effectively provided with a lot of thought to training and re-learning how to be “community” not just by “dumping it onto the local “PC” or another hard pressed local group....but I don't know how you would go about doing that.

Ultimately our responses suggest it is the strength of communities which determine the capacity for the provision of services on a local community basis perhaps as much as, or more, than the fact that they are rural *per se*:

156. The outlook on life by the local populace is the most important aspect (positive) otherwise nothing happens.

157. All these are provided somewhere. Some are provided to different degrees everywhere, it depends on the mix of the population and its energy.

158. Depends on the geography i.e. provision is patchy and is often driven by a strong community.

159. Availability of any informal services must also be related to availability of competent people to offer those services. Those working have much less free time as there is a longer travel time to and from work, and those that are not working are often themselves the ones requiring the additional services. So a majority of informal assistance falls to the few.

160. All these depend on a critical mass of people able and willing to deliver them - volunteering appears to be in decline, even in rural communities.

We teased out further views on how state provision of services could be enhanced in relation to three of the most current trends in service delivery. The responses revealed just how complex the decentralisation of services is, revealing that the challenging of coupling together the concept of “localism” and service is delivery will not be straightforward.

Moving people to access services proved more popular in response to this set of questions than moving services to localities.

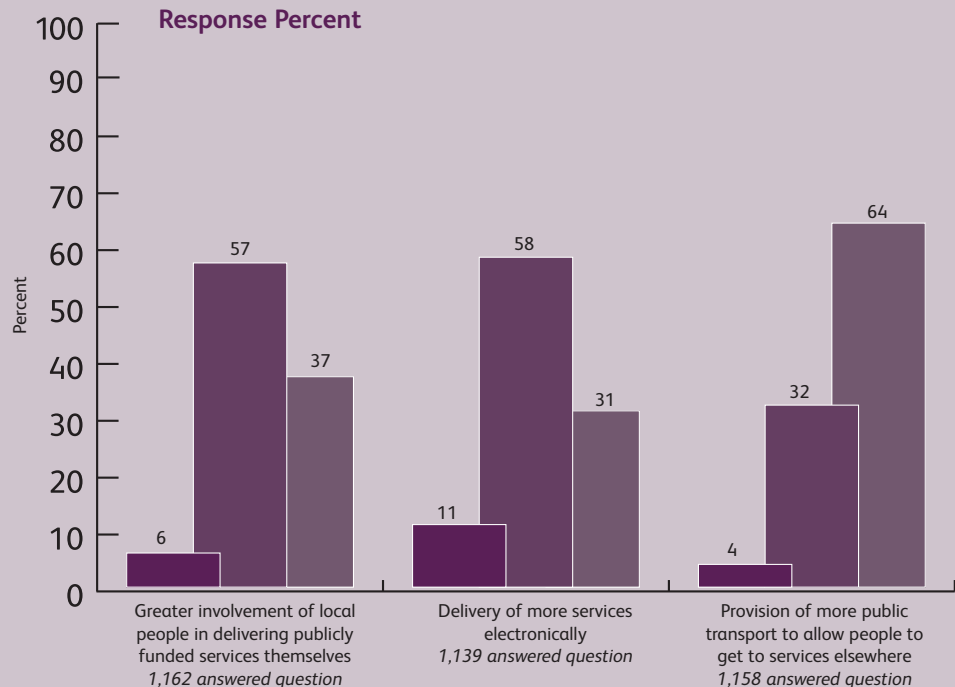
It is important not to see this as an “either/or” distinction however the fact that 64% of respondents thought the provision of more public transport to allow people to get to services elsewhere was a good idea, compared to 37% who thought greater involvement of people in delivering publicly funded service themselves and 31% who thought delivery of more services electronically were good ideas is revealing.

These results suggest there is still some way to go in developing attitudes which see communities filling some of the space at localities which could be vacated by the state as a straightforwardly good idea.

HOW DO YOU RATE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING IDEAS IN TERMS OF LOCAL SERVICES?

- Bad idea
- Of some value
- Good idea

1,170 answered question



9. Current service delivery arrangements

It is useful to moderate the views of survey respondents in terms of the future potential of the “Big Society” against their views of the relative impact of key organisations currently active in rural service provision.

We asked Intermediaries to judge the impact of the organisations concerned on quality of life and Dwellers to comment on effect (in terms of negative, positive or neutral) on quality of life in response to this question.

Responses to this question showed a mixed range of views about the contribution of different organisations to the community. The one consistent theme was that Dwellers and Intermediaries both recognised the impact and positive contribution of voluntary or community groups based in the community at 81 % and 60 % respectively. Interestingly when asked to consider the contribution of voluntary or community groups providing services to the community these figures fell to 42 % and 63 % respectively.

This suggests a challenging distinction in terms of any aspiration to deliver more services locally through voluntary and community groups, between the high value placed in rural communities on volunteering and community activity for its own sake compared to a lower value placed on arrangements set up through the community sector to provide services to communities.

Schools came a clear second for both sets of respondents: 55 % were rated as having a large impact by Intermediaries and 77 % as making a positive contribution by Dwellers.

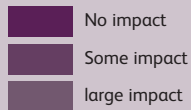
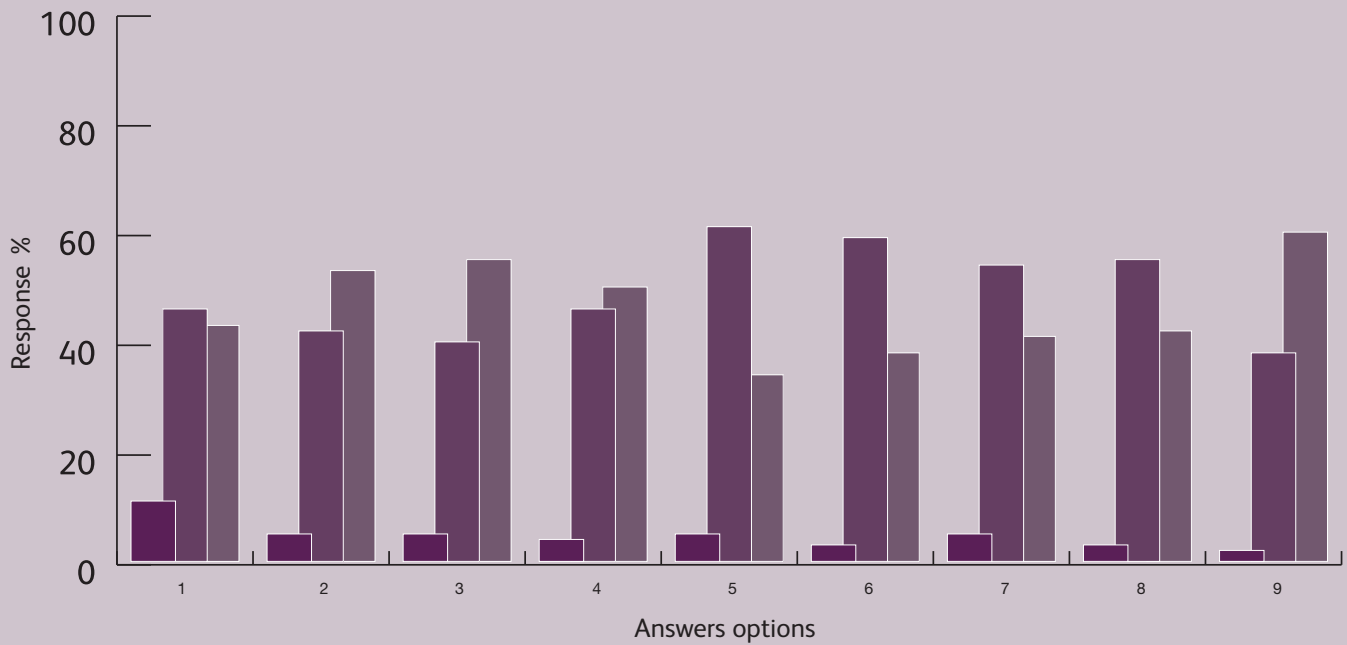
Local Government was judged to have a large impact by only 43 % of Intermediaries and a positive impact by only 37 % of Dwellers.

Distinctive views which might be attributed to the different context of the two groups of respondents also arose with Intermediaries attributing relatively limited impact to Parish Councils (only 34 %) while Dwellers (many of whom associated themselves with Parish Councils) rating the figure at 68 %.

An interesting consideration in the context of Parish Councils is their potential to be a focus for greater community organisation. This has the potential for some potency, where they wish to assert themselves in terms of their power to independently raise funds through the precept. The previous Government coined the term “double devolution” in an earlier round of considering how to empower communities and for a period of time the Parish was considered as a structural component of decentralisation. The promised implementation of this policy never fully materialised but the potential of Parishes, which has long term statutory roots, to become central players in the localism agenda remains.

Overall these responses suggest a mixed view of the positive impact of formal organisations by rural dwellers with rural Dwellers being on the whole more positive about the contribution of the organisations cited than Intermediaries.

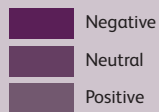
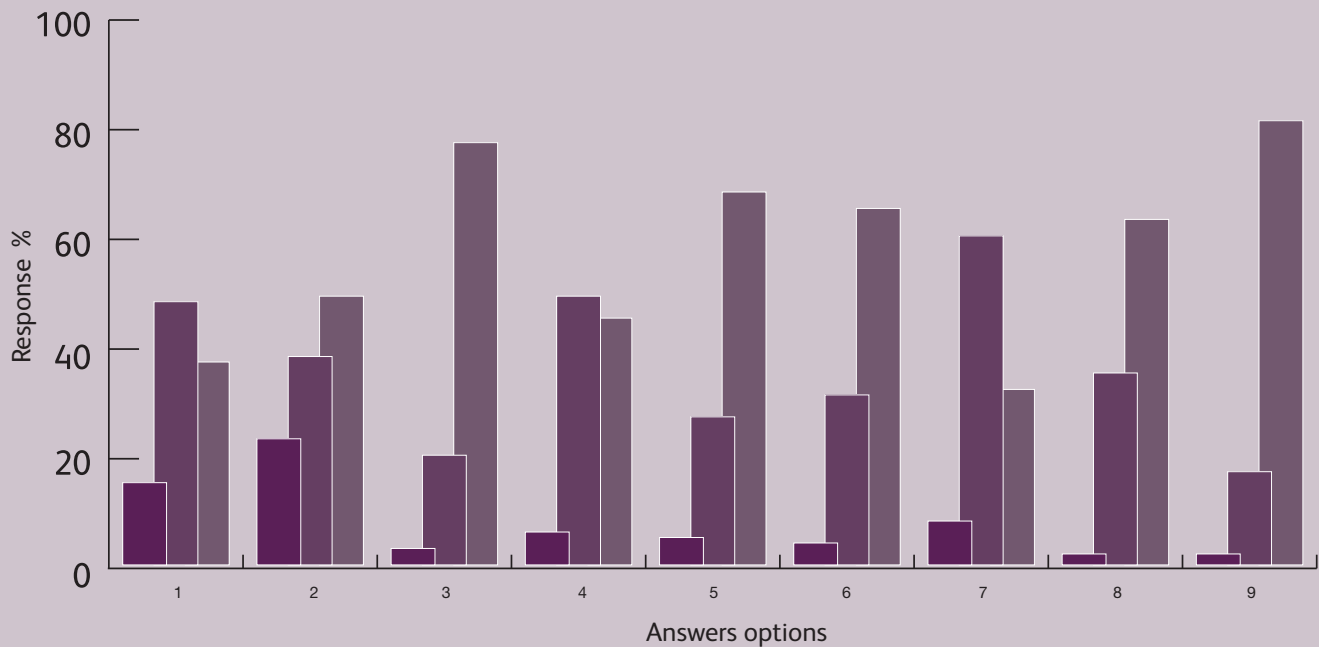
HOW MUCH IMPACT DO THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS HAVE ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES?



Answer Options	No impact	Some impact	Large impact	Response Count
1. Local Government	11	46	43	644
2. Bus or Rail Companies	5	42	53	644
3. Schools	5	40	55	642
4. NHS	4	46	50	637
5. Parish Council	5	61	34	642
6. Local Businesses	3	59	38	644
7. Utilities	5	54	41	637
8. Voluntary or Community Groups – providing services to the community	3	55	42	640
9. Voluntary or Community Groups – based within the community	2	38	60	638
Any additional comments?				77

646 answered question

DO THE ORGANISATIONS LISTED HAVE A POSITIVE, NEGATIVE OR NEUTRAL INFLUENCE ON RURAL COMMUNITIES?



Answer Options	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Response Count
1. Local Government	15	48	37	525
2. Bus or Rail Companies	23	38	49	518
3. Schools	3	20	77	517
4. NHS	6	49	45	513
5. Parish Council	5	27	68	528
6. Local Businesses	4	31	65	510
7. Utilities	8	60	32	511
8. Voluntary or Community Groups – providing services to the community	2	35	63	509
9. Voluntary or Community Groups – based within the community	2	17	81	512
Any additional comments?				87

531 answered question

“ Local government and parish councils seem to get run by people with their own agenda, that they push through even when the people don't really want 'it' ”

Key comments made by respondents which provide more detail include:

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INCLUDING PARISHES

171. Local government should mean local, not a distance of several miles away.

172. Local government (county & district) tries to have a positive effect but is not well regarded - not always responsive or truly consultative - and I speak as a local councillor.

173. Local government can have a positive effect and does here but national government can overlook rural communities, seriously affecting life in the country.

174. Our Unitary authority does no longer “do rural”, I was told.

175. Local government and parish councils seem to get run by people with their own agenda, that they push through even when the people don't really want 'it'.

176. While volunteers do undertake excellent work, they still need some funds/advice from local Rural Community Council. Additionally it is not possible to easily obtain grant funding for local projects. Often it could take considerably time and fund raising before a project goes forward (years even). Allocating all government funding through each County Council would be more effective and save considerable meeting time.

177. The Parish Councillors do not appear to have much power, neither do the District Councillors. I question the point of having them at all. Some of these individuals work really hard, to what end? They seem to be

over-ruled by the paid employees of the Council.

178. Anything or anyone bringing services into the village has a positive effect because such services offset the neglect of small communities by district and county authorities who perceive them as being less important than larger communities. Small communities do not get good value for money from their community charges. The bulk of the money is directed elsewhere. A recent example: huge amounts of money have been spent on dressing up a pedestrian zone in a local town while our pavements and roads are neglected.

179. Parish Council has almost no influence on County or District Council.

180. Negative effect of local government is not entirely their fault, Westminster policies are mainly the problem.

181. Parish councils need to have a positive effect but how many do.

182. A large impact can be a detrimental impact in the case of local government and Parish Council and schools.

183. This section should be taken very seriously as too much is expected of voluntary workers in the rural areas. Our taxes are as high as urban areas and should provide the facilities mentioned above.

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

184. The voluntary groups cannot exist without public funding and expertise. It cannot be solely the Parish Council who provides funds all the time because the funds come from the local people originally and high precepts make life more and more expensive for the elderly and unemployed.

185. You need to be healthy, wealthy and mobile to survive in the countryside. Women volunteers were the glue that held rural communities together. You should be able to live work and play in your village.

186. Again it is the local voluntary and community groups supported by charities which have most impact.

187. I think that voluntary groups do wonderful work and are absolutely to be encouraged and supported. They cannot however do all the work of professional carers and skilled workers, nor can they always be entirely self funding.

188. No faith in the third sector or social enterprise unless they have a business plan to be self sustainable.

189. Locally based community groups such as Hall committees, sports clubs, WI, gardening clubs and church groups all contribute greatly to quality of life in rural communities and assist in keeping an eye on the vulnerable.

190. People need to realise that if they live in a small rural community they have a duty to help others.

191. There are many circumstances that will influence the answers above. The reality is that each village or rural town is different to the next.

192. Voluntary or community groups often find it difficult to provide services to small communities because of cost with regard to scale and travel.

193. We have some will to 'do-it-ourselves' but regulation from above gets in the way! Greatest negative effects have been Dr Beeching/Marples, privatisation of water,

selling off of 'council housing' without replacement, interference/changes in farming (some have been good).

194. Concerns about to legislation loaded on voluntary committees.

195. I think most local people do not understand most of what the local authorities (Parish & District Councils) do to impact their area. They don't also understand the importance anymore of the need for volunteering. Having been involved in local voluntary groups for the past 20 years I have found it increasingly frustrating when trying to recruit others into volunteering. This has been made harder over the last decade or so with the introduction of various "red tape" and legislative things to control and tie up volunteers making people "fearful of volunteering because they don't want the "hassle or responsibility which goes with it. Hard to explain without going into specifics, but in general I hope that makes sense. I am all for local people getting together and getting involved but I think they need to be re-taught: how?

196. Most people have no idea how difficult it is to deliver services with Government money, from systems needed, audit procedures, premises, insurance and responsibility. It can also lead to a local 'mafia' taking over with favouritism.

197. Some villages have better organised community groups than others. Depends on the people who live there Many villages close to London are dead during the day because people are commuting till late and then exhausted at the weekend.

198. VCS are only as good as the people involved. Very difficult to engage with

everyone in the community, whereas everyone in the community will need the more specialised delivered through VCS.

199. Voluntary Groups, tend to have no input into sparse communities.

BROADBAND

200. Presence and speed of Broadband connection can have a large impact, particularly if more services are delivered electronically.

201. Although I agree that providing information/services electronically can be easier than providing face to face services it has to be remembered that not all people have a computer or access to one and if broadband is slow (as mine is) one tends to give up with the Internet/email.

202. Re local business - the lack of good quality of broadband is major problem. Ofcom are letting down the community through failure on infrastructure in this context.

203. Local businesses would have more impact if broadband services, for example, had actually reached rural areas.

OTHER KEY COMMENTS

204. Services can always travel to the community. Multi use village facilities can have a role providing a location.

205. Cultural organisations also have a positive impact on quality of life in rural communities.

206. In a village of low population, where elderly residents predominate it is difficult to see how community bus or Post Office services could be provided by the locals; our

village has been deprived of its Post Office and main public transport, despite considerable protest by the residents.

207. The NHS in local communities relies so much on the quality of the local doctors and after recent legislation even more so.

208. All these are important in the development of 'community' one thing which is missing from the list is a collective issue which serves to bring a community together in common cause. Any one of these organisations can provide.

209. Partnerships comprising of all of the above organisations can have a greater impact by working together.

DISCUSSION

There are very significant resonances between the points raised about the impact and contributions of key organisations in this section and the comments made about the current informal provision of services. In both cases:

- » There is an overwhelming sense that the implementation of the Big Society concept will be complicated and challenging in localities as a consequence of the clear distinction between positive views about community /voluntary activity and more complex views about the benefits of community/voluntary service provision.
- » Poor broadband is a limiting factor to modernising service delivery.
- » The varied nature and coverage of the voluntary sector across different communities is making it very hard to generalise about the scope to decentralise services across all communities.
- » The impact of “red tape” on the development of the voluntary sector as a focus for service provision is cited.

A new insight which arises is:

- » A feeling in some quarters that national policies constrain or circumscribe the effectiveness of local government.

Indications, particularly in terms of the last two quotations provided in this section, are that there is merit in thinking at the micro level about how the budgets and roles of all service providers could be joined up. This could be achieved through an enhanced process of locality planning mirroring the higher level work currently underway to look at the implementation of place based budgets.

The insights also give an indication of the ongoing potential for the development of an enhanced dialogue between Parishes and higher tiers of Government about local service delivery.

10. Rural challenges and rural sustainability

The five most significant challenges facing rural England are:

- The medium term increasing costs of fuel and travel
- the provision of local affordable housing
- increasingly ageing population
- the provision of meaningful employment for local people
- broadband connectivity.

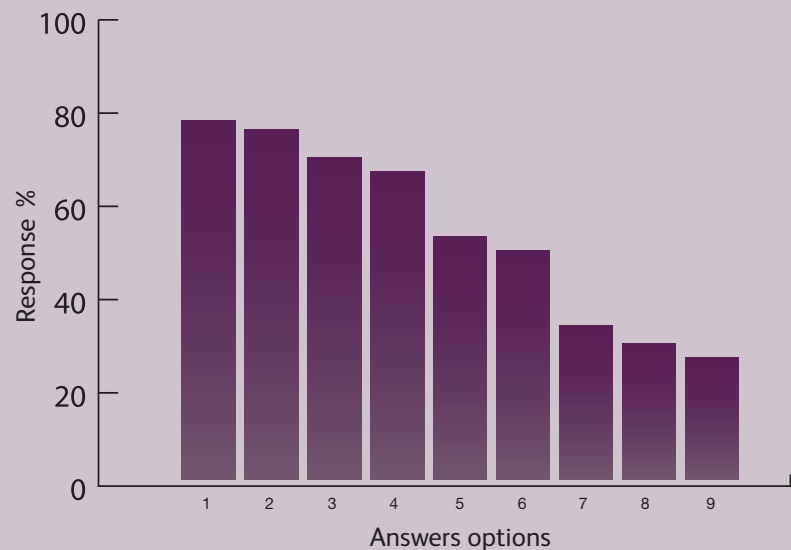
Interestingly alongside this list, which can be clearly differentiated as a core list from the other responses, stand very clear core lists in response to the questions about:

- How rural areas differ from urban areas
- The biggest advantages of living in rural communities
- The biggest disadvantages of living in rural communities
- The most important services to rural communities.

Taken as a group of core responses together these responses do suggest that a clear and distinctive view of the issues and opportunities facing rural England can be set out from the perceptions and experiences of the respondents to this survey.

Key comments made in relation to this question are set out below:

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACED BY RURAL ENGLAND? PLEASE TICK UP TO FIVE CHALLENGES



Answer option	Response %	Response count
1. The medium term increasing costs of fuel and travel	77.0 %	879
2. The provision of local affordable housing	75.0 %	857
3. Increasingly ageing population	69.0 %	783
4. The provision of meaningful local employment for people	66.0 %	758
5. Broadband connectivity	52.0 %	590
6. The need to conserve our rural environment in the face of development pressures	49.0 %	553
7. Current (low) level of overall infrastructure provision	33.0 %	377
8. Lack of local retail	29.0 %	329
9. The need to grasp the opportunities around renewable energy	26.0 %	298

1,140 answered question

“ Costs of fuel and travel and lack of local retail will eventually make living in a rural environment impossible for less well off people”

FUEL AND TRAVEL COSTS

The rating of this issue as the most significant challenge facing rural England demonstrates that there is a growing consensus about the future environmental challenges facing rural settlements dependent on transport. It raises interesting issues when considered against a clear preference in the Big Society element of the analysis for people to travel more effectively to services as opposed to the provision of more services locally by communities themselves or more IT enabled services:

210. The rising cost of fuel hits every single rural dweller far more than it does those who live in a town or can walk to shops, schools or doctors.

211. Greater understanding by local and national Government of self help and encouraging travel to existing facilities rather than setting up the same facilities locally. Villages combining their facilities - school in village A, doctor in B, sports in C and so on. Travel (by car) is essential.

212. Costs of fuel and travel and lack of local retail will eventually make living in a rural environment impossible for less well off people.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The answers below show a rich seam of differing viewpoints about the nature and fairness of the current housing climate in rural areas. There is by no means a consensus that the provision of rural affordable housing is universally a good thing. Alongside the simple “nay-sayer” type comments there are deeper commentaries about the impact of housing

on villages and the need for broader considerations of sustainability within the planning and sustaining of rural settlements:

213. 99% of our problems are caused by over population; fiddling around attempting short term fixes for the many consequences ie rising costs, shortage of housing, worsening traffic, loss and damage to habitat, extinction of species, etc. etc. is just avoiding a rapidly worsening problem.

214. The number of people who own two homes and don't understand how the rural community works, it is a problem threatening the rural way of life.

215. Navenby has seen rapid and substantial growth as a designated location for new housing: 29% in the last decade alone. We cannot keep adding houses and thus families and retirees without meeting the need for local facilities to support them such as child care, youth activities, sports, places to organise and enjoy social, educational and leisure activities.

216. The second home phenomenon ranks high in any such list. Salcombe, my home town, now has 120 on its electoral roll. Ignoring this issue and talking about active communities is a nonsense.

217. Parish Council led local needs housing surveys suggest that rural affordable housing need though important is overstated.

218. Affordable housing is a big issue in this village. However, the policy of the local council, informed by national policy, is that 'local' means anyone who qualifies on a points basis from anywhere; 'local' does not mean people who live in, or have a

reasonable claim to live in, the village. In addition, the criteria of local authorities - including ours - for maintaining the existing mandated percentage of affordable housing for new housing developments is weakening. The basic issue is that unless the community can continue to resist the imposition by the local authority of large numbers of new housing to gain a few affordable houses for non-local people then the poor infrastructure of area will be overwhelmed.

219. I do not know why Labour did not bring back council houses. Affordable housing often is not. A big challenge is making urban people aware that rural life is different, the countryside is not a theme park and that rural people should not be told how to run their lives any more than we tell city folk how to run theirs.

220. Please note affordable housing to most people is not social housing..... Most of us from the area (not migrated as they generally have way more money) need a house that is affordable to buy/rent.

AGEING POPULATION

While a number of other questions solicited responses highlighting the challenges of ageing populations (for example in relation to the differences between rural and urban areas) and respondents to this question identified this as a key issue – it generated relatively few narrative comments by respondents:

221 In our fairly affluent area with a large population of older people some of these have only a small effect.

222. The ageing population isn't a problem *per se* - it's the loss of the next generation of families and workers. Gentrification is THE key issue in that it largely underpins many of the above choices (eg NIMBY's opposing creation of affordable homes, wind farms, work spaces etc).

EMPLOYMENT

A strong consensus emerges in terms of the comments below about the negative implications of a lack of local employment opportunities in rural communities:

223. Employment is clearly an issue; it can be found in the nearby market towns which are between 5 and 12 miles away; but I guess opportunities will decline at least in the shorter term until the economy is revitalised.

224. Ability to live and work in the same place is vital and at the moment not deliverable.

225 Local employment for well educated young people is vital to prevent the loss of these youngsters to the community.

226. Total lack of viability of land based businesses - apart from a few exceptions it is now almost impossible to make a living from the land, or related businesses. This is driving work (and so ordinary people) out of rural communities and replacing them with dormitories of well paid urban based workers. Eventually there will be no rural communities, just less dense suburbs of the well off.

227. The provision of learning and skills suited to employment opportunities.

BROADBAND

A strong and consistent theme emerges in the context of broadband demonstrating strong views on how the poorer quality nature of it compromises the views of a number of rural communities in relation to realising the full benefits of the growing "e-enablement" of services:

228. Services can only be delivered where there is a decent broadband connection and people have access to use it. This is not the case in many rural areas. People will only use public transport when there is no other option. It has to be reliable and cheap.

229. Residents are financially penalised when they do not have access to broadband. Too many services (private and public) are online without due consideration that individuals can access this either because there is no broadband in their area or because they do not have access to a computer (and no bus service to the library).

230. Broad band connectivity is an essential part of the local employment issue.

231. Lack of broadband is a big issue. Without it those in rural areas are seriously disadvantaged, both domestically and business wise. With better broadband, local employment could be improved. With changes in work practices more people could work at home and perhaps support other local business (pubs/shops).

OVERARCHING COMMENTS

A number of overarching responses to this survey suggest both a recognition of change but in some quarters a strong reactionary response to regulation and intervention:

232. They are all important and related to each other. The aging population are blocking the housing for the young and lack of employment for local people has gone as there are so few farms any more.

233. We are victims of decisions made by people who don't understand the importance of the countryside - which is mostly to provide food - not habitats for birds. Sad though this is, the interference of bodies keen to preserve dated environments are distorting public opinion, when actually we should be ensuring that the habitat for bees and their needs are secured - not protecting certain birds and animals which is upsetting the natural balance of the eco-system.

234. Overall too much regulation of all types and top heavy Government.

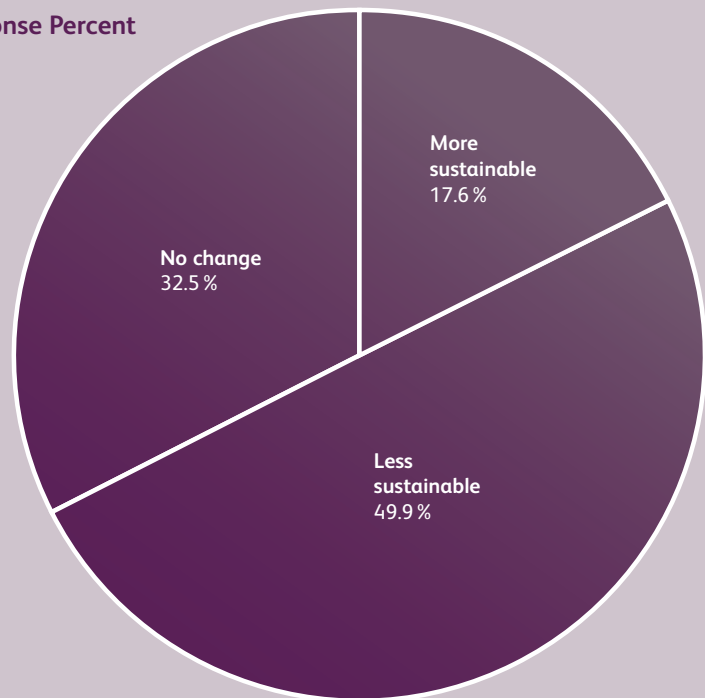
235. I think that trying to create a lot of rural employment, and housing to go with it, may be trying to revert to a way of life that is obsolete and will never return. Present-day 'rural' industries are farming, forestry, warehousing, and quarrying. None of these require permanent large work-forces or are closely associated with neighbouring communities. Many (probably most) employees drive from the towns or are seasonal 'guest' workers.

11. Sustainable rural communities?

In our final question we asked rural Intermediaries to indicate whether they felt rural communities would become more or less sustainable over the next year. Almost 50% of rural Intermediaries thought rural communities were likely to become less sustainable over the next year. This has to be moderated by the comments we made earlier in this report about the difficulty of generalising both in terms of “rural” as a blanket term and in terms of sustainability.

DO YOU THINK RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE LIKELY OVERALL TO BECOME MORE OR LESS SUSTAINABLE OVER THE NEXT YEAR?

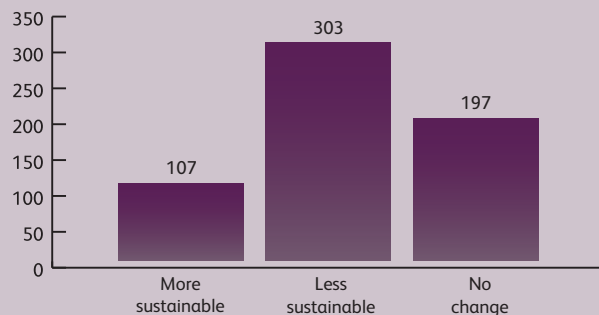
Response Percent



Response Count

607 answered question

333 commented on the reasons for their answer



In relation to definitions as indicated in the introduction to this report we have relied on the rural/urban definitions maintained by the Office for National Statistics. In terms of “sustainable” the current working definition is enshrined within the Bristol Accord established on an EU basis in 2005:

1. ACTIVE, INCLUSIVE AND SAFE

Fair, tolerant and cohesive with a strong local culture and other shared community activities

2. WELL-RUN

With effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership

3. WELL-CONNECTED

With good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services

4. WELL-SERVED

With public, private, community and voluntary services that are appropriate to people’s needs and accessible to all

5. ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE

Providing places for people to live that are considerate of the environment

6. THRIVING

With a flourishing, diverse and innovative local economy

7. WELL DESIGNED AND BUILT

Featuring quality built and natural environment

8. FAIR FOR EVERYONE

Including those in other communities, now and in the future

While the responses to this question have to be couched in defined terms (in terms of “rural” and “sustainable” as concepts) and set out with an acknowledgement that all places are to an extent different/unique there are some distinctive elements identified by over 300 respondents to this question which suggest a specific rural component. We have grouped them against the 8 elements of the Bristol Accord below:

ACTIVE INCLUSIVE AND SAFE

Positive comments

236. The best, most active rural communities are working to solve the problems now and are very generous with their time and expertise to support those who follow. We know we will get little assistance from government and must do it ourselves. We also know that solutions need to be tailored to local circumstances and that you can certainly NOT paste on urban solutions in the countryside.

237. My community works together to make the best of the limited resources we have available that will not change during the next year.

238. If the “Big Society” means anything it should encourage self-help neighbourhood action - to grow more of our own food (survey didn’t mention allotments) and share resources / equipment.

239. Localism, now called Big Society, could help revive sustainable rural communities. However, this is against competing pressures of globalism and international trade.

“

Quality of life will suffer for the elderly, young parents and their children and other disadvantaged groups. An improvement in our sense of community resulting in people taking responsibility for each other might mitigate this trend. ”

240. Rural location creates a demand as government policy of centralisation, “big is good”, changes. Locations and community spirit provide opportunity if people are empowered.

241. Quality of life will suffer for the elderly, young parents and their children and other disadvantaged groups. An improvement in our sense of community resulting in people taking responsibility for each other might mitigate this trend.

Negative Comments

242. Less well off people are forced to leave to find affordable housing and employment. Communities are likely to become enclaves of retired and well off residents which is not sustainable in the long term

243. Ageing population, reduced local services and increasing house prices.

244. Lessening support from all public bodies will hit those in rural areas the hardest due to a decrease in services, in policing, in rural economic development and an increase in awful planning red tape stopping the creation of viable businesses and communities.

245. Over a longer term as communities they will become less sustainable due to ageing, unaffordable housing, lack of employment and lack of affordable transport.

246. With less funding to maintain infrastructure and housing, and demand based on numbers, rural communities face the loss of services, lack of maintenance of publicly owned assets, and poorer housing conditions. More local shops will close. small schools will be threatened.

247. It appears that services to rural areas are being reduced and there are no opportunities to keep young people within the countryside. The countryside cannot survive with most of the population over 60.

248. Youth drainage from rural communities due to lack of affordable housing and employment opportunities. No young families = no new children = decreasing viability of local schools and less local support for ageing population. HELP!

WELL-RUN

Positive Comments

249. Government cuts mean communities will need to look to themselves for support and services: this could draw them together and benefit both those drawn in to providing the voluntary help and those finding help offered by neighbours.

250. Devolution/transfer of powers/services from the Borough Council to the Parish Council.

251. If the community can be freed up to make decisions regarding the things that they think will increase the sustainability of their community then they will become more sustainable.

252. Think rural communities will respond well to Big Society ideas and plans particularly if local government backs off and stops being so heavy handed.

Negative Comments

253. Dubious about the delivery of any services or housing if faced with only local decision makers.

254. When governing bodies see sense and let us get on with living our lives - we will always find the resources or make do with what we've got in order to survive and maintain this beautiful (mis-understood) way of life.

255. There is no sense of priority to do any more than current policies allow, and preferably councils much prefer to service towns. The Mathew Taylor MP Review is another country.

256. I see no real will by central government to tackle the underlying causes of rural isolation and deprivation. Moreover, it consistently fails to create funding formulae that properly take into account the special needs of rural local authorities, which are therefore condemned to provide second-rate services.

257. We've just seen our plans for community-run, built and administered affordable housing narrowly defeated in a Parish Poll, thanks to the efforts of a small minority determined to mislead the majority and bluff them into thinking they were voting against a site, rather than the housing itself.

258. The cut back in public expenditure is likely to have a major impact on services, which in turn will impact on the rural communities which already have limited access to those services. Our experience is that there is a limited pool of people in any community who are willing to get involved in community activities. Consequently, the Big Society is unlikely to be able to fill the gap.

259. The Big Society needs to consider rural communities more and the unique issues they face.

WELL-SERVED

Positive Comments

260. Reducing central services and provision although this could provide opportunities for rural communities if they are ready to grasp them.

Negative Comments

261. People are going to have to move out for more affordable housing. Schools will close and villages will become less attractive to families. Village shops will decline.

262. Government continues to remove key activities from Post Offices through their actions, developers threaten local shops and businesses with plans for supermarkets, funds for high speed broadband go to cities.

263. Less support from the unitary authority as it reduces its level of services. Rural communities are losing facilities such as Post Offices, shops.

264. There is developing interest in new initiatives at local level to provide much needed services - both formally and informally but the challenge is to make sure that there is support available to help communities to do this.

265. With the current economic climate, I believe that essential services to rural communities will be squeezed and this will have a detrimental effect on the locality.

266. Lessening support from all public bodies will hit those in rural areas the hardest due to a decrease in services, in policing, in rural economic development and an increase in awful planning red tape stopping the creation of viable businesses and communities.

267. Cuts to transport and local services will have a negative impact.

268. Pressures from cuts in public spending will inevitably result in a loss of infrastructure and services. Many rural communities will not be geared up to generating local alternative provision and capacity building support/expertise is also likely to be thinner on the ground.

WELL-CONNECTED

Negative Comments

269. Lack of available funds mean that some projects especially road improvement which is much needed will not get done.

270. More investment in infrastructure and transport is needed to contribute to sustainability.

271. An ageing population and poor infrastructure can only lead to this direction

272. Probably need better infrastructure to become more sustainable but this is unaffordable.

273. With rising costs, reduction in rural infrastructure and further pressures on farming and agriculture into "Super-farms." Rural communities are becoming mothballed.

274. Limited public transport networks and the continued centralisation of facilities and employment into the larger towns mean that rural communities will be ever more reliant on private transport.

275. Increased costs of living in particular for transport will further disadvantage rural communities.

ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE

Positive Comments

276. Inevitable changes in fuel and energy costs will cause people to seek more sustainable solutions.

277. Many communities are now taking an interest in renewable energy as a way to save money and save the planet.

278. They will have to become more sustainable due to climate change issues.

279. Most of my villages are concerned about the environment and are taking steps to ensure the beauty and ambience of their very pretty villages. However we have had to bus children to the local comprehensive school as the road has been designated too dangerous for them to cross by bike.

280. The effect of climate change and oil prices may work to force communities to become more sustainable or they may destroy them making them fit for only the self satisfied and wealthy.

Negative Comments

281. Fuel costs are a major issue through reliance on private transport.

282. Oil prices can only rise; this will impact directly on communities AND individuals - only when individuals realise that their backs are against the wall will they act.

283. The current economic climate will see a reduction in the public services available to rural communities. There will also be a lack of understanding of the benefits that the quality environment can give to society this will lead to increased pressure for development or mineral extraction.

“ Growing realisation that prosperity and quality of life is not solely obtainable through economic success but social and environmental factors are as important - rural areas are better placed to deliver this triple bottom line that urban environments ”

284. People are just waking up to the environment problems and how serious they are.

THRIVING

Positive Comments

285. Experience shows that with increased austerity there is likely to be increased community led activity which if supported will result in greater sustainability for rural communities.

286. Growing realisation that prosperity and quality of life is not solely obtainable through economic success but social and environmental factors are as important - rural areas are better placed to deliver this triple bottom line that urban environments.

287. Rural people often tend to be entrepreneurial and may set up own business if made redundant eg gardening, van driving, e-business from home. They also are more inclined to be creative in order to remain in their community if circumstances change: downsize for example.

288. Government cuts to local government are a threat to rural communities, hence my response now. When we see the impact of the cuts it may be different. Local people can be more self sustainable...fuel, growing food etc.

Negative Comments

289. Worsening affordable housing provision against increasing demand / worsening economic factors under government's budget-deficit reduction measures / contraction of services (local and county authority services; roads; health; schools; police) for same

reason / increasing costs of transport, energy, etc.

290. Lack of public funding is likely to make it difficult to provide infrastructure and affordable housing. Given the closure of many rural pubs and shops and younger people moving away for jobs and affordable homes communities could well become less sustainable.

291. With the reduction in publicly financed organisations and their initiatives and an increase in unemployment, local businesses and services will find it increasingly difficult to remain viable when households have to make savings and therefore seek the perceived cheaper options (e.g. supermarket prices vs local shop prices).

292. CRC (over optimistically IMO) state that all but a tiny minority of under 25s will be forced to leave the countryside within 20 years (I'd suggest 10 years is more realistic in many areas). At that point villages lose shops, schools, sports clubs etc and change radically. Likewise, rural businesses come to rely upon workers commuting out from town and cease to have employment links with local communities.

293. Government cuts are likely to lead to higher unemployment and reductions in public services which will impact on rural communities where local employment is already hard to find and public transport access to services is minimal in many areas

294. Unless meaningful employment can be provided within rural communities, houses will increasingly be occupied as second homes or by those earning a living elsewhere, thus damaging the community integrity.

WELL DESIGNED AND BUILT

Positive Comments

295. Hopefully, notwithstanding the pressure on public finances, there will be more of a debate about the need for local affordable housing schemes in rural areas allowing local young people to remain in their communities sustaining village schools, facilities etc. Such an outcome may not deliver many new houses in a 12 month period, but wider understanding of such needs has to be positive to rural communities.

296. The Planning system encouraging development in sustainable locations.

Negative Comments

297. Lack of affordable housing, planning policy not ensuring local employment opportunities.

298. We are likely to be joined to our neighbouring market town, I believe that we will lose our identity as this region is becoming an urban sprawl with poor forethought and no infrastructure commitment.

299. Planning policy continues to restrict economic development leading to dormitory communities that are perpetuating a downward trend of sustainability.

300. Current planning policies prevent rural development and concentrate on urban communities.

301. Development is turning villages into commuter belts where integration into communities does not take place because no one has the time to join in anymore. Rural areas are being urbanised with the planning legislation with Parish Councils being unable to protect the essence of their villages.

302. Planners have restricted development so much that they have killed our village. We have produced a Survival Plan which you should see!

FAIR FOR EVERYONE

Positive Comments

303. The government focus on 'localism' / 'big society' is something which rural communities are already delivering-provided that they are provided with the appropriate support, they should be able to continue to deliver for themselves.

Negative Comments

304. It is hard to see what the future holds for rural communities at the moment due to the lack of certainty around the Big Society proposals.

305. Lack of public funding planned for affordable housing 2011-15 will lead to even less being provided.

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