

The aim of the Rapid Research Service is to provide a swift and incisive analysis of policy trends and developments, and to investigate their relevance to regeneration practitioners. We are able to follow on from this research to provide specific analysis on issues of concern to your organisation, as well as tailoring our research on national issues to examine the implications for your area. To discuss this further please contact one of the policy staff below.

Rapid Research 7 - Rural Renaissance: Ten challenges for creating sustainable and inclusive rural communities

CLES RAPID RESEARCH



Introduction

The recent focus on rural regeneration has been sparked by interest in housing affordability and growth, the debate around city regions and administrative changes to the funding and delivery of rural regeneration, as well as the creation of Natural England. In particular, these issues have accompanied a renewed interest in how to ensure lasting change in some of our more sparsely populated, deprived areas and how best to narrow the gap between the least well performing areas and the rest of the country. Indeed, it is the same agenda as has driven much urban policy making in recent years. Consequently, this Rapid Research looks to examine issues that are relevant to those communities and practitioners working in rural regeneration and offer thoughts and recommendations as to how rural regeneration policy should be focused in the future, in order to narrow the gap between the most deprived rural communities and the rest of the country. To do this it will:

- Review Government policy as regards rural regeneration
- Examine the nature of rural deprivation and inequality in rural communities
- Explore, through interviews with practitioners and a review of research, policy documents and literature the challenges for rural regeneration, the potential impact of emerging issues such as city regions and new arrangements for funding and delivery of regeneration in rural areas
- Examine case study examples of innovative and effective projects in rural areas
- Make recommendations as to how rural regeneration policy can be shaped and developed in the future.

The Development of Rural Regeneration Policy since 2000

Like wider Government regeneration policy, which has seen the introduction of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, rural policy makers have come to recognise the importance of reducing inequalities and ensuring greater access to

services in rural areas, particularly for the most vulnerable in society. These ideas were encapsulated in the Rural White Paper, its Review and also the Rural Strategy of 2004. Ideas about the separation of delivery and policy making for rural development, as identified by Haskins in his Review and as flagged by the Foot and Mouth crisis, were also taken forward and have resulted in the creation of Natural England, and a larger role for RDAs in rural development.

For the current Government and, in particular Defra, the overarching aim of rural policy is that it:

*“should have as its outcome genuinely sustainable development, that is development which integrates and balances environmental, social and economic considerations at every stage. It also means providing “a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come...including thriving economies and communities in rural areas and countryside for all to enjoy”.*¹

More recently, there has also been a focus on tackling social exclusion² with a particular aim of reducing the gap between the most deprived rural areas and least deprived. Indeed, the evidence for poor economic and social conditions in some rural areas is both compelling and measurable. Defra’s target is to achieve sustainable and long-term regeneration in these areas by 2008, with demonstrable progress by 2006.³ The Modernising Rural Delivery programme is the first stage in the Government’s implementation of Lord Haskins’ Rural Delivery Review, and a core part of the 2004 Rural Strategy. Central to it was the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, which established the new integrated agency, Natural England.

¹ For an overview of Defra’s rural strategy please see: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/strategy/overview.htm>

² Rural White Paper (2000)

³ Defra, Rural Affairs: www.defra.gov.uk/rural/default.htm

November 2000 - Rural White Paper: "Our Countryside, the Future: A fair deal for Rural England"

This was published just prior to the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease, and was the start of renewed thinking about the countryside and an emphasis on the social and economic development of our rural areas. It proposed, "10 ways we will make a difference" in rural areas, these were:

- Supporting vital rural village services
- Modernising rural services
- Providing affordable homes
- Delivering local transport solutions
- Thinking rural – rural proofing
- Rejuvenating market towns and creating a thriving local economy
- Setting a new direction for farming
- Preserving what makes rural England special
- Ensuring everyone can enjoy an accessible countryside
- Giving power to country towns and villages

It provided direct funding for services and economic development for rural areas, and signalled a move away from the focus, among policy makers, on agriculture and farming, it also targeted programmes on the development of local economies and services around rural hubs, for example, the Market Towns Initiative.

February 2001 - Foot and Mouth Disease

The economic loss of the Foot and Mouth crisis in rural areas was estimated to be between £2.2 billion and 2.5 billion. The Government set up the Business Recovery Fund and provided £51 million worth of assistance to rural businesses. It was administered by the Regional Development Agencies. However, the lion's share of government funding was allocated to farmers, who received approximately £1.34 billion in compensation. Illustrating once again the inherent bias in favour of agriculture. However, the huge economic losses highlighted the complexity of the linkages between different aspects of the rural economy that had, hitherto this point, been ignored or forgotten.

June 2001 - MAFF becomes Defra – with a focus on delivery

This was designed to bring all agriculture, rural affairs and environmental issues (including climate change and access) under one department in the hope that this would help to better co-ordinate the development and delivery of future initiatives. Subsequently, Government commissioned a number of actions to improve the focus and delivery of rural policy, including an independent review of rural delivery carried out by Lord Haskins (The Haskins Review); Steps to improve the rural evidence base; and a review of the Rural White Paper.

2003 - Haskins Review

The "Haskins report" into rural delivery recommended significant changes in the way in which rural services were delivered, including a drawing a clear distinction between, on the one hand, the development of strategy and policy, and on the other delivery, at a local level.

2004 - Review of the Rural White Paper

The CRC, which was established as an operating division of the Countryside Agency, on 1 April 2005. The Commission will act as a rural advocate, expert adviser and independent watchdog for rural communities, with a particular focus on rural disadvantage. This was designed to assess progress, refresh objectives, identify key challenges and look for ways to accelerate delivery.

2004 - The Rural Strategy

The Rural Strategy set out a raft of delivery reforms including: rationalising of funding programmes; streamlined and more targeted support for rural people; clearer division of responsibility for policy and delivery; enhanced accountability; better mainstreaming of rural socio-economic policy and delivery; more coherent and effective environmental outcomes.

April 2005 - Commission for Rural Communities (CRC)

The CRC was established as an operating division of the Countryside Agency, on 1st April 2005. The Commission will act as a rural advocate, expert advisor and independent watchdog for rural communities, with a particular focus on rural disadvantage.

October 2006 – Natural England Launched

Natural England was officially launched on 1st October 2006. Natural England and the Forestry Commission will now manage the delivery of funding aimed at enhancing the environment. The delivery functions of the Countryside Agency have been transferred to Defra and the RDAs, who will manage the delivery of funding aimed at supporting sustainable social and economic development in rural areas. It comprises all of English Nature, the landscape, access and recreation elements of the Countryside Agency, and the land management functions of the Rural Development Service.

Figure 1. UK Rural Regeneration Policy since 2000

The constituent bodies that have formed the new agency have been operating as a confederation of partners since 1 April 2005. Most significant to the policy surrounding rural communities, social exclusion, and indeed this research, is the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC).⁴ Since 2005, it has involved itself in a number of issues and policies as they impact upon rural communities, including digital technologies and broadband availability, housing and local government modernisation. It has also taken over publication of the State of the Countryside annual publication. For a more in-depth review of rural regeneration policy since 2000 please see the timeline on the previous page. (Figure 1)

The State of the Countryside 2006

The most recent edition of the yearly State of the Countryside Report⁵ sets out a broad baseline picture of the key social, economic and environmental conditions and change across rural England, including population movements and migration; housing supply; deprivation and poverty in rural areas; earnings, income and employment; business growth; land use and agriculture; and also the condition of the land and the environment, including biodiversity and rainfall. The purpose of the state of the countryside report is to increase understanding, generate debate and influence key decision makers to ensure appropriate rural proofing of policy relating to rural communities. It helps to highlight and evidence some of the key trends in rural England.

The Nature of Rural Deprivation

A number of key challenges, some of which are highlighted in the State of the Countryside Report, will be explained in more detail, along with the thoughts and comments of a number of practitioners and local authority officers, in order to understand the nature of deprivation and the challenges facing rural communities. These

challenges will encompass issues such as employment, funding and delivering regeneration and ensuring thriving rural economies, as well as the challenges for specific target groups. It will also highlight some of the innovative solutions from elsewhere across the country. The section below looks at each of the challenges in turn and highlights the viewpoints of the practitioners.

The first question asked to each of the interviewees was, which of a series of challenges they considered to be the most important in rural regeneration. Whilst many felt that rural regeneration was an area that needed to be looked at in a joined-up and integrated manner, others felt that there were particular issues that were of greater significance than others.

Challenge One - Rural economies, access to jobs, skills and enterprise and investment

Interviews revealed that practitioners felt that skills and employment is the key area of concern for rural regeneration practitioners. This appears to be in line with the problems faced by urban areas and the current issues with regard to economic restructuring and worklessness. Like urban areas, some rural localities have been extremely hard hit by industrial restructuring and the closure of large industrial installations, such as coal mines. This is particularly evident in areas such as County Durham and Yorkshire. With rural economies diversifying, people who used to work in heavy industry often do not have the necessary skills to access new employment opportunities.

- ***Rural economies***

Many rural areas are characterised by relative prosperity with higher income per head than the national average, in particular in the more accessible areas in and around cities and in commuter areas. However, this masks the disadvantaged minority living amidst prevailing affluence and further contributes to the myth that the rural areas are not disadvantaged. Nevertheless, in 2006 there were 900,000 households in rural England that had an income of less than 60% of the English median, and were therefore classified as living in poverty. Between 2004 and 2006 there was also an

⁴ The Commission for Rural Communities: <http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/>

⁵ The Commission for Rural Communities (2006), The State of the Countryside Report 2006, Weatherby: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/crc22stateofthecountryside2006

increase in the proportion of rural households with low incomes, from 26% to 30%. There are of course other patterns also visible; incomes are higher in small rural settlements than in towns and urban areas, but in general higher in the less sparse settlements as whole. That said, the gap in wages paid in the most rural areas compared to the most urban areas is now around £130 per week.⁶ The practitioners we spoke to felt that the low wages offered in rural areas were a significant challenge as these jobs often provide few opportunities for advancement, and restrict the aspirations of young people. It was particularly felt that jobs in agriculture, and increasingly in small-scale manufacturing and service industries, were paid too low.

- **Access to jobs**

Alongside low wages was the prevalence of low or un-skilled and seasonal jobs offer limited opportunities for employees in rural areas and make it difficult to maintain year round employment and subsequently, a year round population base. Though agriculture is still at the core of the rural economy and society, employment in agriculture has decreased by 30% (151,000) in the last 20 years; employees in rural businesses are now more likely to be in manufacturing (25%), tourism (9%) or retailing (7%), than in agriculture (6%).⁷ In addition, wholesale and retail; agriculture and forestry; and construction and manufacturing make up a significant number of rural businesses.⁸ All of which indicates that rural areas also have diverse economies, which vary from place to place. However there a number of rural areas 'lagging' behind the rest of the country as a result of structural decline which further compounds economic weaknesses and social deprivation. Whilst there are less people in rural areas who have no qualifications - 25% of the population, compared to 29% in urban areas - access to employment is not necessarily high and there remain problems in this regard.

⁶ State of the Countryside Report 2006

⁷ Defra, Rural strategy:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/strategy/overview.htm>

⁸ State of the Countryside Report 2006

- **Skills**

It was also felt that there was an employment-skills mismatch, which is a significant reason why people don't migrate to rural areas, and why young people don't return after graduating. Jobs often fail to take account of higher-level skills and ambitions, resulting in a mis-match between the skills of young people and the jobs on offer in rural areas. This is illustrated by the reasons behind hard to fill vacancies in rural areas. Whilst rural businesses have fewer hard-to-fill vacancies than in urban areas, more (6%) are put down to insufficient numbers of interested people than in urban areas, and a further 16% of people said that they thought a company's remote location or poor public transport links also contributed to recruitment difficulties. However, the high number of non-UK migrants, which has grown substantially in rural areas in the last two years, is regarded as one possible way to solve some of the issues surrounding a limited workforce.

- **Enterprise and investment**

The perceived lack of unemployment in rural areas, resulting from the high numbers employed in poor quality jobs and a poor evidence base, means that large investors are not attracted to rural locations. This difficulty is further compounded by the poor transport links and infrastructure that may also be required by large businesses. However, there is also more self-employment, part time and home working in rural England than in urban areas.⁹

Challenge Two - Transport

Transport and accessibility were the second most pressing issues for the local authority personnel that we spoke to, a view that is supported by evidence from the State of the Countryside Report. Half a million (14%) rural households do not have a car and many people in households with a car do not have access to it when they need to travel, for example one-car households. On average rural households also spend £13.70 more each month on public transport than urban households, and only 51% of people living in rural settlements live within walking distance of a bus stop with regular daily services. Transport was seen as a key issue

⁹ State of the Countryside Report 2006

in rural regeneration, primarily in accessibility and connectivity terms, with many people in rural areas living some distance from their places of work, vital services, and leisure opportunities. As such, transport was seen as a pre-cursor to social inclusion.

In addition, people without private transport, particularly the elderly, are often excluded in rural areas, which has a knock-on effect on their everyday life activities. A lack of transport also often means that people are unable to access jobs and training and interact with people from outside of their own communities. It also has implications for health and well-being. Thus, linking transport to challenges surrounding skills and employment, as well as to a range of other deprivation related issues such as healthcare and education. Indeed, increased overall mobility, brought about by increased car use/ownership, threatens the future of local shops and other outlets and further increases the isolation of those who do not have a car by reducing the customer base for public transport and local amenities. Community transport can however play a significant role in reducing the isolation of rural communities.

It must also be mentioned, despite our respondents not identifying this as the most important issue affecting rural communities, that a lack of roads and railways, or inadequate transport infrastructure is also a significant issue as regards addressing the increasing isolation of some rural areas and the provision of transport solutions. It also goes some way to explaining the failure, by large companies, to invest in rural areas.

Challenge Three - Population and Housing Pressures

Between 1991 and 2002, 60,000 people per year migrated into wholly or predominantly rural districts. This migration was even more significant in 2003 – 2004 where in most districts; with over 50% of their population in rural areas, net inward migration totalled 105,000 people. In addition many rural areas have an ageing population; the number of people aged 65 or over in wholly or predominantly rural districts increased by 161,000 (12%) between 1991 and 2002, whilst the number aged 16-29 decreased by

237,000 (18%)¹⁰. This reflects the net movement to rural areas of households with children and of older households. Whilst the migration out of younger age groups reflects a movement away to access further and higher education and initial employment opportunities¹¹, a lack of affordable housing contributes to the failure of these groups to return to rural areas. Nonetheless, rural areas remain a rich resource, valued by both residents and visitors for their landscapes, biodiversity and open space; these contribute to enjoyment and general well-being as well as to education and health. However, this too contributes to pressures on the housing market, including increases in prices and a decrease in the availability of affordable housing in rural areas.

In 2005, as a result of these clear pressures on the rural housing market, the Government set up the Affordable Rural Housing Commission, which reported in May 2006. The ARHC found that restriction on supply, together with the limited availability of suitable sites for development and the pressure from people wanting to move to the countryside have all contributed to house prices which have risen faster, and to higher levels, in rural areas than in the towns. In addition, social housing is seriously lacking in rural areas – only 5% of houses in villages are social housing compared to a national average of 23%. As regards affordability¹² of rural housing, the State of the Countryside report also identified the South West as the least affordable area, with hotspots also found in Northumberland, Cumbria, Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Herefordshire. A number of our respondents felt that increases in second home ownership in rural areas were contributing significantly to the lack of affordable housing and wider rural disadvantage. The practitioners we spoke to also felt that insufficient levels of social housing and a lack of emphasis on building new properties, along with housing stock which is often not the right size, tenure or price for disadvantaged rural communities

¹⁰ Defra, Rural strategy: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/strategy/overview.htm>

¹¹ State of the Countryside Report 2006

¹² The method for working out affordability is described here: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/data/uploads/SoTC06_C_H3.pdf

and a lack of properties available for rent, further restricting the housing choices of rural populations. As such the ARHC recommended that in order to address the problem of a lack of housing, in particular affordable housing, in rural areas that central and local government should:

- Facilitate the building of between 11,000 and 22,000 new rural dwellings, over coming years.
- Ensure the delivery of rural housing is part of the mainstream planning system, with local need met predominantly through local planning documents.
- Encourage the involvement of private sector landowners and not-for-profit organisations such as Community Land Trusts in rural housing and house building.
- Identify ways in which some previously-used agricultural buildings could be re-classified as Brownfield land as this could then be reused.
- Extend national partnership working between public bodies to speed up the release of public land.
- Reaffirm commitment to ensuring that a proportion of affordable housing in rural areas remains for rent¹³

In response to this commission, and the need to address this pressing issue, the CRC also set about examining the challenges of rural housing. Their report gathered together the views and opinions of people living in rural England about rural housing. The report, *Rural Housing - A place in the countryside*, used discussions with people living in rural areas to identify the issues as regards housing and how this affects rural communities. In particular, the challenges that were picked out were the rising cost of housing; high rents; and limited availability of social housing stock. As such, the report makes three core recommendations:

- A long-term, holistic approach should be adopted to better bring together existing

policy covering planning, housing, financial exclusion and fiscal policy to make a difference in rural locations.

- Central government should take a lead on the issue in order to support action at the local and regional level.
- Central and local government should adopt proper rural proofing of existing mechanisms and policies to meet rural needs.¹⁴

Our respondents also felt that local authority planning guidance and wider central government policy restricts the development of new and affordable housing in rural areas and that it should be amended to promote growth in affordable housing in rural areas. Practitioners also viewed housing as an issue that complemented many other issues in rural regeneration, with the availability and affordability of rural housing, particularly for disadvantaged and hard to reach groups, as having knock on consequences on lifestyle patterns relating to employment, skills and transport.

Challenge Four - Active citizenship & community engagement in rural areas

Strong social capital and social networks can generate value for both individuals and communities alike, and whilst many practitioners focused on the issues of housing and employment, others linked these to the need to encourage active citizenship and community involvement.

A key indicator of social capital is the extent to which people take part in formal or informal voluntary activity. Voluntary activity is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, and like urban areas there is a trend in rural areas of a shift from formal to informal volunteering. People living in rural areas are also more likely to become engaged in the range of social and political activities, 25% of people in rural areas would write a letter to their MP, compared to just 15% in urban areas. And 34% of rural people compared to 23% of urban residents have helped on fundraising drives. The Church of England also plays a much larger role in smaller rural communities than in larger towns and urban areas. Some have suggested that this

¹³Commission for Rural Communities (2006), Rural Housing - A place in the countryside, Countryside Agency Publications, Cheltenham:
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/pdfs/housing/commission/affordable-housing.pdf>

¹⁴ Rural Housing - A place in the countryside

underpins and supports some strong rural communities. Social activity in rural areas is also more likely to be undertaken by older, more educated and more affluent people possibly resulting in the marginalisation of younger people and other minority groups, such as migrant workers; BME communities; and also lesbian, gay and bisexual groups, thereby possibly marginalising those who are already excluded.¹⁵ Rural communities also face distinctive issues as regard engaging with regeneration partnerships. Aside from geography, there are a number of other barriers that make it difficult for rural communities to be engaged in rural regeneration partnerships, including:

- Transport
- Communication
- Low population densities
- Pressure to be involved in paid work

Strong local identities also inhibit involvement in partnerships across a wider rural area.

Practitioners also felt that a further strain on the development of the voluntary and community sector in rural areas, is the lack of capacity building and infrastructure bodies, as well as funding to support community engagement and voluntary activity. Many of the most deprived urban areas receive funding through the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) to set up Community Empowerment Networks (CENs). However, because of the more sparsely populated nature of some rural areas, either pockets of deprivation are masked by the relative prosperity of an area or they are not deemed to be sufficiently deprived by the Index of Multiple Deprivation¹⁶ (IMD) and therefore do not receive NSNR funding and associated support to set up and sustain infrastructure bodies. This means that many rural voluntary organisations and CENs are left without, or with only limited access to, funding and grant opportunities.

¹⁵ State of the Countryside Report 2006

¹⁶ Only the 86 most deprived areas in England receive funding from the NSNR. For more information on this see: www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

Challenge five - Health and healthcare

Whilst our respondents did not identify health and health inequalities in rural areas as key areas of concern there is also significant evidence to suggest that these are challenges for the future of regeneration. Concentrations of people with limiting long-term illnesses are significant in rural areas, with the proportion of the population in this category reaching almost 20% in sparsely populated areas. The demand for mental health services is also high in rural areas.¹⁷ Indeed, levels of suicides in rural areas are almost 50% higher than urban areas, with the rate per thousand males aged 16-24 in rural areas being 12.69 compared to 8.49 in urban areas.¹⁸ The ageing of the population in rural areas, with the consequential demands this places on public and community services that support the elderly is also problematic in some cases. Access to GPs, dentists and also out patient care, such as radiotherapy is also more problematic in many rural areas, particularly for those without access to a private transport.

Challenge Six - Environmental sustainability

With increasing demands on the environment, from agriculture, industry, tourism and domestic usage there is an increasing need to take action to prevent damage and to improve the quality of our natural resources that support rural and urban communities. However, for our respondents, this was also not considered to be a priority issue for rural areas. Nonetheless there is significant evidence from the literature and also policy documents to suggest that this is particularly important in rural communities that are dependant on the rural environment for attracting visitors and to support the local economy. There needs to be greater recognition of the contribution (including economic contribution) of the countryside to rural sustainability and quality of life. Therefore there needs to be a focus on the importance of linking improved land and resource management, with the economy as a whole and with providing access for all – for recreation, health and education. In

¹⁷ State of the Countryside Report 2006

¹⁸ State of the Countryside Report 2006

considering the role of the environment in rural communities, however, it is important to consider that environmental change does not just happen as a result of development but also as a result of changes in forestry and farming; to provide alternative energy supplies, e.g. wind turbines; and by political decision making such as the designation of national park status.

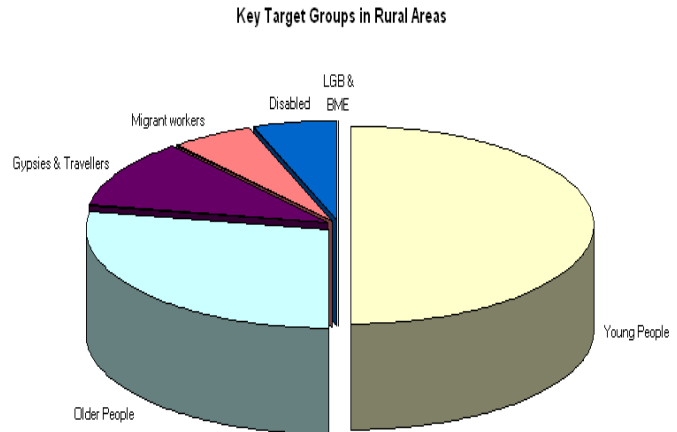
For the most part, gradual rather than dramatic changes, are characteristic of environmental change. However, the rate of the change still means that Government targets, particularly as regards biodiversity, will be difficult to meet¹⁹ and that there is only a small chance of keeping greenhouse gases below dangerous levels. Some of the most significant changes are associated with climate change which is already starting to, and likely to continue to result in changes to our landscape and the broad pattern of animal, plant and human life. Volatile weather patterns, including decreased rainfall, higher than average temperatures and flash floods have also characterised the recent past.²⁰ Whilst much of this appears to happen at a global scale it is likely to have significant impact on our rural communities. The importance of the natural environment to the economies of many rural communities, as regards encouraging visitors, tourists, residents and businesses means that effective strategies need to be in place to manage and sustain a high quality environment to ensure the wider sustainable development of these areas. Environmental change is not however, just something that is happening to rural communities. Like urban communities, rural populations contribute to the changes that are happening through agricultural practices, energy consumption and car use, amongst others.

Challenge seven: Inclusive and cohesive communities

We also asked rural regeneration practitioners whether particular groups within rural communities should be the focus of targeted interventions, such as BME communities; disabled people, young people; older people; lesbian, gay and

bisexual communities; migrant workers, gypsies and travellers. Each of the respondents was asked which of these groups they felt should be the focus of any specific interventions. Figure 2 highlights this.

Figure 2



As can be seen from the figure above, young people are the key target group for the rural regeneration practitioners that we surveyed. Even with increasing levels of accession migration and BME migration to rural areas, very few practitioners felt that these groups were key target groups. Indeed, as the State of the Countryside report has highlighted

“At present ethnic minorities are concentrated in the cities, while the countryside is overwhelmingly white. Over the next 20 years this will begin to change. Rural labour shortages will attract people with skills, whatever their ethnic origin. Doctors, teachers, hotel staff and many others will increasingly come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.”²¹

We also asked practitioners whether there were any specific issues facing individual groups. The following section looks at each of the groups in turn, and identifies key issues.

¹⁹ State of the Countryside Report 2006

²⁰ State of the Countryside Report 2006

²¹ The Countryside Agency (2000), State of the Countryside Report 2000, Weatherby

□ **Group One – BME Communities**

Most practitioners felt that the proportion of people from BME communities in their area are so small as to not warrant any specific interventions from the local authority. However, as illustrated above, there is likely to be an increasing number of BME groups migrating into rural areas. However, a lack of specific actions and interventions, isolation and provision of poor services not designed to meet the needs of rural BME communities may result in divided communities and / or lead to racial tensions within the wider population. For example, as many as one in 12 people, from BME communities in Northumberland have experienced racial abuse. All of which poses a challenge for social cohesion.²²

□ **Group Two – Young People**

When asked about the key issues facing young people, the practitioners identified a host of related themes:

- *Aspiration* – It was felt that young people in rural areas are faced with poor opportunities for advancement in many aspects of their life. Few people are able to act as role models for these young people and this can leave them feeling disillusioned and uninspired.
- *Retention* – This is linked to aspirations and opportunity. Rural practitioners notes that few areas are able to retain gifted young people, who often move away to urban areas in search of a more promising lifestyle, including enhanced educational and employment opportunities. This is also linked to housing and employment issues.
- *Skills* – Whilst there are often many chances for young people to gain valuable skills in rural areas, it is often the case that the employment opportunities do not match with skills, resulting in a further outward migration of talented young people.
- *Support and Anti-Social Behaviour* – Few support networks are available to

young people in rural areas, which often leads to negative perceptions of young people, but also negative activities such as anti-social behaviour.

- *Jobs* – As identified earlier, there are few skilled and well-paid jobs in rural areas, in particular for young people leaving school or college, or for those returning to rural areas after university.
- *Housing* – As identified earlier, affordability and access to housing is a key factor in retaining young people in the countryside.
- *Entertainment* – There are few leisure facilities for young people in rural areas, meaning that they often have to travel great distances in order to socialize with people of their own age. This has cost implications for their families.

□ **Group Three – Older People**

The increasing size of the rural elderly population and also the deteriorating mobility of much of this population, which impairs their ability to access vital services, such as healthcare, post offices and banks. In rural areas, accessibility is already a major problem, but when this is coupled with a constrained mobility and a reduction in local health facilities and other services, it can result in severe social isolation.

□ **Group Four – Migrant Workers, Gypsies and Travellers**

Most of those surveyed agreed that as regards social cohesion, gypsies and travellers do not present a significant challenge. There were, however, some concerns that increases in the number of travellers during festivals and simultaneously, an increase in reports of crime by permanent populations, will lead to greater animosity towards the location of traveller sites in rural communities. An increase in migrant worker populations, particularly from the EU accession states, has resulted in both challenges and opportunities. Where there are significant populations of migrant workers, their presence has facilitated the sustainability of local services, economies and in many cases filled much-needed roles in the local labour market. However, there are varying support needs associated with

²² Commission for Rural Communities (2006), Rural Disadvantage: Our first thematic study, Countryside Agency Publications, Wetherby:
<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/article.asp?PID=1&aid=41>

these communities that local authorities and other practitioners are increasingly being expected to meet, including the provision of health and education services.

Challenge Eight: Measuring poverty and deprivation

We also asked rural regeneration practitioners questions regarding policy making for rural communities, currently and in the coming years – in particular whether they felt the IMD was an effective measure of deprivation in rural areas?

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 (IMD 2004) is a measure of multiple deprivations at the small area level. The model, which underpins the IMD 2004, is based on the idea of distinct dimensions of deprivation that can be recognised and measured separately. People may be counted in one or more of the domains, depending on the number of types of deprivation that they experience. The overall IMD is then conceptualised as a combination of these specific dimensions of deprivation. The IMD 2004 contains seven Domains of deprivation:

- Income deprivation,
- Employment deprivation,
- Health deprivation and disability,
- Education, skills and training deprivation,
- Barriers to Housing and Services,
- Living environment deprivation and Crime.²³

However, owing to the focus on Super Output Areas, there is some thought that IMD classifications overlook the small concentrations of deprivation in larger more affluent communities. As a result policy makers and delivery agencies sometimes also overlook these communities.

Indeed, the majority of the rural regeneration practitioners, we spoke to, thought the IMD was an ineffective measure of rural deprivation. This was for a number of key reasons:

- Many rural areas have large affluent populations, made up from retirees and city commuters. However, this masks pockets of extreme deprivation.
- The way in which the IMD is measured means that there are often difficulties identifying specific pockets of deprivation. This is because the IMD relies on a certain density of population in order to identify deprived areas. Rural communities may only have a small number of deprived people, but they could live in greater deprivation than those in urban areas. As such the IMD is often viewed as being geared towards urban areas.
- The IMD is also predominantly based on geography, and therefore, hides many other thematic issues.

One local authority has however, been working on a re-calculation of the measurement of deprivation in rural areas in order to focus their activities and resources more efficiently and effectively. This approach has received recognition and endorsement from the Government Office for their region.

Challenge Nine: Structural changes in the delivery of rural regeneration

Whilst, many of the regeneration practitioners we spoke to felt that the formation of Natural England was good, it was interesting to note that nearly an equal number did not actually know what Natural England was, or have an opinion on its formation. Of those who did agree with its formation, many felt that it had the potential to effectively join-up rural regeneration activity, in particular through further development of the rural delivery pathfinders²⁴.

What is also not clear however, from the change in structure and responsibilities that resulted in the formation of Natural England and the changing delivery role, is what this means for funding and delivering future rural regeneration. Indeed, the overwhelming

²³ For more information please see: www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1128444#P18_329

²⁴ For more information please see: www.defra.gov.uk/rural/ruraldelivery/pathfinders/default.htm

response was that regeneration practitioners were not sure what the move to RDAs would actually mean for funding in their locality. There were a number of concerns:

- A blanket approach may mean that funding would not be effectively targeted at the areas and projects in most need.
- Those areas that are not deeply rural but are on the fringes of city-regions may be overlooked as regards rural delivery.
- Due to the abstract and 'remote' perception surrounding RDAs, some local communities may find it hard to identify with the RDA as the body responsible for the funding and delivery of rural regeneration.
- RDAs might not have sufficient understanding or experience of the issues relating to rural communities.
- Defra may become too distanced from the issues at the very local level to be able to effectively coordinate policy at the national level.

In addition, the Rural Strategy recommended that the numerous funding schemes for rural development should be reduced from 100 to just 3 major funding programmes, in order to focus in more detail on the economic development of rural communities:

- Rural Regeneration
- Agriculture
- Natural Resource Protection

The strategy also recommended that £21 million of additional socio-economic funding previously disbursed by the Countryside Agency should be devolved to the RDA's single pot fund. This is an important change in terms of monitoring. It may mean that projects funded through the single pot will need to be more focused on economic outputs/outcomes, for example, number of jobs and number of training places, rather than the more flexible and socially orientated outcomes which have been used by the Countryside Agency. That is not to say that all rural funding will be administered through single pot, funds such as Leader Plus will remain separate, but may still become more economically focused.

Indeed, of the respondents who were unsure that the RDAs were the right body for funding for rural regeneration, many felt that the county level would be the best place for the funding to reside. For example, one of the district councils in Cumbria felt that Cumbria was marginalised from funding in the North West by the two more dominant cities of Liverpool and Manchester and thus a county-based scheme would be better. However, there is also the possibility that this type of arrangement may cause problems in other two-tier local authorities.

However, the RDAs may prove to be more effective at connecting up rural regeneration across districts, counties and city regions as well as linking into the national agenda, for example with the Rural Delivery Pathfinders, that are currently being piloted in eight areas across the UK.²⁵

Challenge Ten: City Regions

Rural areas are dynamic and rural society is rapidly changing in ways that are reshaping communities and blurring urban / rural distinctions. This is particularly important in light of recent interest in city regions, and those who govern them. City regions could potentially mean new systems of governance and accountability for these areas, and a greater focus on the sub region than is currently the case. They could also draw rural communities towards their urban neighbours. For some rural communities, particularly the most excluded, new systems of governance may result in significant benefits including:

- More community focused outcomes;
- An administration large enough to ensure effective policymaking, yet small enough to understand the specific needs of its communities and thus support more effectively the rural poor;
- Rural populations could be connected to economic opportunities across the city region;

²⁵ For more information please see: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/ruraldelivery/pathfinders/default.htm>

- Improved accountability leading to better rural proofing of services;
- The recognition that improved competitiveness relies on a much wider area than just the urban core but also a movement away from agriculture as the core driver of the rural economy; and
- Experience of urban enterprise development and the development of community and social enterprise could contribute to rural regeneration and social inclusion, as well as facilitate better service delivery.

Arguably, where city regions could have the greatest impact is in those rural communities that are on the periphery of outlying towns and cities, doubly removed from the urban core as it were. Through city regional governance these areas could be brought into the city regions, linked to other areas across the region, and outwith its boundaries and address the needs of the socially excluded more effectively and appropriately. That said, there are concerns that the city regions agenda, will cause sub regional partnerships to overlook rural areas, and particularly the deprived communities in these areas, as well as to overlook the economic contribution of rural areas to the city regional economy, thereby further isolating already geographically peripheral areas.

Respondents to the survey were asked whether this agenda would be wholly welcomed in their rural communities and whether it would be able to link into their regeneration programmes. The results varied almost equally across the board. Many agreed that rural communities need to have a strong local voice and that any competition for funding that the city regions might entail, would allow their voices to grow stronger. The only issue was that whether this strengthened voice would be heard and whether the major cities would skew the funding available. Another major concern was the focus on meeting targets in order to access funding. Many rural authorities noted that with smaller, sparser populations it is difficult to meet strict targets, and thus funding could be removed on that basis.

Having examined the nature of rural deprivation and considered some of the views of those practitioners working in this area, the following section will look at real life examples of projects and programmes working to reduce deprivation and create sustainable and inclusive rural communities.

Making a real difference in the countryside: Case studies

The following case studies seek to highlight some of the innovative approaches to rural regeneration that are taking place around England, including new approaches to reviving local economies; connecting rural populations through transport and the internet; and also ways of identifying common challenges across rural areas and connecting regeneration at the local, regional and national levels.

Rural Community Transport Partnerships

The Devon Rural Transport Partnership (DRTP) was launched in 1999 to investigate and address rural transport issues in Devon. The Partnership is made up of over 30 voluntary, community and statutory agencies that all have an interest in improving access to services within the county.

Support is given to existing voluntary and community transport groups and to local communities wanting to address the transport needs in their area. This can include advice on applying for funding and with setting up new transport projects. The partnership also works at the strategic level to raise the profile of transport issues, encouraging organisations to think about transport and access issues when planning new services. It thereby meets the needs of rural transport users who might otherwise not be able access services, pursue leisure activities or be economically active.

Cybermoor - Alston, Cumbria (www.cybermoor.org)

This former mining village has been transformed thanks to the innovative way that European funding has been spent. Extremely inaccessible and suffering from a declining economy, this remote village in Cumbria faced significant social and economic challenges, but funding has allowed the town to devise successful projects for building strong community spirit, keeping young people interested in the area, and attracting others.

Alston Moor Partnership is a group of local organisations formed to develop projects that will ensure the sustainability of Alston. The Partnership was originally formed in June 2001 as a result of being allocated £170,000 of European funding to deliver a range of employment related initiatives. Since then the partnership, assisted by Alston Moor Parish Council and Eden District Council, has worked on a number of projects. Most recently, a 'Community Chest' fund has been established to enable small projects to access funding for feasibility studies, test marketing and piloting of ideas.

Alston Moor Partnership is keen to make sure that it offers the opportunity for all individuals and organisations with an interest in the future of Alston to participate in activities. In addition to the wider partnership that meets quarterly, there are a number of working groups that have been established to develop ideas and projects.

The Lancashire Rural Pathfinder

Lancashire was chosen as one of the eight pilot Rural Delivery Pathfinders. The national pathfinder programme sought to develop a model to ensure consistent and robust rural proofing of service delivery to identify and test the adaptability of rural programmes to address local needs and opportunities, exploring how customers engage with rural support mechanisms and test ways of simplifying access for all. The national pathfinder programme runs from 2005 to 2007.

In Lancashire, the pathfinder intend to address these aims by focusing on a set of core themes relevant to communities and policy makers in Lancashire:

- Access to services
- Enterprise
- Environment
- Diversity of housing stock
- Transport

Amongst other things the pathfinder has so far completed a fresh analysis of the NW rural evidence base that takes account of the new rural/urban definition. Linked to this it has also identified the six core themes, as noted above, and agreed a programme of work to flesh out understanding of these priorities and the interventions needed. However, there a number of challenges which must be overcome to ensure the development of the Rural Delivery Pathfinder in Lancashire, including:

- Identifying how the regional priorities will be used to guide future national level interventions and funding, including for Natural England and the Commission for Rural Communities.
- Overcoming the lack of objective evidence to allow robust targeting of interventions and support at the sub-regional level.
- The difficulties in reconciling environmental and economic/social information across administrative boundaries and the new rural/urban definition.
- Capacity of partners to deliver the changes envisaged, both physical capacity and the freedom.
- The development of the new European programmes post 2006.
- Deciding upon and identifying the synergies both between the regions and also at the regional and at the national level.

Keswick Business Improvement District (www.keswick.org/bids.asp)

As part of its Market Towns Initiative (MTI), the rural town of Keswick, in Allerdale chose to adopt a Business Improvement District (BID) model, and subsequently became the first rural BID in the country, following a 'yes vote' in the ballot of the business community, held in September 2005.

Business people came forward and a company limited by guarantee was incorporated in April 2006 to deliver the business plan on which the vote was held. Keswick Business Improvement District Limited was established with 15 Directors, who represented a cross section of the business community within the town. Every business rate payer of £2,900 or more, within the boundary of Keswick are members of the BID and are required by legislation to pay a 1% levy based on their business rateable value. The levy is collected by the local authority as the collection agency on behalf of the BID Company. The BID Company and the Directors are responsible for the effective delivery of the projects within the Keswick BID Business Plan.

A reference group of business people was created to steer the pilot stage leading up to the ballot and this temporary group made decisions on the geographical area of the BID, the levy amount and acted as a reference point whilst the business plan was being written.

The projects detailed within the 5-year business plan are a result of consultation with the businesses in the Keswick BID area, and any ideas that they put forward. In total, over 60 individual project ideas were originally identified by business people in Keswick, these had to be reduced to reflect what was achievable and possible within the 5 year period. Businesses were asked to rank the projects in order of importance and then a final list was drawn up based on the ranking, the budget and additional funding available. Voluntary membership is encouraged and any business under the £2,900 rateable value or any property owner may also become a member of the Business Improvement District by paying a voluntary contribution.

Conclusion and CLES Recommendations

Having examined some of the key challenges as regard rural deprivation, and spoken to a number of practitioners CLES has produced the following recommendations for local authorities, RDAs and other practitioners that are working with rural communities to reduce deprivation and inequality to ensure the sustainability of rural communities and their economies.

Challenge 1 – Supporting strong and sustainable rural economies

Recommendation – Recognise that encouraging enterprise in rural areas, particularly those most affected by economic restructuring, is a long term task and will involve innovative solutions as is illustrated by programmes such as MTI and BIDs, as well as more individualised support mechanisms, such as those included in LEGI. It is also important to increase the job offer in rural areas by attracting companies and employers with higher skilled and less

seasonal employment opportunities, into the area.

Challenge 2 – Effective, accessible and efficient rural transport

Recommendation - Recognise the role of effective connectivity through transport within and between rural areas and less sparsely populated areas. Support innovative solutions to rural transport, ensure need is correctly and sufficiently evidenced and promote the role it can play in overcoming social exclusion, through schemes such as rural community transport partnerships and the Rural Bus Challenge.

Challenge 3 – Ensuring an adequate supply of affordable rural housing

Recommendation – Create affordable housing, bringing with it new residents including young people and families who will help to sustain economies and amenities, thereby also stimulating the job market, enterprise and employment opportunities in rural areas.

Challenge 4 – Supporting an active voluntary sector to contribute to rural renaissance

Recommendation – Recognise the high levels of voluntary activity in rural areas and work with local organisations and infrastructure bodies to enhance support networks, improve access to funding and advice and develop the coordination of voluntary organisations and activities in rural areas. Use this to assist rural regeneration and alleviate poverty and inequality in rural communities.

Challenge 5 – Ensuring healthy communities

Recommendation – Recognise that health inequalities also exist in rural areas, and that these are often compounded by a lack of transport, services and social networks. Work to overcome these by ensuring that health care and also well-being services reach those geographically and socially excluded in rural areas.

Challenge 6 – Delivering a sustainable natural environment

Recommendation – Recognise the importance of the natural environment to the economies of many rural areas and in promoting these areas, ensure that effective strategies are in place to manage and sustain a high quality environment to ensure the long term attraction of visitors, tourists and residents to these areas. Thereby ensuring the sustainable development of these areas.

Challenge 7 – Support and service the needs of communities of interest

Recommendation – Local authorities need to be aware that as BME, disabled, elderly and LGB populations in rural areas increase, so to will local authorities need to tailor their services and interventions to meet their distinct needs, and ensure cohesive and inclusive communities. It is also important to recognise both the advantages, as well as the support needs that migrant worker communities may bring to rural areas.

Challenge 8 – Measuring poverty and deprivation

Recommendation – Build an evidence base around rural deprivation to ensure policy makers better understand the nature

of rural deprivation and how it can be addressed.

Challenge 9 – Administrative changes

Recommendation – RDAs and local authorities should work together to develop new partnerships that recognise local challenges and the voices of rural communities, ensuring funding and delivery of regeneration programmes respect this. For example, this could happen through the further development of Rural Delivery Pathfinders.

Challenge 10 – Involving rural areas in city regional governance

Recommendation – Ensure that any development of city regions truly reflects and includes rural areas, recognising the impact of the rural economy on the city region and the distinct but valuable nature of rural communities as a whole.

Useful References

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6. Centre for Local Economic Strategies (2005) *Local Work: Findings No. 69: What now for rural regeneration?*, CLES, Manchester.

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If you are a local authority seeking to develop strategies for sustainable rural communities, CLES or CLES Consulting can provide advice and assist in developing your frameworks and strategies. For further information on our policy advice services please contact Nicola Carroll on 0161 236 7036. CLES can provide policy advice to authorities and organisations on all aspects of regeneration, local governance and economic development policy.