THE PRINCE'S COUNTRYSIDE FUND

Recharging Rural

Creating sustainable communities to 2030 and beyond

July 2018

SRUC

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Extra

Recharging Rural

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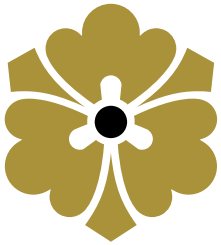

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Contents

Acknowledgements 6
Executive Summary 7
Introduction 15
Project Aim 15
Approach to the research 15
Theme 1
What is the experience of "remote rural"? 17
What is "remote rural"? 17
How do people experience "very remote" rural? 20
Concluding comment: multi-layered rural remoteness 22
Theme 2
What changes have people seen over the past 10 years in "remote rural" communities? 23
Housing pressures and availability 23
Roads and travel 24
Digital (including Energy) 24
Business changes 24
Service reduction and centralisation 24
Community empowerment and activity 25
Community breakdown and isolation 25
Theme 3
What are the barriers now, and future challenges, facing "remote" rural communities? 26
Barriers for rural UK right now? 26
Challenges facing remote rural communities to 2030? 27
Theme 4
Are remote rural communities valued by the general public? 29
Yes, remote rural communities are valued by the general public 29
It is possible to see remote rural communities as both valued and not valued 30
No, remote rural communities are not valued by the general public 31
Theme 5
How are these problems being tackled? 33
Young people 33
Inclusive community-level approaches 35
Government, Councils and communities connecting and working together 36
Sustainable collaboration within community 37
Integrated thinking 38
Action and campaign 38
Effective, inclusive communication 39
Community centres or hubs 39
Funding 40
Businesses 40
Rural Policy focus 41
Theme 6
Successful community-led projects that aim to remove barriers in remote rural communities 42
Community centres 43
Inclusion and overcoming isolation 44
Mental wellbeing 46
Elderly 47
Community transport 47
Arts projects 48
Broadband 49
Community-based website projects 50
Employment, training and skills 50
Food 51
Energy-focused 52
Environmental priorities 52
Housing 52
Community land ownership 53
Theme 7
How are new technologies being harnessed to address the challenges of "remote rural" living and working? 54
Broadband and mobile infrastructure must exist 54
Websites and social media 55
"Smart" rural transport 55
Energy and Renewables 56
Increasing technical skills 56
"Bright future of digital possibilities" in remote rural UK 57
Connecting or isolating people? 58
Theme 8
Sustainable remote rural communities: changes, resources and recommendations? 59
What must change? 59
What resources are required to address the challenges of "remote rural"? 60
What resources are required to address challenges in "very remote" rural communities? 61
Respondents' overall recommendations 63
Funding and investment 63
Digital infrastructure 64
Transport 64
Affordable housing 65
Services and community hubs 65
Energy 66
Listen, Understand and Respect – then lead on Action and Policies 66
Respect community and build capacity 68
How do these findings chime with the body of evidence? **71**
What does the literature tell us? 72
Community resilience and the #HaveYourSay survey responses? 72
Concluding comment 73
Report Recommendations 74
1) Recommendations for The Prince's Countryside Fund 74
2) Recommendations for rural stakeholder 74
3) Recommendations for policy makers 75
4) Recommendations for rural communities to be sustainable and build their resilience 75

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Finally, I am extremely grateful to The Prince's Countryside Fund for giving me this opportunity to become immersed in such an important, significant and worthwhile project; it has been a genuine privilege to be part of a unique process that has generated such an important evidence base from communities and individuals across rural England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

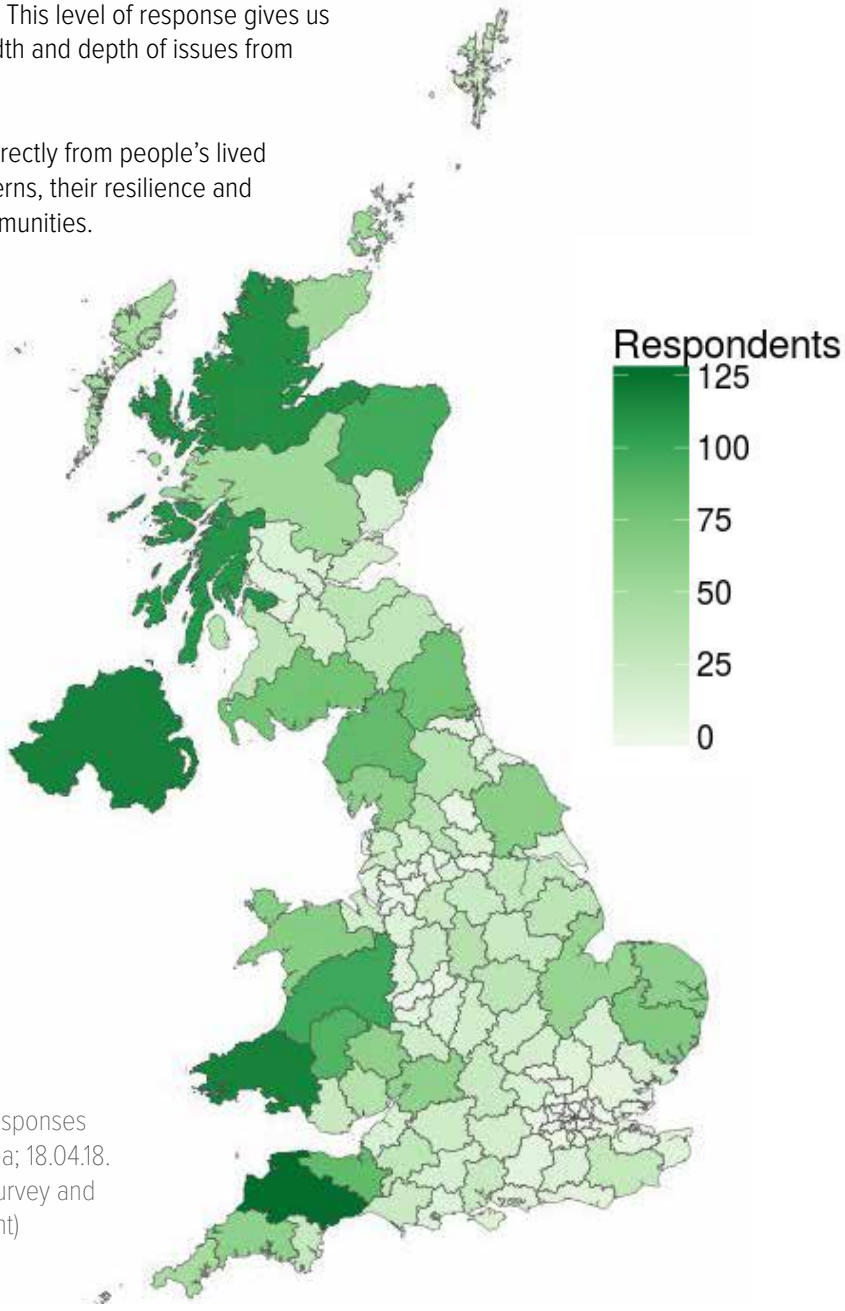
Executive Summary

Introduction

In commissioning this research, The Prince's Countryside Fund wanted to understand how rural communities can be helped to be self-sufficient and viable into 2030 and beyond. This will assist the Fund to plan and deliver its future support to rural areas through grant giving, advocacy or enabling delivery. Through the process, it was hoped to identify case studies and examples of best practice, highlight key areas of opportunity for future policy consideration and make recommendations for rural communities to consider in order to ensure a resilient and sustainable future.

The UK-wide #HaveYourSay online survey took place throughout March and April 2018, gaining a total of 3098 responses (England: 1846; Scotland: 723; Wales: 411; and Northern Ireland: 118). This level of response gives us confidence that we are covering the breadth and depth of issues from across rural UK.

We now have a wealth of new evidence directly from people's lived experience. In this, we see people's concerns, their resilience and their ideas for the future of their rural communities. By launching this **#HaveYourSay** survey, The Prince's Countryside Fund has clearly tapped into people's passion for their rural communities and areas, giving respondents a voice and channel to communicate their experiences and recommendations for the future of rural UK.



Map showing density of responses according to postcode area; 18.04.18. Map contains Ordnance Survey and ONS Data (Crown Copyright)

What is the experience of "Remote Rural"?

People's experiences of "remote" and "very remote" rural UK show a layering of geographical and personal factors. This means that map-based labels of remoteness are important but limited, because they hide individual experiences.

Thousands of people from across "remote rural" UK stated that a car is needed to access anything, that infrastructure is limited or poor, and that this is coupled with poor digital connectivity. More detailed descriptions show that these "disabling" characteristics of remoteness are further combined with geographical and physical aspects, particularly in the islands.

Poor infrastructure, including roads that are no longer in a fit state to support the rural economy because they have been worn away (particularly following severe winters), as well as poor paths, public transport, ferries, and limited access to utilities combine to make life more challenging.

Survey respondents describe how very limited access to, or absence of, services remains a problem, including very basic or no shops, leisure facilities, physical and mental health services or the NHS, libraries, social and self-help groups, and schools. Furthermore, the issues associated with housing and homelessness, and social isolation and exclusion are key concerns for both younger and older people, linked to poverty which is often hidden.

Rural remoteness is a process; indeed, remoteness has increased over the past 10 years for the majority, although a small number see some improvements in broadband and mobile coverage, and in opportunities for community empowerment through asset/land purchase, particularly in Scotland through empowerment and land reform legislation.

The overwhelming majority, however, report that remoteness is happening to them, through increasing loss and decline, with one loss feeding another. Such losses include no affordable housing, especially for young people; declining numbers of rural businesses with employment prospects affected by the rise in zero-hours contracts; service centralisation which leads to a downward spiral in health and wellbeing; and community breakdown associated with commuting and mass housing developments.

> *Very remote is usually thought of as a geographic thing, but everywhere is a long way from somewhere, so remote is really a state of mind, not of location. A state of mind that says I feel I'm missing out.*
> (Scottish island)

> *Poverty is hidden: the beauty of the surroundings means decision-makers only associate the area with wealthy people.*
> (Wales)

What are the barriers and challenges facing rural communities?

The top three barriers that exist right now for thousands of people across rural UK are poor broadband and mobile phone coverage, poor road and transport networks and a poor variety of employment opportunities with little or no scope for progression. Outmigration of young people is a "top 5" issue across rural UK, being seen as a natural result of this mix of poor job prospects and weak digital connectivity.

The issues repeatedly stressed by respondents to the survey show that future challenges reflect these current barriers, and that those living in remote rural areas do not see these barriers being removed, creating a snowball effect of decline.

When looking to the future, respondents agree that the top challenge is the lack of affordable housing because it is fundamental to everything else. A lack of investment in services, transport infrastructure, and broadband and mobile in turn are driving growing social isolation, rural poverty, and the rural youth exodus.

> *People who have lived in the community for their whole life are becoming increasingly isolated, especially when they can no longer drive.*
> (Wales)
>
> *I think it is difficult for young people who aren't from a farming background to find long term, financially viable work in rural areas. I am 24 and commute 80 miles a day to work in a town because there are no jobs locally..*
> (England)

How are rural communities valued?

An underlying challenge described across rural England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is a lack of joined up rural policy because rural is largely "invisible" or "off the radar".

This "invisibility" is also experienced in relation to how the "general public" value rural communities. Although a very small minority feel that the general public does fully value remote rural – its landscapes and scenery (particularly in tourist areas), and its role in the production of food - the majority of respondents feel that their rural communities are not valued in the sense of being fully understood by the general public.

> *I'm not convinced the wider public thinks much about remote rural, other than as a backdrop to much of the holidays or countryside recreation.*
> (England)

Three main reasons are given: that people value landscapes and places, not communities and their skills; that remote rural living is seen as a choice, so rural people feel "blamed" for any difficulties they experience; and that the majority of real rural issues are hidden from view, because "green space" equates to peace, holidays and relaxation, not poverty, deprivation and service centralisation.

How are these problems being tackled?

Communities are taking action themselves to address these barriers and challenges, and their top priority is to keep young people in rural areas. Communities are trying to make sure the right "mix" of factors is present, including genuinely involving young people in decision-making, while also knowing there must be affordable housing and transport, accessible services, education and training, and meaningful paid employment.

There is also a focus on maintaining and creating inclusive, diverse, open communities, connecting people, and making links between issues such as housing and employment in order to solve them. Solutions identified by communities include involving the private sector more, and campaigning to achieve change and reduce poverty.

> *People already are working together on a huge variety of initiatives including keeping toilets open, fundraising for community assets, volunteering to keep community resources open like the village hall, gritting roads, sharing transport, fundraising for training courses, children's facilities, and natural and cultural heritage conservation.*
> (Scotland)

Respondents state that others should be taking action to support communities and making significant change at strategic levels, for example through the provision of funding instead of being reliant on volunteers, or making certain that policy is fit for purpose in rural areas backed up with strategy to ensure action, such as treating rural people as you would a "minority", leading to fairness and social justice.

Communities are also aware of the need to lead on and deliver projects to help remove the barriers, with a strong focus on bringing all people together. Of the 550 projects reported, the most common are physical community hubs. These provide many different services and have many different functions, acting as a focal point for the community and encouraging a sense of pride. Other common projects include those to help overcome loneliness, and projects that address people's isolation by including the harder-to-reach in society, with a focus on mental wellbeing and the elderly.

Communities are also focused on connection, leading on transport schemes to act as the 'glue' in rural areas, as well as community broadband projects and websites which help to connect people locally and with the 'outside world'.

Many projects typically deliver multiple outcomes, such as arts activities also increasing personal confidence and community connections, food projects also focusing on linking people with the land and with each other. Community land ownership (in Scotland) also delivers to diverse goals including affordable housing, economic activities, repopulation and raising school roll numbers.

> *To get involved in the first place, people need to know what's happening. Not everyone is linked to the church or community groups, and many voices go unheard. Places such as the local pharmacy or GP surgeries should be used to disseminate information.*
> (Northern Ireland)

What are the future opportunities?

There is a strong desire to harness the possibilities that new technologies bring. First though, rural areas must be given reliable, resilient, high-speed broadband and universal mobile coverage. If this happens, rural people will innovate and then there can be a "bright future of digital possibilities", including access to remote services; attracting businesses to the local rural area; networking and connecting (locally and beyond); communal fuel buying to help those in fuel poverty; or even e-cars, e-buses and e-charging points. Though keen to seize this potential, communities realise they must make sure those without technology are not excluded, and that both digital training and offline channels must be provided.

> *Maximise the opportunities from technology. Enhance skills from all to use technology, as it can be used to overcome barriers to access services like healthcare, employment, and education.* (Northern Ireland)

While communities are being active themselves, they also recognise that certain parts of the "bigger system" must change and specific resources are needed for rural communities to be sustainable to 2030 and beyond.

> *Entrepreneurs live everywhere, and our rural communities are alive with multi-talented, highly experienced business folk.* (Scotland)

The top three changes communities say they need across rural UK are a reduction in the closure of key services such as banks, post offices, and pubs, fairer funding for rural areas that compensates for higher costs of improvements, and to improve rural broadband and mobile coverage.

To achieve this, thousands of **#HaveYourSay** respondents pointed to the priorities of investment in digital connectivity, rural issues becoming more of a priority on the public policy agenda, and greater joined-up thinking. This is because it is clear to respondents that the spectrum of challenges that they face as remote rural communities are all interlinked.

Building on the respect and listen agenda

Individuals and communities across rural UK have a breadth and depth of experience, wisdom and knowledge that they wish to share, both with other communities and with those creating policies that affect rural areas, communities and businesses.

Rural communities wish to be listened to, understood and respected, with action taken to feed into coherent policies designed for rural areas. The diversity of communities must be recognised – some lead the way, with all the skills they need to navigate and seize all the opportunities available; others will need support to develop their capacity and confidence to navigate uncertain futures.

Those providing policy and practical support will need to enhance their understanding of, and respect for, rural communities, building communities' lived experience into their decisions and approaches. This rich evidence-based report provides a valuable starting point to do just that.

> *Some things can be – and are – addressed locally by local people (if they can find funding) but many other things require thought and action at government level. No amount of local initiatives will change how local authorities or the health service are funded.* (England)

Report Recommendations

a) Recommendations for The Prince's Countryside Fund

i Bring together local, regional and national stakeholders and policy makers in a UK-wide Connected Communities Forum to examine the barriers, challenges, required resources, changes and recommendations described in this report to identify and prioritise action areas and responsibilities;

ii Identify how the next generation can be further engaged and supported to create sustainable rural communities through access to employment, training and skills development by consulting with young people;

iii Develop a Village Survival Guide: designed as a practical guide with resources including case study examples to assist rural communities in building their resilience and a top ten resilience checklist;

iv Work together with wider stakeholders on effective communication of clear, balanced and evidence based messages about 'remote rural' showing the challenges, contributions and opportunities;

v Continue with vital funding of community-led initiatives, using the Recharging Rural evidence base to guide future interventions across 'remote' and 'very remote' rural UK;

vi Bring together technical and rural expertise to explore ways in which digital technologies can be further harnessed to address isolation and remote rural service delivery, strengthen and attract rural business and drive the economy, e.g. Rural Apps for on demand shared shuttle services, mobile apps for local delivery from local shops, pharmacies and other services; connecting to web based resources such as business advice and learning;

vii Investigate opportunities to provide further training and skills in rural areas for digital including linking in with other providers.

b) Recommendations for rural stakeholders

i Foster improved knowledge exchange and learning between remote rural communities across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales;

ii Raise greater awareness and clarity of the ways in which 'remote rural' contributes to the UK as a whole;

iii Rural stakeholder organisations to review their organisation's current strategy and service delivery by examining the barriers, challenges, required resources, changes and recommendations described in this report;

iv Identify 'remote rural' champions in individual stakeholder networks to help to build a rural talent pool across the UK;

v To maximise impact, consider and identify roles in the rural sector and how to join up with other organisations across the UK. Reflect on the individual opportunities availably in each jurisdiction in the light of current policy context;

vi Involve the private sector, regional, and national enterprise agencies in specific ways with their innovative ideas, experience, and commitment;

vii Work creatively with partners to make local spaces multi-use, e.g. doctor's surgeries by mums and toddler's groups, pubs as libraries and shops, schools used by after-school clubs. Share examples through the UK network where this has been achieved.

c) Recommendations for policy makers

i Review current mapping and definitions of rural and remote rural, to reflect evidence of "experience of remoteness", in order to inform policy development;

ii Consider the implications of the sustainable necessities of rural life – car/transport, broadband and mobile and affordable housing;

iii Working with rural stakeholders and communities, drawing on evidence from the Report, to review indicators of rural community well-being;

iv Respond to the Recharging Rural survey respondents' desire for (i) cross-sectoral "joined up" rural vision and strategy within each UK jurisdiction and at local government levels, plus (ii) act on evidence around tailoring national policies to rural realities;

v Review current funding and service delivery (rural-proofing) within rural UK jurisdictions to include consideration of the interlinked effects of service reduction, plus the social, economic, environmental, cultural and wellbeing contributions of countryside;

vi Recognise the contribution of volunteers and make sure they are supported.

d) Recommendations for rural communities to be sustainable and build their resilience

i Be active in sharing community achievements with others in 'remote' and 'very remote' rural communities in the UK including how to effectively engage with the harder to reach or ways in which isolation and loneliness has been tackled in your area;

ii Proactively use knowledge and learning from other remote rural communities and case studies through national and regional bodies, networks and online discussion groups;

iii Include young people fully in community decisions, drawing on strengths of inter-generational mix and helping to train future rural leaders;

iv Be innovative in considering community assets with opportunities for "pop ups", use of new technologies, flexible multi use spaces, and mobile services;

v Work with stakeholders to identify creative and ambitious approaches to a "joined up" future for services, seeking specialist advice and guidance where necessary.

How do the responses chime with the body of evidence?

The research literature on resilient rural communities, while not totally in agreement, broadly states that communities live in a context of disruptive change (rapid or slow burn), with communities and individuals having varying degrees of control or "agency" over what happens.

There are some general principles of community resilience: the ability to learn, adapt, reorganise and change; create a positive direction of travel; able to "bounce forward" creatively; function in the midst of crisis, mobilise community resources at multiple levels; and collaborate with relevant stakeholders within and beyond the community.

There are some interlinked factors that support community resilience: social, economic and cultural capital; natural, built, political and financial resources; people-place connections; values and beliefs; knowledge, skills and learning; social networks; diverse and innovative economy; leadership and community infrastructure; equitable and sustainable resource use.

Community resilience is seen as a process, where positive resources are balanced with vulnerabilities. "Human agency" is key to this balancing act, with people being able to imagine, dream, plan, and make deliberate choices for their individual or collective futures.

The #HaveYourSay survey answers echo key features of community resilience: Context of both rapid and "slow burn" disruptive change: rural remoteness is a process that is happening to people as they experience loss and decline in services and infrastructure ("slow burn"); while technology-enabled change gives opportunities for a "bright future of digital possibilities" that many wish to seize and innovate around, whilst also sensing that if infrastructural investment is not made in remote rural areas, communities will quickly lose out and fall further behind (rapid).

Vulnerabilities include: growing social isolation and multi-layered remoteness; rural poverty; economic/business decline; and infrastructural weakness through loss and service centralisation; plus low capacity in some communities. Resources include: human agency in action; great awareness of change; excitement and readiness for change; connections deliberately created for social inclusion; mobilisation of community and external resources for action; building skills and capacity; protecting assets; imagining futures with creative openness; plus awareness and mobilisation of multiple collaborations locally and externally to strengthen remote rural communities.

Introduction

Project Aim

In commissioning this research, The Prince's Countryside Fund wanted to understand how rural communities can be helped to be self-sufficient and viable into 2030 and beyond. This will assist the Fund to plan and deliver its future support to rural areas through grant giving, advocacy or direct delivery. Through the process, it was hoped to identify case studies and examples of best practice, highlight key areas of opportunity for future policy consideration and make recommendations for rural communities to consider in order to ensure a resilient and sustainable future.

The UK-wide **#HaveYourSay** online survey took place throughout March and April 2018, gaining a total of 3098 responses (England: 1846; Scotland: 723; Wales: 411; and Northern Ireland: 118). This level of response gives us confidence that we are covering the breadth and depth of issues from across rural UK.

We now have a wealth of new evidence directly from people's lived experience. In this, we see people's concerns, their resilience and their ideas for the future of their rural communities. By launching this #HaveYourSay survey, The Prince's Countryside Fund has clearly tapped in to people's passion for their rural communities and areas, giving respondents a voice and channel to communicate their experiences and recommendations for the future of rural UK.

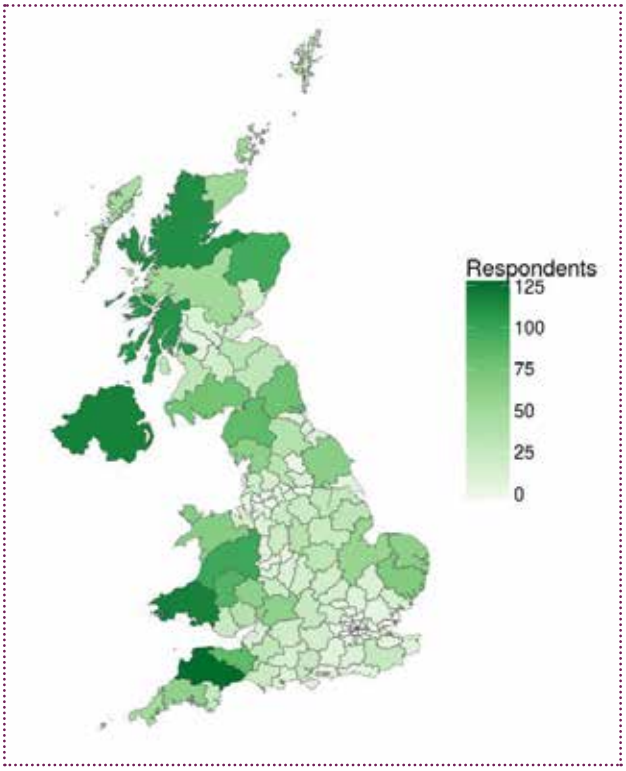
Approach to the research

The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, focused primarily on the lived-experience of those living and working in (or for) rural England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. There were seven phases to the research:

1. Desk research around definitions of "rural" in each of the four UK jurisdictions;
2. Stakeholder Workshop Series 1 (scoping) in each of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales;
3. Telephone interviews with charities and funding agency representatives;
4. #HaveYourSay online survey, comprising open and closed questions focused on: defining remote rural; trends and changes; current and future barriers and challenges; communities working to create change; projects to overcome barriers; technologies; required changes and resources; recommendations for sustainable rural communities.
5. Stakeholder Workshop Series 2 allowing rigorous checking of findings in each of the four jurisdictions;
6. Policy Workshops with civil servants, Members of Parliaments and/or Assemblies in each of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales;
7. Data Analysis and report-writing.

In reading the following report, it is important to note that: (i) The research was not designed to generate a random sample of responses. It is therefore not possible to say that "rural England thinks x" or "rural Northern Ireland thinks y"; however, it is possible to say that respondents in rural England/Northern Ireland/Scotland/Wales state x or y; (ii) the analysis represents the views of the survey respondents, rather than those of the report author.

The fact that 3,098 individuals have given their responses on the past and future of remote rural communities generates substantial "lived experience" data. This rich, in-depth evidence base of thousands of responses from the #HaveYourSay survey is reported in the following sections of this report. The following two maps (Maps 1 and 2) show the density and distribution of the survey respondents across rural UK.



Map 1: Map showing density of responses according to postcode area; 18.04.18. Map contains Ordnance Survey and ONS Data (Crown Copyright).

Map 2: Map 11: Map showing distribution of respondents using the first half of their submitted postcode; 18.04.18. Contains Ordnance Survey and ONS Data (Crown Copyright). Additional Copyright permission obtained for use of NI data.

Theme 1
What is the experience of "remote rural"?

Key messages

1. Over 3000 responded to the question "What is 'remote' rural?"
2. People's experiences of "remote" and "very remote" rural UK show a layering of geographical and personal factors. This means that map-based labels of remoteness are important but limited, because they hide individual's experiences.
3. Thousands of people from across the "remote rural" UK stated that a car is needed to access anything, that infrastructure is limited or poor, and that this is coupled with poor digital connectivity. More detailed descriptions show that these "disabling" characteristics of remoteness are further combined with geographical and physical aspects, particularly in the islands.
4. Poor infrastructure, including roads that are no longer in a fit state to support the rural economy because they have been worn away (particularly following severe winters), as well as poor paths, public transport, ferries, and limited access to utilities combine to make life more challenging.
5. Survey respondents describe how very limited access to, or absence of, services remains a problem, including very basic or no shops, leisure facilities, physical and mental health services or the NHS, libraries, social and self-help groups, and schools. Furthermore, the issues associated with housing and homelessness, and social isolation and exclusion are key concerns for both younger and older people, linked to poverty which is often hidden.

What is "remote rural"?

Respondents were presented with a list of 23 characteristics of "remote rural", to which the top three responses[1] from across the UK are: **Need a car to access anything**; **Limited or poor infrastructure** (roads, rail, air); and **Poor digital connectivity** (broadband, mobile).

The importance of infrastructure and connectivity as defining features of "remote rural" is a theme echoed repeatedly throughout the report. The fundamental necessity for private transport is a challenge for those on lower incomes, and a source of isolation for those who do not have access to a car and/or who can no longer drive.

Broadband and mobile connectivity are seen as both a fundamental necessity for business and community, and a severe constraint when absent; similarly poor road condition is reported as a challenge to business and a source of increasing isolation. As the report shows, the layering of these three elements of infrastructure serves to create additional difficulties, where one deficit builds onto the other.

In each of the four UK jurisdictions of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales:

- None of the **positive options** appear in any of the top ten definitions of "remote rural"[2];
- With the exception of Wales, all jurisdictions have the same characteristics as their top three; for Wales, their third highest characteristic is that "Young people look elsewhere for jobs, and leave area for work";

[1] From 3,081 respondents
[2] These were put at the beginning of the prompt list and were specified as: Self-sufficient and strong communities; Strong local connections within community; Innovative and entrepreneurial people who overcome challenges; High quality tourism destinations

- "Young people look elsewhere for jobs, and leave area for work" appears in the top ten of all four jurisdictions;
- "Remoteness from central decision-making" appears in all four jurisdictions;
- "Hidden loneliness, people disconnected from people outside their own household" appears in three out of four of the jurisdictions (it is absent from Scotland's top ten); this is a recurring theme within the report.

Analysis [3] of the "Other" open-ended category shows seven themes: Physical and geographical remoteness; Assets and positive experiences; Challenges of poor infrastructure and services; Schools, education and research; Housing and homelessness challenges; Social isolation and exclusion; Remote rural economies; Being off the radar – funding and policy.

Physical and geographical remoteness

Some state that "remote rural" is primarily about geographical location and physical remoteness, being distant from centres of population, with areas of low population density. Weak infrastructure (e.g. roads, ferries) – made more impassable in poor weather such as snow, flooding etc. - leads to further physical remoteness (and for some, isolation). Some also talk of their lives "revolving around the ferry timetables".

Assets and positive experiences

Others report their positive experiences of living in "remote rural", due to it being "tranquil, beautiful, remote in every good sense of that word"; they wrote of a high level of natural resources; beautiful surroundings such as "precious seas, fresh water and land based ecosystems", "true dark space" - no street lights or light pollution - and a "better quality of life" where you are "closer to your environment":

> *Peace and Quiet. No interference from a phone signal. Good air quality. You can connect with nature, you have very little noise or light pollution. [NI]*

Those who "love living in the middle of nowhere" enjoy the remoteness and feel very fortunate, while also feeling that "strong community" is all that is needed; they point to the benefits of being known within service provision:

> *Better services. A GP that knows you, has time to see you, dispenses medication and performs minor surgery. [ENG]*
>
> *Healthcare, social care better than on the mainland, despite remoteness from e.g. X Ray, A&E etc. More time, more personal. Ditto services such as banking, even though only open 2-3 days a week. [SCOT]*

Challenges of poor infrastructure and services

In contrast, the majority pointed to limited or no public transport (buses, trains) and poorly maintained roads and footpaths. For some there are no mains electricity or sewerage, or more commonly no mains gas. There were reports of there being no shops for basic supplies, limited leisure activities (affecting health and wellbeing), no library service, high or premium delivery charges and costs for heating oil and petrol. We were told of "longer distances to travel for NHS Clinical services" and a lack of social groups and self-help help support groups, especially for mental health issues.

Taken together, this all has consequences for those on lower incomes and those who do not use or have access to private transport, as it can simply mean "going without for those unable to travel". A further implication is the "huge pressure" that volunteers experience for "taking responsibility for sustaining the community".

[3] From 244 respondents

Schools, education and research

As a specific sub-set of services, schools have an important role in "keeping communities viable" but this is often overlooked as costs are cut by Councils. Remote rural schools are at on-going risk of closure, with limited educational choices, particularly for those aged 16-18 with the associated costs of travel. There is an additional issue of "academic remoteness", whereby "serious tech, science, engineering research and development" is something that happens "elsewhere" rather than in remote rural areas.

Housing and homelessness challenges

There are significant issues around holiday and second homes "lying empty for long periods" and in some areas "caravan-dwelling is a common experience";. Even where significant rural/village house-building has taken place "houses still aren't affordable for local young people", and there is often "poor management of social housing" due to its distance from council offices.

Social isolation and exclusion

This is playing out in many ways: people being isolated as lone-workers (particularly farmers); lack of mobility due to poor public transport (particularly the elderly); poor mental or physical wellbeing due to poor or distant services; and the lack of social events in a central community hub.

Respondents also point to divides within their remote rural communities between the rich and poor, English and Scots, Welsh and English-language speakers, and incomers and locals – and how these divides are made all the more noticeable in a remote rural context because they are 'undiluted' within the smaller population of remoter geographical settings. Respondents describe "high levels of depression", and for those experiencing mental ill health and/or feeling unsafe, remote rural can therefore be a challenging place to live:

> *With tiny populations you can be defined by what you do or conditions you have. Mental illness can need to be hidden as it is often misunderstood and can end up defining how others perceive you in a negative way. People form opinions whether they have all the facts or not and it is hard to redefine yourself beyond that. [SCOT]*
>
> *More difficult to get away from dangerous situations. In a small community it's impossible to stay safe if you are targeted - there is nowhere to go. [ENG]*

This underlines the importance of community-based support and volunteering:

> *If it wasn't for the people in the community helping each other, the elderly, disabled, mentally ill, unemployed, etc. would be totally isolated. [SCOT]*

Remote rural economies

These are largely farm-based, and/or reliant on traditional "rural industries" – some even describing it as an "over-reliance" which makes remote rural areas vulnerable because smaller farms are "no longer viable". There are high rates of self-employment, with challenges of living on the minimum wage due to the "remote rural premium" of higher living costs. It is common for people to have multiple jobs with irregular hours:

> *Extremely difficult to find work, limited job opportunities for people with family commitments, therefore unable to move out of the area. Low paid jobs are not economic to take, due to cost of transportation and journey time - therefore, lots of very low income families. [SCOT]*

> *I think it is difficult for young people who aren't from a farming background, to find long term, financially viable work in rural areas. I am 24 and commute 80 miles a day to work in a town because there are no jobs locally. [ENG]*
>
> *'Intermittent' employment for self-employed people - builders, plumbers, electricians who can work for six weeks but have no work for six months or have to travel outside of the area Monday to Friday for employment [NI]*

Other challenges are "professional isolation", where it is "hard to build a client base as a self-employed person" in a remote rural area, plus the lack of child-care which means that there is a high proportion of women relying on "multiple, poorly-paid, part-time jobs".

Being off the radar – funding and policy

"Remote rural" means either not being seen or heard, or being seen but misunderstood. This is explained in large part due to decision-makers being "in cities, many miles away, with no knowledge of remote rural issues" and with remote rural areas being "stereotyped":

> *Central decision-makers unaware of the issues. e.g.: bid for funding to enable work with young people in poverty. Phone call from London querying the bid, asked if we understood that it was to work with young people experiencing poverty. We said "yes". He said with some bewilderment "but you are in Cornwall" [ENG]*
>
> *Hidden poverty; beauty of surroundings means decision-makers only associate area with wealthy people. [WLS]*

This leads to a feeling of being under-represented, due also to a "numerically low voting power to affect change", where decisions are made based on information for a whole area "rather than specifically for the real population of the villages and populations they affect". There is a need to enhance decision-makers' understanding of "what life is really like" and "the nature of rural life", to overcome the sense of being marginalised and ignored.

How do people experience "very remote" rural?

Respondents [4] from "very remote" rural areas write about the *seasonality* of their remoteness, in terms of the seasons affecting how remote they feel; secondly, some write of close-knit communities, while others write of *social isolation and loneliness*. Both exist. As illustrated in the following quote from an islander in Scotland, remoteness is equally geographical and personal; this is not to downplay or play-up either – it is simply to emphasise that "very remote" is layered for each individual:

> *Very remote is usually thought of as a geographic thing, but everywhere is a long way from somewhere, so remote is really a state of mind, not of location. A state of mind that says I feel I'm missing out. [Scottish island]*

Geographical location

As we might anticipate, the characteristic that all respondents write about in relation to "very remote" rural is geography, summarised as: inaccessibility, physical barriers (such as seas, islands), no through roads, "an island off an island", and poor transport links. This remoteness leads to such places being perceived as "out of sight, out of mind".

[4] The overwhelming majority of those who responded to this question (1,167) were speaking from personal experience, that is, they used "I/we am/are" to describe how they experience very remote rural. Less than 10 respondents were giving their views from outside a "very remote" rural area

Low population density

"Very remote" rural has a low population density or a dispersed population, where the "nearest neighbour is measured in miles", with "no need for public spaces". The population is small and ageing, linked to a lack of affordable housing and meaningful jobs with progression opportunities which leads to youth outmigration.

Transport challenges

There is limited or no public transport in "very remote" rural, with poor quality road access (if at all), and transport connections are single track roads, with few or no rail links. Distance and time to nearest towns are substantial, combined with the poor state of the road / transport network to reach them. Transport connections are also "fragile" such as ferries or high passes liable to snow blockage. There is a "level of vulnerability" due to single ferry connections or single roads on which you are totally reliant to reach home.

Digital

Experienced as either no broadband, or internet connectivity that is "too slow even for online banking", and no mobile signal.

Community connections

There are "cohesive societies of people who support one another", with "strong community links and ties", underpinned by tradition and traditional values, heritage, and culture. Owing to strong links and connections to place, there is a strong sense of "responsibility and respect as custodians of rural environment". Communities are close-knit, belonging to a small group "where there are no strangers". There is a sense of "village identity", where "everyone knows everyone, we look out for our neighbours", dealing with issues and helping others in need, and knowing everyone is safe. Additionally, communities have the shared purpose of maintaining community, by working together, sharing and pooling resources, which is underpinned by a different pace of life that supports this purpose. Close community links also enable travel between remote communities, for example on other islands and internationally, where strong shared connections of place, family and heritage make it easier for people to socialise and visit with one another and maintain cultural ties.

Self-reliance

Resilience, determination, and independence are words used to describe "very remote" rural communities. Respondents stated that "you have to be resilient both individually and as a community to get by"; you have to be independent "because you have no other option"; and you must have significant levels of self-sufficiency. They are able and adaptable, "many of whom will turn their hands to anything" and they are innovative and make the most of every opportunity – again, due to being very remote and having to be self-reliant.

Lack of, and distance to, services and facilities

"Very remote" communities experience a lack of facilities. This is coupled with significant distances to travel to reach any services and facilities, including shops, petrol stations, medical/healthcare [5], public transport, and emergency services. This remoteness is experienced "in reverse" as well, with challenges of being reached by services, both routine or in emergencies, particularly in adverse weather conditions, and the "refusal of firms to deliver to us as we are on an island". This also relates to the difficulties of recruiting teachers and GPs to such "very remote" locations, and retaining them once they have arrived.

Economy

The characteristics of "very remote" economies are described as "low, precarious incomes and high levels of self-employment", with difficulty accessing work, and in many areas, simply no employment.

[5] Dentists, radiography, hospitals, medical specialists, chiropractors, therapists, mental health services

Isolation

This is described as *geographical isolation* due to lack of service provision; *physical isolation* as a pleasure and a positive experience; and *social isolation* as lack of mobility, personal connection and not feeling part of community:

- *Geographical isolation* is being "last in the pecking order", "forgotten", or "left behind", either in relation to poor services, and/or when adverse weather conditions take hold when in winter months "bad weather can trap families for days".
- *Physical isolation* is being in "beautiful isolation", being quiet and "able to be on your own, walking around", experiencing silence and "dark skies", getting in touch with nature more easily.
- *Social isolation* is experienced by those who are subject to poor transport networks and not able to drive, with long distances to critical services, who therefore feel cut off; and those who due to a combination of social and financial factors, are unable to connect with the community and society around them. Other aspects include being "completely constrained by the job", for example of being a hill farmer that "takes up all daylight hours", with pressure to "get the work done" and no opportunity then to socialise. Others write of the difficulty of finding people with "similar interests, priorities and outlook on life". Social isolation reportedly leads to loneliness, and can result in poor mental health.

Cost

Living in "very remote" rural is associated with two drivers that together lead to a high incidence of poverty: higher cost of living, and lower earnings. Fuel poverty (linked with high "off-grid" domestic fuel prices and typically older style of housing), as well as the higher price of car fuel coupled with high mileage due to long distances to services, plus cost of ferries to leave islands to reach services and facilities, all work together to raise the basic cost of living – before any other living costs are taken into account. Secondly, wages in rural areas are typically lower, seasonally-based and more uncertain. Respondents "have to maintain more than one job", and "often by travelling away from your home community".

Concluding comment: multi-layered rural remoteness

The above results show how "remote rural" is not only geographical, because it also has personal aspects. While recognising that island life is fundamentally different due to being surrounded by water and having to build many plans around ferry timetables, it is necessary to be more careful when using labels of "remote" and "very remote" only for remote rural places, when people themselves are evidently experiencing remoteness and isolation in rural areas in different ways and parts of rural UK.

Theme 2
What changes have people seen over the past 10 years in "remote rural" communities?

Key messages

1. Over 1500 respondents described the changes they have seen over the past ten years.
2. Rural remoteness is a process; remoteness has increased over the past 10 years for the majority although a small number see some improvements in broadband and mobile coverage, and in opportunities for community empowerment, particularly in Scotland.
3. The overwhelming majority, however, report that remoteness is happening to them, through increasing loss and decline, with one loss feeding another. Such losses include no affordable housing, especially for young people; declining numbers of rural businesses with employment prospects affected by the rise in zero-hours contracts; service centralisation which leads to a downward spiral in health and wellbeing; and community breakdown associated with commuting and mass housing developments

Respondents were asked to reflect on the changes they have seen over the past ten years in "remote" rural communities. Before moving into specific descriptions [6], it is important to note that:

(i) rural areas are diverse, particularly evident in relation to the ways in which housing changes are being experienced in different rural areas of the UK;

(ii) changes over the past ten years are interconnected, with apparently minor changes creating impacts for individuals and communities that can then affect wellbeing and cohesion.

Housing pressures and availability

There are two key elements: firstly, the lack of affordability, and secondly, the rapid increase in housing due to expansion of towns and cities. This theme shows the diversity of rural across the UK – however, the consequences of that diversity are very similar: private rents and house prices are unaffordable in a rural wage economy; reduced availability of affordable and/or social housing; and outmigration particularly of the young, due to being priced out of any housing that is available.

Respondents in Scotland write about the increase in holiday and second homes which can lead to a dramatic and significant increase in prices, taking housing outside the affordability of locals; this is coupled with a lack of homes to rent, and a lack of (quality) social housing.

In England, the focus is on the significant increase in new house builds and housing estates in villages and on greenfield sites over the past ten years, putting services under strain and increasing traffic on roads that were not built (and are not being maintained) to sustain this.

[6] From 1,570 respondents

Roads and travel

Across rural UK, roads have deteriorated over the past ten years owing to a lack of repair (causing potholes, wearing away of road widths), with the concern that the road network is now "not fit to support the rural economy". Over the same period, the decline in public transport has pushed rural residents to the position where it is almost impossible to "get around without owning a car", which leads to a further decline in public transport due to its lower usage. This decline puts great pressure on those seeking employment, as they must have a car to do so, putting them in a "Catch 22" situation due to the increasingly higher costs of having their own private transport. Public transport decline impacts on the use of shops, while making it difficult or impossible for those *who used to use the buses* to continue taking part in social events. The raising of the retirement age (UK-wide) has also, in England, led to:

> *The big effect of people of age 60 not being able to have free bus passes until they reach the new retirement ages. These people would travel to towns and visit shops, cafes, hotels and friends. Whilst doing these activities they were spending money in cafes, shops etc. which was keeping small businesses going. Also visiting friends, doing doctor and hospital visits was doing mental and health wellbeing a lot of good. [ENG]*

Digital (including Energy)

Some positive changes over the past ten years include improved broadband (including fibre optic broadband) and 3G and 4G mobile connectivity, benefiting both residents and tourists The majority are still frustrated with their current provision however, due to the disadvantage and "technology lag" that they experience compared with urban populations, particularly for young people, businesses, and employers, which strengthens the out-migration taking place from rural areas. A further significant change in the past ten years is that wind farms have developed across many rural areas - there are those who are "for and those against" which has "caused tension" within communities, as well as generated revenue streams in others.

Business changes

There is a growth in tourism numbers over the past ten years, which – while good for employment – can make certain rural areas "over-reliant on one sector", and make locals feel as though they exist solely for tourists. Other trends include:

- Lack of job creation for the younger generation within the community;
- A shift to zero-hours contracts, which is coupled with seasonal contracts;
- Small local businesses finding it hard to trade and many have closed, leaving empty properties in the high street; weak demand for business premises and weak demand for housing owing to lack of employment opportunities;
- Massive increase in paperwork and reliance on internet connection and ability to use online services;
- Less rural employment opportunities, and having to go into the cities for work or training.

Service reduction and centralisation

There has been a significant reduction in local council funding in the past ten years with a dramatic loss and/or centralisation of services, negatively affecting: schools (with reduction in certain lessons such as music, plus lack of school places locally), the arts, roads, bus services, health services, social care support, public toilets, and street lighting. Impacts include families leaving the area or not moving in due to school closures; opportunities to pick up health problems being missed, with access to care then limited, creating a "downward spiral"; and the elderly no longer attending local events due to not feeling safe in winter months without street lighting.

Isolation is reported as increasing, due to buses having to be "pre-ordered" (up to several days in advance), and the lack of services (including the Post Office) greatly reducing or eradicating social contact for those who do not have their own transport. The private sector has also withdrawn services over time, including closure of rural bank branches and/or

reduction of mobile banking routes. The consequences of this "mix" of trends is reported as a "serious shortage" of GPs and Social Workers due to difficulty in recruiting them and services have become even more thinly spread and therefore even more vulnerable to funding cuts because they serve fewer people – creating a "vicious circle" that reduces rural community sustainability even further.

Community empowerment and activity

Some report an increase in community empowerment through community land ownership, community energy, windfarm development revenue streams, and community council change of status to enable more proactive activity, bypassing structures and processes that would otherwise hold them back. These initiatives typically rely on a small group of motivated individuals developing a mix of projects that creates a build-up of energy and momentum:

> *Local improvement foundation using money from windfarm developments has been revitalising the community with many new initiatives e.g. new holiday clubs for local children, greatly improved local playing field, a community cafe and new activities and classes at local community centres. Grants have been available for local groups and individuals and there seems to be enthusiasm for further community developments. [SCOT]*

Community breakdown and isolation

Changes over the past ten years in the make-up and functioning of local rural communities lead to breakdown of former structures and connections, and the subsequent isolation of individuals. Primarily, this is described in terms of "loss" – loss of community life, interaction and connection. This is attributed to villages being "used for commuting rather than living in"; substantial new housing changing the "format" of the village and leading to loss of "community spirit"; ageing volunteers who are not being replaced; loss of the younger generation who are moving out for jobs/housing; and the loss of connectivity for the increasing proportion of elderly who are isolated at home due to declining public transport. These changes are happening around them and to them:

> *Social isolation, we now don't know our neighbours, don't get to know those living in/on farms etc. [SCOT]*
>
> *People who have lived in the community for their whole life are becoming increasingly isolated, especially when they can no longer drive [WLS]*

A second aspect of isolation relates to material poverty for those on low income, who will not have the means to travel, access services, training, and perhaps employment. There is concern that some on low income are located in social or low-cost housing in rural areas without the necessary support mechanisms, and experience isolation due to the increasing lack of services which demands private transport. The following quote is one example:

> *Low cost housing brings people with little money but they are then isolated because they cannot reach services. It's not the lack of low cost housing that is the issue, it's the lack of services needed for people who live in those houses, especially elderly and young parents. [ENG]*

Theme 3
What are the barriers now, and future challenges, facing "remote" rural communities?

Key messages

1. The **top three barriers** that exist right now for thousands of people across rural UK are poor broadband and mobile phone coverage, poor road and transport networks and a poor variety of employment opportunities with little or no scope for progression. Outmigration of young people is a "top 5" issue across rural UK, being seen as a natural result of this mix of poor job prospects and weak digital connectivity.
2. The issues repeatedly stressed by respondents show that **future challenges** reflect these current barriers, and that those living in remote rural areas do not see these barriers being removed, creating a snowball effect of decline.
3. When looking to the future, respondents agree that the **top challenge** is the lack of affordable housing because it is fundamental to everything else. A lack of investment in services, transport infrastructure, and broadband and mobile in turn are driving growing social isolation, rural poverty, and the rural youth exodus.

Barriers for rural UK right now?

The top three barriers [7] across rural UK are poor broadband and mobile phone coverage, poor road and transport networks, and a poor variety of employment opportunities. Infrastructural issues are experienced as the most significant barrier due to the fundamental need for broadband, mobile phone coverage and transport to reduce out-migration (particularly of rural youth), attract in-migration of families and businesses, open up education and training opportunities without having to leave your locality and ensure people feel connected with wider society with the option to engage with "mainstream culture". Remote rural is also associated with limited, seasonal employment options that give little opportunity for career progression, with a concerning rise in zero-hours contracts.

- For England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, the top two barriers are the same (poor broadband and mobile phone coverage; poor road and transport network). However, for Wales, their second-listed barrier is "poor variety of employment opportunities", followed by "generational loss of talent: emigration of young people";
- Outmigration of young people sits within the top five barriers in all jurisdictions, and is seen as linking directly with affordable housing availability and employment prospects – both of which sit in the top ten across the UK;
- "Poverty within communities not recognised or addressed" sits within the top ten across the UK, and this emerges in several strands of the report, including whether the general public value remote rural communities, and around discussions of social isolation related to access/transport;
- The "lack of a single rural policy vision" and "short term policy and funding" also appear in the top ten across the UK, and are regularly cited elsewhere within the report.

[7] From 1,877 respondents

Challenges facing remote rural communities to 2030?

Respondents were asked to specify the top three challenges that will face remote rural communities to 2030 [8]. Many are linked with each other, for example transport and access to services, employment, affordable housing and population, and poverty, social isolation, transport, and services. The eleven themes are now outlined, with the most-reported shown first through to the least-reported.

Affordable rural housing

This is the leading issue, both because of the housing need in itself and because of how the lack of affordable housing impacts on all aspects of rural society and its economy. Housing issues are experienced as a lack of affordable housing (to rent, buy, in single-person units), insufficient housing for public sector or other workers on low wages, overpriced and scarce rentals, social housing need and a lack of housing stock diversity. What this then means is that "you cannot belong in the community" - many leave the rural area, primarily young people plus this generates difficulties in recruiting and retaining employees.

Services

Lack of investment and funding is seen across public and private sectors, in health and social care, schools, police, libraries, and transport, as well as a reduction in hours, branches or complete closure of banks, shops, pubs, Post Offices, children's facilities, and with a decline in staffing of any services that do remain. This leads to substantially-increased difficulty in accessing more remote services, particularly for those who cannot drive or have no access to a car, and when this is coupled with the parallel decline in public transport it is generating an increase in personal isolation. There are concerns about inequalities for those in poverty, "undermining social justice", as well as concern for the health and wellbeing of those providing the increasingly-stretched services in the public sector and as volunteers.

Transport

This is a fundamental aspect of rural life that impacts on everything else. Challenges relate to: the poor road condition and maintenance (including in winter – gritting/clearance/repair); lack of funds for infrastructure (roads, ferries, piers); lack of public buses; high cost of public transport; increasing cost of car use and petrol prices which penalise rural dwellers due to required rural mileage. This mix impacts on transport for goods (in and out), on individuals' ability to access services and each other (young and old), and the extent to which "training and work aspirations" can be realised due to transport constraints.

Social isolation

This is experienced by those who have become isolated as their environment has changed, and those who are isolated due to economic and/or social circumstances. Firstly, long-term rural residents (an ageing population) become isolated – those "who have lived their whole lives somewhere that becomes unsustainable" - as services decline, are centralised and web-based, giving less opportunities for social interaction. Reductions in public transport similarly are leading to social isolation, particularly for those who do not or cannot drive, and for those who can no longer drive., This change is happening to them, around them, and their isolation is therefore a process.

Secondly, respondents report hidden isolation and loneliness, those who are not included in social, economic, business, education, or skills opportunities, who are not on the radar, with the need for "unremarkable social activities" that create links, keep communities together, and help address what are felt to be mental health issues that arise from such isolation.

[8] Respondents = 1,319

Population change

This is described as an "exodus", particularly of youth, leading to an associated demographic "imbalance" with a growing proportion of elderly in communities, putting additional demands on social and health services. The outmigration generates "community collapse" and a "brain drain", particularly of the economically active. Seasonal population variation (in tourist areas) results in isolation occurring more in the winter months.

Employment opportunities

There is a reported lack of jobs, and those that do exist are primarily low paid with no career path., There are also too many zero-hours, temporary and seasonal contracts, which in turn create challenges around securing accommodation. The economy is seen as vulnerable due to reliance on only a small number of sectors, reducing job diversity and opportunity for the young *and* those aged over 50, leading to out-migration of youth, skills-loss and reduction in economic viability.

Poverty

The costs of rural living relate to domestic off-grid fuel poverty, because of the increasing cost of fuel and the energy inefficiency of most rural properties. A further challenge is the "increasing polarisation of wealth and extreme poverty" which remains largely hidden and unknown, such that "the rustic lifestyle becomes a meme" (humorous image or text).

Digital connectivity

A lack of high speed broadband and mobile connectivity "comparable to urban areas" impacts the whole community and does not allow businesses to "overcome market distance". There is a need to address this challenge and ensure "equal digital connectivity".

Brexit

A significant challenge, not only in the agricultural sector, but also owing to the impact of potential farming subsidy loss on other sectors of the rural economy since farming is interconnected with multiple sectors (suppliers, markets etc.). The challenges are seen as the effect of agricultural support changes or reductions, a loss of rural infrastructure projects, the out-migration of workers and maintaining young farmers and crofters. A related challenge is that adaptation through diversification of farms into tourism "can only go so far", and therefore how to adapt to survive is a key concern.

Lack of rural policy

Some reported that there is "no national vision encompassing and understanding rural". This is seen as being both because of, and leading to, "economic invisibility" for rural areas, a lack of awareness of challenges, and a focus on "success areas" with less attention on "challenging areas". There were comments made in regard to an overall absence of rural-proofed public policy "in an era of on-going austerity", with an exception being the just-introduced Islands Bill in Scotland. Given all this, the challenge will be an on-going defence of funding for "a few people, that is, rural".

Environmental sustainability

Respondents noted a need to be aware of (and change behaviour relating to) current and immediate environmental impact of actions and of longer-term, climate change-related actions. In some areas of rural UK, there is a threat to (and destruction of) natural habitats, due to growth of cities and towns, with building and overdevelopment on green space at such speed that "there will be no such thing as rural", with a "loss of farmland and food security". The wider challenge of climate change and extreme weather events requires an associated need to adjust and adapt, by being "really aware of the effects and ways to work around them", as well as using new types of energy.

Theme 4
Are remote rural communities valued by the general public?

Key messages

1. More than 1500 respondents described how it is often difficult for those outside rural areas to appreciate the full complexity of life and work in remote rural areas.
2. Although a very small minority feel that the general public does fully value remote rural – its landscapes and scenery (particularly in tourist areas), and its role in the production of food - the majority of respondents feel that their rural communities are not valued in the sense of being fully understood by the general public.
3. Three main reasons are given:
   a) people value landscapes and places, not communities and their skills;
   b) remote rural living is seen as a choice, so rural people feel "blamed" for any difficulties they experience;
   c) the majority of real rural issues are hidden from view, because "green space" equates to peace, holidays and relaxation, not poverty, deprivation and service centralisation.

As policy and funding support landscapes change in the next few years, the extent to which the wider public understands the complexities of life and work in rural UK will be important. The #HaveYourSay survey gave the opportunity for people in rural UK to share their perception of what the general public thinks of rural communities; a next step would then be to generate data from the wider public to see how closely this ties in with the survey respondents' perceptions. Nonetheless, these findings [9] already give insights into different types of rural, and what remains visible and invisible.

Yes, remote rural communities *are* valued by the general public:

A small number of respondents focused on landscape and scenery and how the values of rural people are respected, including the slower pace of life, the opportunity for leisure, recreation and "escape", open space, its role in food production, and craft and design:

> *Rural areas are treasured in North Wales mostly due to the landscape and accessibility of most shops and services as they are within walking distance [WLS]*
>
> *Open spaces, recreation, iconic Scottish scenery, uniqueness [SCOT]*
>
> *People like to know that British values such as struggle in hard conditions is still alive. People love those who are being brave and sticking things out. They would like to think one day they will be able to afford a house in the country. People like crafts and small businesses those not governed by the city and modern day living [ENG]*

[9] From 1,576 respondents

Rural is wonderful, the space, the air, the crafts and design that people produce is amazing. Some small pockets of community are amazing. [ENG]

Public appreciates the beauty, peace, cleanliness, slower pace of life [ENG]

Due to the beautiful scenery, the quietness of the surroundings, the pleasant walks, the Old Fashioned Tea Shops, Cafes, the quaint streets and houses, the local friendly people who welcome new faces [ENG]

I think people are becoming more appreciative of where food comes from [SCOT]

I would say it is valued for recreation and leisure; for more affluent people who want to escape the city life; for farming in the production of food; and as a nature reserve to preserve our natural heritage [SCOT]

Remote rural is known and valued by the general public for the producers of food, crafts, forestry [WLS]

It is possible to see remote rural communities as both valued and not valued:

Respondents separate out two types of rural and how they are valued differently by the public:

Public appreciate the pretty rural areas, however in ex-industrial or real farming rural communities are not valued [SCOT]

Some are valued a lot (holiday destinations, etc.) but others are probably not even considered. [ENG]

In remote rural tourist destinations, the public may value the beauty and touristic aspects of their experience, but they do not necessarily value the working landscape:

Islands like ours are used mainly as holiday locations. A place to escape to. So it is valued. However it is largely not understood that our lives and way of life is quite different. Visitors' expectations can often be the hardest thing about working in the tourist industry. [SCOT]

I'm not convinced the wider public thinks much about remote rural, other than a backdrop to much of the holidays or countryside recreation (e.g. mountain biking). [ENG]

General public only seems to recognise remote / rural areas as a place for tourist recreation and leisure (e.g. day out to a castle or forest). Otherwise there seems to be very little knowledge or value of rural life and community and what this provides to the public (e.g. food production, commuting workforce, art and music). [WLS]

No, remote rural communities are *not* valued by the general public

The overwhelming majority of respondents feel that the public do not value remote rural communities.

There is a difference between the public valuing places and valuing communities:

> *I don't think most people think of rural communities in their day-to-day lives - I think they may value places and landscapes, but not the actual communities. [SCOT]*
>
> *Very few people live in rural areas and many people don't visit the communities- they just visit the landscape - and don't understand the different issues they have [ENG]*

The public does not appreciate the skills and talent in rural communities

The wider public are not fully aware that rural communities comprise many talented people, but rather many think that they "have straw in their hair, are slow and lack entrepreneurial skills", are "ageing and under-skilled yokels", and/or are a combination of "rich, old or uneducated". In contrast, respondents themselves are aware that in remote rural areas "Entrepreneurs live everywhere, and that our rural communities are alive with multi-talented, highly experienced business folk etc." [SCOT]

Remote living is a lifestyle choice

The general public do not understand that living remotely is a "necessity due to employment, family or affordability constraints" but rather think that it is a choice and that people could easily move if they chose to. Remote rural communities then feel "blamed" for their own problems and challenges, particularly in a climate of economic austerity and in the context of post-Brexit, and that they should just "get on with it". Many perceive farmers to be rich, with no understanding of the challenges of rural working lives, particularly the practical difficulties during times of adverse weather conditions:

> *The public do not understand the challenges of living in a remote rural area. They do not understand the impact of having no broadband (it is increasingly difficult to access public services without a fast connection); they also do not understand the impact on household income of having to drive everywhere, and or relying on oil and wood for heating. They also do not appreciate that a 4x4 is usually a requirement in the winter months to get to and from home in areas that are snowed-in, and the increased household costs associated with fuelling, taxing and insuring such a vehicle. [WLS]*

There is a concern that people are "detached from rural producers", from the "realities of remote rural life" and that they do not understand that "you can't eat the scenery" but rather must work very hard to provide food. The public's understanding is informed by romanticised, "sanitised country life" portrayals in the media, rather than having a good knowledge of rural as a "workplace" where many are "struggling to survive financially".

The majority of real rural issues remain hidden from the public's view:

The general public has a perception that "geographically beautiful surroundings compensate for all sorts of problems":

> *Rural areas are seen as places to visit and keep 'special'. Places for peace, holidays and relaxation. Green 'lungs'. Maintaining traditions. [ENG]*
>
> *Here is seen as a middle class "chocolate box" county. The reality is very different but this side isn't immediately obvious. It's often hidden by tourism for example. There is deprivation that is acute but not expected so not recognised [ENG]*

The public does not understand the distance to travel to get connections for buses/transport, the trauma patients face when having to travel more than 100 miles for 10 minute hospital appointments, the additional costs and problems caused by a lack of services or the effect of not having a ferry for days due to bad weather. They also do not recognise the issues of appalling mobile phone coverage, expensive delivery costs, or the real pockets of hidden deprivation. In summary, people can see rural as a "charmed life":

> *The majority of public live in towns and cities and therefore don't really see or understand remote rural communities or the needs or pressures they face. Also see their lifestyle as a bit idealised, especially when they use these areas for recreation and leisure or building their own health and wellbeing. [ENG]*

Theme 5
How are these problems being tackled?

Key messages

1. More than 1000 respondents described working together to address their barriers and challenges across remote rural UK.
2. Their top priority is to keep young people in rural areas. Communities are trying to make sure the right "mix" of factors is present, including genuinely involving young people in decision-making, while also knowing there must be affordable housing and transport, accessible services, education and training, and meaningful paid employment.
3. There is also a focus on maintaining and creating inclusive, diverse, open communities, connecting people, and making links between issues such as housing and employment in order to solve them. Solutions identified by communities include involving the private sector more, and campaigning to achieve change and reduce poverty.
4. Respondents state that others should be taking action to support communities and making significant change at strategic levels, for example through the provision of funding instead of being reliant on volunteers, or making certain that policy is fit for purpose in rural areas backed up with strategy to ensure action, such as treating rural people as you would a "minority", leading to fairness and social justice.

Analysis of responses [10] generated 11 themes, discussed below.

Young people

The overwhelming majority of responses focus on the importance of young people needing to be seen as a key part of rural communities – now and for the future. Communities are already resourceful but young people will "only stay in areas where there are good services, education and facilities and well paid employment":

> *It's imperative to make rural areas an attractive place for young people to make a life. My (young) generation may well be the most educated ever, but we leave to the cities for work. [ENG]*

In summary, the "conditions" need to be right – jobs, training and apprenticeships, affordable housing and affordable transport. In parallel, there needs to be a much greater emphasis on deliberately involving younger people in decision-making – putting them at the centre, and ensuring they have a voice. To encourage young people's interest, there is a need to start at school, giving the "right messages" about children's local place and the importance of their future role in the sustainability of their communities.

Steps need to be put in place to stop or reduce out-migration of young people – prioritising affordable housing, affordable transport, employment and training, with the involvement of the private sector. Employment is central and experience, job security and progression, reasonable pay, and diverse sectors of employment must be factored in.

[10] From 1,036 respondents

There is a need to support local projects and services to ensure there will be employment for local young people, and opportunities for them to gain experience, including in higher-paid technology-based industries. Farm succession at a younger age was also mentioned as being a route to retaining young people.

There is a fundamental need for training in local rural communities, with an emphasis on the range of skills that young people could acquire, making sure all career routes are valued. Training must be brought to rural areas, with opportunities for mentorships within rural communities:

> *Provide more local opportunities for young people to gain skills and knowledge close to their communities. Make the apprenticeship initiative more attractive to local SMEs and single person businesses. [ENG]*

Training people locally adds to the capacity of the local economy, increasing the resilience of the economy and community. Diversity of opportunity is key, with an emphasis on "staying" as being a positive outcome, potentially reducing emphasis on university-only as the career choice:

> *To encourage young people to stay in the local area by offering apprenticeships in a variety of fields - and not to view those who go away to university only to come back again as 'failures' and instead utilise their knowledge and experience for the benefit of the community. [ENG]*
>
> *Giving sufficient post-school training to young people in useful skills whether in agriculture, tourism, artisan crafts like wood working and turnery and also IT skills which will be new in farming, animal management, equine management, building maintenance, energy conservation and renewal energy and forestry and water management - up to date knowledge worker ability will be important. [ENG]*

Innovative thinking is required, for example by providing local scholarships for medical / healthcare students with the caveat of returning to an area for a specified time after the students graduate, thus addressing both youth employment and recruitment challenges. Innovation is also described in terms of seeing young people in a broader way, that is, as being able to work in crafts, a variety of services and in entrepreneurial sectors, creating local mentorships across a range of sectors that exist in rural areas. Allied to this is the need for funding to cover insurance costs for local craftsmen/ artists to enable them mentor young people.

A key bottleneck for young people is affordable housing.; It is an essential condition for being able to remain in rural areas, even when a job or training has been secured. There needs to be options for rented accommodation, not only owned, and genuinely affordable. The option for being trusted with self-build should be looked into by house-building companies, to enable young people to remain in their communities, and to upskill them.

Linked with affordable housing is the need for young people to be able to access affordable transport, between home and work or training, through community transport and/or other innovative schemes (e.g. Wheels to Work).

A further very strong theme is the fundamental need to involve young people in decision-making in their communities. This should not be "lip-service" only, but enable young people to shape their local environment, which means giving them power and authority. Young people should be at the centre of consultation and decision-making and be given leadership roles currently too dominated by those of "the older generation". Sustainable rural futures belong to young people, so it is viewed as right that they should be central to discussions about how the future could work for them, with influence over decisions and future paths:

> *Incorporate young people in process and decision making - not just as a token gesture. Listen to them. Give them opportunity and ownership of their community and projects. [SCOT]*
>
> *Getting young people involved and accepted into the established community groups e.g. village councils. [ENG]*

Generating interest for young people needs to begin at a young age, with a theme emerging around schooling, encouraging young people's interest in their home environment at a much younger age ("rural education should start as soon as you can walk"), showing them that rural can and does offer them a meaningful future. One main way of growing interest for local children is through projects on local issues, including environmental issues, which they could then share with parents and others in the village or town through exhibitions or plays. "Citizenship" should also be encouraged in children, to encourage participation in their place, and the value of a strong community. Schools should also be encouraging children to realise that they are valued in their local place, that there are many opportunities, and give practical information about apprenticeships:

> *Better information about different types of jobs, don't type cast young people, don't tell them what they can't do, tell them there's always a chance. [ENG]*

Inclusive community-level approaches

Firstly, there is a need to deliberately include all, rather than simply hoping it will happen through usual community development approaches. By "all", survey respondents highlighted those with disabilities, on lower incomes, in different age brackets, or from multiple ethnic backgrounds, who should all be deliberately included in their rural communities where diversity is seen as a strength:

> *Get involved, come together, use each other's skills, make sure all are involved don't leave old, young, disabled, BME out! [ENG]*
>
> *Support all participants enable accessibility by providing transport to meetings and recognising and supporting disabilities such as dyslexia, ADD etc. There should be greater effort made to ensure mobility access, allowing the use of different methods of recording information i.e.: videos rather than written word etc. [ENG]*
>
> *Keep young people in the loop, educated and involved, take care of the next generation, the older generation, keep families together. [WLS]*
>
> *Intergenerational approach, both young and old are isolated and lonely. [ENG]*
>
> *Communities working together addressing their unique needs/ deficits, multi inclusive mix of class, age, race, gender, sexuality - the whole shebang. [SCOT]*
>
> *Equality of access where those with less financial assets are included. [SCOT]*

Inclusive process are likely to need specific actions and input – involving volunteer, community, and action groups, and/ or community champions to help bring the community together since for various reasons many people do not attend meetings or include themselves in committees. Creative approaches are required to hear multiple voices and ideas, such as local community groups aimed at building cohesion, including for those new to rural communities.

Specific processes for being more inclusive include providing the right times, places and physical spaces for bringing people together. This could be through informal, open access meetings outside core working hours, or providing paper or online newsletters for people to catch up with what is happening locally, or through community groups and non-family based social networks to connect people with different agendas or the isolated elderly. The meeting place is also key: it should be comfortable for people of all ages, with an atmosphere that is clearly there to give support, training, or a focus on health and wellbeing; or at low-cost, family friendly social events such as markets, fairs, or bonfires. If possible, there should be links with (voluntary) low-cost community transport, or the potential for developing more not-for-profit semi-communal housing options.

These opportunities to connect need to be built around not only needs, but also on people's diverse skills from across the community, so that issues and opportunities can be addressed in the short term and for the future. There is a need to start with easily-identifiable issues that people have in common, tackling these and then moving on to more significant issues, through careful, supportive conversations over time within communities. Asset-based approaches can be used to create projects that build on people's skills and resources. This can (and should) involve all sections of the community, providing capacity-building if necessary and bringing in multiple agencies and local government when required to enhance delivery. There was an emphasis on multi-generational projects, creating active community networks of school children, young people and the elderly, because they all have different perspectives, knowledge and skills – the only condition being that they are passionate about where they live.

Government, Councils and communities connecting and working together

Outcomes cannot all be achieved by communities in isolation, but through partnership with local government, community councils, wider stakeholders and other communities:

> *Some things can be - and are - addressed locally by local people (if they can find the funding) but many other things require thought and action at government level. No amount of local initiatives will change how local authorities or the health service are funded. [ENG]*

This highlights the need to enhance local government's understanding of "rural", by raising awareness of community challenges, working with local government to make sure that the value, contribution and needs of rural communities are heard, with an emphasis on being genuinely listened to. There is a desire to work with local government, showcasing the diversity of the rural economy – that is, farming and beyond agriculture. Awareness of rural could be enhanced by relocating more public sector departments in rural areas.

There is a desire for rural communities to be "given more opportunities to take leadership in decisions that affect rural communities", being empowered to co-ordinate rural community groups, have a valued say in their future, develop plans and deliver solutions. There should be a growing expectation of "meaningful and mature engagement between communities and local government", with communities supporting local government to improve where funds are spent and identify solutions. The strengths of such a partnership approach were emphasised, helping with the "translation of plans from theory into practice" as they are implemented on the ground. It is essential for people from rural communities to be involved from the outset to help support and guide the development of plans – to give their local knowledge and experience. Some rural communities will need support and resources to take part in such processes, with local government liaison groups supporting such processes – "bringing strategies to life".

There is a need to work with multiple stakeholders, not only with government, through joined-up agency thinking, sharing community expertise and learning through cooperation, accessing support from suitable external organisations with experienced staff, to "learn from the past as well as innovate for the future":

> *Work with all local groups, get the local authority involved in discussions rather than seeing them as the enemy. Learn from other communities and share knowledge. Use the opportunities that groups provide for training, conferences. [SCOT]*

Sustainable collaboration within community

Strong local relationships form the basis for action and support for one another, at the same time generating a sense of shared responsibility for action; otherwise it is much harder to achieve actions for the community. Community networks must be modern and fluid, extending outside the community, remembering the need to:

> *Get people involved - when the village is only 80 odd people, you need every hand you can get. [ENG]*
>
> *Get locals involved; make residents feel responsible for the place they live in. [ENG]*

Sustainable community engagement also means being loyal to local facilities and not travelling to those outside the local village or local town, buying local, using the local pub, supporting the small farms and local slaughter houses, etc.:

> *If the new facility/community project is working, then people should support it – a concerted effort. We need leaders of initiatives to work to ensure quality, and the community to then make sure they support it. [SCOT]*

There is a need to plan for the future, considering what rural communities need to be sustainable and thrive, specifically thinking about collective goals and benefits, future issues and ways to overcome them including the issue of population change, possible technological changes - imagining a future and supporting a process to deliver outcomes:

> *Start with comprehensive and inclusive visioning processes then support the development of facilities and local management skills. [ENG]*
>
> *Gather together under a core funded development group with staff and develop a plan with a step by step approach to increase capacity and confidence in the community. [SCOT]*

There is a desire to create, support, and/or train rural leaders who will be increasingly needed to deliver to the future challenges and opportunities for rural communities:

> *Identify and train inspirational leaders who then galvanise communities into action. [WLS]*
>
> *Create 'remote rural' 'champions / leaders who can help communities develop ideas but more importantly, can liaise with other stakeholders to turn ideas into 'reality'. [SCOT]*

Capacity-building must be coupled with creating and managing a more sustainable resource base, from resilient landscapes and ecosystems, through to community-led local food production, self-sufficiency and a 'circular economy'. This also requires an emphasis on diversity of products and services (rather than over-reliance on single products which can create vulnerability), plus social investment and technological focus:

> *More socially-minded investment in people, the environment, motivating and employing people of all ages, thinking outside the box. [WLS]*
>
> *Maximise opportunities from technology. Enhance skills from all to use technology as can be used to overcome barriers to access services like healthcare, employment, education etc. [NI]*

Integrated thinking

Connections must be made to maximise the knowledge, skills and experience that exist in rural communities, so that they can be mobilised to address challenges and create opportunities. This is about how people work and who they work with:

- link across, and work with, rural communities that are not necessarily close by creating stronger teams with bigger critical mass and skills to deliver larger projects together, including shared rural community resilience plans – rather than each community trying to survive on its own;
- create regional networking organisations to share learning from other rural regions and to enhance critical mass instead of communities working in parallel;
- bring different ages and professions together within the same and different communities, to identify ways forward, and share experience, knowledge-base and resources, especially from those who have already travelled the path and gone through change;
- create an inventory of mentors, champions and carers: "villagers are used to walking and will walk across fields to help a neighbour in need. There needs to be a directory of people needing care and those willing to deliver care in rural areas." [ENG]
- increase the number and type of cooperatives, including informal 'trading' of skills (e.g. timebanking-type approaches) plus pooling resources to enhance buying power;
- link community buses, shops and other community services (some semi-mobile e.g. banks rotating between neighbouring villages) - encouraging integrated thinking across communities
- more and different involvement of existing bodies such as parish councils or agricultural show societies;
- integrate new housing with community or public buses and future-proof the planning aspects;
- create reasons for non-rural dwellers to invest in rural communities so that they can offer employment opportunities within the community, thus encouraging families to stay and keep schools open, make public transport viable, and encourage the community to be more self-sufficient;
- partner rural and urban schools to share resources, including via technological connections, and share visits to each other through "twinning";
- strategic partnering of primary and/or secondary schools with employers and trainers, from an early age for the children.

Action and campaign

Action is needed in order to have control, feel listened to, garner community spirit (rather than slip into complaining), and fight for the maintenance of services, housing, and community spaces – pulling together people of all ages. Community mentors may sometimes help support these actions. Specific goals include revitalising communities by attracting new people to come and live in the area, and tackling hidden poverty.

Action to develop a strong rural voice brings awareness to those who perhaps do not understand why and how rural communities are important, as well as campaigning for specific actions to take place. Campaigning and lobbying focus on: profile-raising for rural as a whole, highlighting what rural contributes (e.g. food, environment, tourism), highlighting the daily struggles and hard work of rural areas and how the countryside works, the challenges of poor infrastructure, and the need to create an affordable future for rural children, for example in terms of housing.

Lobbying is intended to reach local and national governments, and related agencies that make decisions affecting local rural development options. It is important to work with governments, whilst remaining assertive: "standing up and being heard", "fighting" for services, "advocating" for rural needs and "refusing to accept second best".
Creating a collective voice creates "power in numbers", plus it enables a voice for the isolated and small communities that perhaps do not have the resources to speak for themselves in an impactful way.

Effective, inclusive communication

Inclusive communication does not need a shiny, dedicated building, but instead should be based on one-to-one efforts, making sure people in the community (particularly those who may be more remote due to personal circumstances or geography) are all informed about what is happening, and know that they are welcome. Opportunities need to be created to ensure people feel included, with much more use made of online resources (websites and social media) as well as utilising multiple rural locations:

> *To get involved in the first place, people need to know what's happening. Not everyone is linked to the church or community groups, and many voices go unheard. Places such as the local pharmacy or GP surgeries should be used to disseminate information. Hopefully GPs would be up for this as social connectivity contributes to good physical and mental health. [NI]*

There is a need to create social links deliberately, through community groups, drop-in hubs that meet regularly on known days (for socialising and/or information and advice), rural hubs on particular topics (for sharing experiences and supporting one another), and structures for remote rural communities to share experiences with one another and combine their voices to feed into government channels.

Digital technology must be harnessed as a means to connect, recognising that not all rural areas will have fast broadband, and that not all people will be connected to broadband (due to cost, availability, choice or age) and could therefore be excluded. For those who can connect, community websites are a positive way to communicate and share information, plus a means to link through to other (agency) sites to access courses, grants, training, employment and so on. Social media (Twitter and particularly Facebook) can "promote community cohesion and spread awareness of issues and events", since they can be used to gather ideas and discuss opportunities with local residents, increase the diversity of those getting involved, enable learning exchanges between nearby villages, facilitate sharing of experience between more distant villages and internationally, and create groups of like-minded individuals.

Community centres or hubs

These are described as local schools (including community schools), rural pubs, the local church, village halls, and (non-specified) anchor organisations. The benefits and outcomes of having a community hub are that it can be a local place where people band together, skills are shared, learning and social cohesion happen, young people feel more connected to their community, concerns can be raised and all generations can be integrated. In contrast, the impact of having no community hub is highlighted:

> *We have nowhere for young people to go, no village hall/youth club and no children's playground, having these places might help. [ENG]*
>
> *We try and continue to try. It is very hard without a meeting place. With just tiny steps forward each year people lose heart. It is so hard to fight for every tiny morsel and maintain enthusiasm. [WLS]*

Funding

There should be less reliance on volunteers, with salaries to fund (at least) key roles in community projects, rather than expecting such a high input from volunteers to deliver at community level:

> *Paid employment for community champions. I'd love to do more than just help our neighbours but I also need to earn money to pay the mortgage and put food on the table. Funding is inconsistent. Something starts but then finding runs out and stops. [ENG]*

This is particularly the case as local development groups and organisations depend heavily on volunteers, some of whom may lose motivation and/or experience burnout, due to the immense amount of voluntary work they are already carrying out:

> *People already are working together on a huge variety of initiatives including keeping toilets open, fundraising for community assets, volunteering to keep community resources open like the village hall, gritting roads, sharing transport, fundraising for training courses, children's facilities and natural and cultural heritage conservation. [SCOT]*
>
> *We have been doing this for a number of years in NI. People are exhausted with the constant lack of security in funding of projects. [NI]*

There is a simple need for funding at community level, to deliver benefits such as community engagement, cohesion, strength, and pride, learning, creating a respected voice for local people and a chance to make their area thrive. Given these benefits, and the outcomes of delivered projects, respondents continue to campaign for service retention and deliver funded projects, but ultimately money issues recur. A sense of unfairness over lack of funding and service closure is experienced as a "domino-effect":

> *People are already working on a voluntary basis to keep the local shop open, if we lose our nursery, the school will follow, why should we lose these valuable services due to underfunding? [ENG]*

Businesses

There are great advantages to businesses being more involved in working with communities to address the future challenges facing rural areas. They often have innovative ideas to help solve problems, encourage new income streams and investment, and enable rural communities to be marketed as locations for self-employed entrepreneurs. There is particular encouragement for community-based businesses that "work for the community and offer something to future generations":

> *Through the creation of community trusts or businesses, residents feel empowered and have a real stake in how things are run. [SCOT]*
>
> *By building inclusive and cohesive communities and community interest companies to take charge of delivery of local services tackling the rural deficit in transport, care services and micro-enterprises. [NI]*

By including young people in their business models, rural businesses can show the next generation that there is a future for them in their local rural area. Training and development can help to progress rural businesses, also ensuring young people make a living in rural areas. Again, the emphasis is on both traditional and new enterprises, opening up horizons for young people across a breadth of rural businesses, from specialised to the local area, to training in basic skills (as these will always be needed), through to meeting current and future high-tech demands:

> *Stimulate high value economic activity and enterprise facilitated by broadband. [SCOT]*
>
> *Start up local business that can compete on a global scale using the internet. [NI]*
>
> *Invest in energy efficiency of housing stock - also creates jobs. [NI]*

To foster sharing of skills, resources (including equipment), marketing and so on there is a need to support innovation hubs where small businesses can meet and work together in shared spaces at extremely low cost. These spaces foster the exchange of ideas and new ways of working that would not happen otherwise. This is particularly important in rural areas to increase the critical mass of dispersed rural businesses, through sharing resources and increased co-operative working.

Rural Policy focus

Respondents noted that there should be a cross-sectoral rural strategy within both central and local government policy (that is, centrally for each jurisdiction and at local government level within each jurisdiction). There is a need to have a realistic vision of the "purpose of rural", with a clear idea of the countryside that the government wants, with "rural-proofing" to ensure its delivery.

Policy was believed to focus on the areas of greater population, and within that, on those poorer areas of cities where "need appears to be higher":

> *Government needs to take this seriously as they currently respond to the greatest population concentrations rather than the greatest geographic needs. [ENG]*

Respondents question why rural communities are being asked to solve their own structural problems (broadband, housing) when urban areas are not asked to do the same. There is no consistent interest in rural communities, but instead the focus is on urban areas from both central and local governments. They suggested a need to "frame" rural residents as a minority, in a similar way to ethnic or disabled minorities, in order to ensure fairer treatment:

> *Include geographical exclusion alongside ethnicity and disability etc. in monitoring criteria for funders. You get what you measure! [ENG]*
>
> *Get National Governments to treat rural populations with the same degree of priority as they do different ethnic populations. [SCOT]*

Theme 6
Successful community-led projects that aim to remove barriers in remote rural communities

Key messages

1. A total of 550 projects were described from across rural UK.
2. The most common projects are physical community hubs. These provide many different services and have many different functions, acting as a focal point for the community and encouraging a sense of pride.
3. Other common projects include those to help overcome loneliness, and those that address people's isolation by including the harder-to-reach in society, with a focus on mental wellbeing and the elderly.
4. Communities are also focused on connection, leading on transport schemes to act as the 'glue' in rural areas, as well as community broadband projects and websites which help to connect people locally and with the 'outside world'.
5. Many projects typically deliver multiple outcomes, such as arts activities also increasing personal confidence and community connections, food projects also focusing on linking people with the land and with each other. Community land ownership (in Scotland) also delivers to diverse goals including affordable housing, economic activities, re-population and raising school roll numbers.

Figure 1 illustrates how often the different types of 550 projects were reported, and Table 1 shows the different project categories.

Figure 1: Illustration of the types of projects put forward by survey respondents [11]. The size of the shapes represents the number of times a project type was suggested. Therefore, "community centres" received the most responses, "websites" the fewest.

[11] From 550 respondents

Title and/or Code	Description of reported project type
Community Centre	Building or refurbishment of physical centres for community use. Includes shops, village halls, sports hall/facility and multi-functional spaces.
Inclusion	Specifically focused on those who are harder-to-reach, on excluded groups and individuals, and in addressing community divides and bringing people from across the divides together.
Isolation	Isolation Projects specifically targeted at those experiencing isolation and/or loneliness.
Broadband	Community-led broadband delivery on the ground.
Arts	Creative arts and culture based in community/communities. Includes art exhibitions, mobile rural cinemas, theatres as well as participative arts and crafts with the community. Some are solely arts-focused; others combine this with a social inclusion approach.
Training & Skills	Training and skills to be more employable, to increase confidence, to live a healthier lifestyle (e.g. through cooking skills), financial and business management, IT skills; some youth-focused, others all age groups.
Community Transport	Focused on those who otherwise would not be able to access jobs, training, shops, healthcare, each other and community events. Includes community buses, demand-led, and "Wheels to Work" (moped rental/lease schemes).
Employment	Focused on providing jobs locally, either youth-only or all ages.
Mental wellbeing	To reduce stigma, promote inclusion and address mental ill health
Food	Promoting local food from locality or region; raising awareness of where food comes from, including through farm visits for children.
Elderly	Focused on including the elderly and addressing their needs.
Environment	Protecting and/or promoting local physical environment.
Energy	Low-cost and/or green energy schemes, some of which are also focused on reducing rural fuel poverty.
Land	Where the local community of place buys the land they live on (or land nearby to them) so that they can regenerate their community/ies.
Housing	Local affordable housing for local community; often in small numbers linked to locally-identified need, with positive knock-on effects for school, businesses etc.
Web	Setting-up of online communities with the purpose of connecting people locally.

Table 1: Project codes and descriptions – the latter taken from an analysis of respondents' project descriptions.

Community centres

The majority of these are physical places and spaces allowing communities to achieve and deliver many (often inter-related) services, support and facilities. Centres bring the community together, generating a sense of pride and overcoming loneliness. The following diverse quotes are illustrative of the aims, outcomes, process and different types of facilities:

> *Providing a local amenity, providing a place to meet, removing need to travel by car to get essentials, provide community with something to be proud of [Community shop, ENG]*

There are many clubs and societies that take place. There's also annual parties that bring the whole village together. They also have speakers coming in from around the country to give talks at the history society etc. Lovely refurbished space with a kitchen. Hold children's parties too which is nice [Village hall, ENG]

Before a lack of facilities that bring people, especially young people, together. Dispels loneliness with regular classes and events where all are welcome [New village hall and all-weather sports pitch, ENG]

Get people talking & interacting again… encouraging local pride [Library community centre, ENG]

It provides goods for people without transport, a place to meet, volunteering helps people who would be isolated, training for young people to work, banking and other service through PO, community computer and free internet access [community space, ENG]

Lack of local food shop and post office especially difficult for people without cars and to reduce loneliness. People could go one morning a week and enjoy each other's company and buy basic provisions plus bank and fishmonger vans and keep the community together [church shop, ENG]

Prevented conversion to chain shop and damage to independent local businesses. Community engagement, involvement and investment. Strong vision and outcome that provided new independent retail opportunities and rented accommodation. Community minded project [Community buy-out of closed pub, WLS]

Bring community together to support each other and create places to meet in a village with nowhere to do this [Village trust, ENG]

Difficulty accessing sporting facilities due to distance. The community worked like stink to make it happen. It's a fantastically well maintained and run facility [Community-owned leisure centre, SCOT]

Community all value it and each family take turns to clean it to keep costs down. Population increased on island partly as a result of it. Somewhere for parties, church Services, gym for school, toddler group to meet, GP appointments. Multipurpose [Island village hall, SCOT]

Due to the local Post office closing down the village would have had a lack of infrastructure. The community banded together to solve the problem and worked tirelessly to renovate the old school site to open up a community run shop. [Community shop, WLS]

Access to safe accessible community space. Hall busy with YFC, yoga etc. [Church hall, WLS]

Inclusion and overcoming isolation

Many projects focus on connecting individuals and communities through supporting and listening to people, creating a sense of "belonging", engaging hard-to-reach groups, mixing generations, overcoming divisions, providing practical support (such as childcare and transport) and creating informality around different activities:

So far it's already building community spirit, people getting to know each other, a sense of purpose and belonging, reaching out to those in difficulty, supporting each other, bonding, helping [Community shop and café, ENG]

Offering opportunities to hard to reach groups. Community owned and run by locals who know the different communities [Community-funded building, ENG]

It is inclusive. Has generations mixing together. An outlet for sharing hobbies like gardening; baking; reading. When people know each other they look after each other [Pub is the Hub, WLS]

Loneliness and need for car transportation. It has provided shop, cafe and community activities [Community shop, WLS]

Isolation, lack of services, childcare at affordable rates, affordable meals. Developed by the community for the community. Responded to a real need. Community were trained with the right capacity to undertake rural community development work. It kept grounded in the needs of the community and it was successful in gaining grants and funding [Community centre, NI]

Provides opportunities for pre-entry level courses for women in rural areas aimed at confidence building and networking for isolated women. Driven by human need and understanding and funding was often based on local trust [Women's training group, ENG]

Social isolation, apathy and lack of agency by local people, lack of joined up thinking, sectarianism, poor education and skills. Long term it has been supporting our local community for a long time and continues to get engaged in innovative and contemporary projects aimed at a wide range of rural and social cohesion based projects [Inclusion project, NI]

By holding "what matters" conversations with people, listening to what they have to say, and connecting them with things that are happening in the local community, and with each other [Community connectors, Wales]

There was isolation, divisions/negativity within the community, apathy and loss of identity as a community. The project brought all generations together, creatively, utilised and highlighted community skills (logistics, design, craft, story-telling etc.), donations from residents, the wider communities and other villages generated goodwill and 'ownership'. Heritage was celebrated and linked to local trails and landmarks fostering community pride and rebuilding a sense of purpose and unity" [Community heritage project, SCOT]

It travels around to communities; friendly, welcoming, quirky, non-judgmental inclusive, free, kind; tackles isolation and loneliness [Rural outreach, ENG]

Dedication and team-work from the charity addressed their isolation, their home and school and social challenges, their poverty and psychological needs [Local youth carers' charity, SCOT]

Access to affordable childcare locally; available locally in the community, also provided job and career opportunities for childcare staff [Community childcare, SCOT]

Providing services and activities for families to get involved in. Bringing communities together and social inclusion with activities being affordable and accessible and timely. Preschool age children and families [Community-led, family-focused project, ENG]

Mental wellbeing

These are projects that concentrate on the needs of those experiencing mental ill health, and on improving mental wellbeing, from those focused specifically on depression and suicide, through to those that offer someone to talk to , improve self-esteem, and provide access to therapy, as well as working with arts, cinema, and physical wellbeing as routes into enjoyment and support:

Depression, loneliness, feeling of isolation. We encouraged men to become active in the community [Men's Sheds, NI]

1:1 support to access existing services and activities for lonely people, to address their loneliness and isolation [Community health project, SCOT]

Suicide prevention project working in small villages; it worked with the community in its design. It let the community say what it needed and what would work [Rural project, ENG]

Mental health & wellbeing connecting people to supportive community" [Rural research project, SCOT]

Mental health, employment, isolation – inclusion, real qualification, self-esteem [Targeted local employability programme, ENG]

Transport, mental health, remoteness; they have a wide variety of projects [Rural youth project, ENG]

Got a large amount of people involved with something unusual. Got people talking and considering mental health and rural isolation, an issue we often brush under the rug and do not discuss [Young Farmers "on tour", ENG]

Charity set up to provide therapy through gardening for mental health issues, rural isolation etc. Rural isolation and access to therapy services for people without having to travel hours to reach a city with provision which would be less relevant. It is local and fits in with the community culture and run by local residents [Local community gardening group focused on mental wellbeing, ENG]

Mixing arts, support and library in one place as well as doing great work in the wider community. Rural isolation especially for those with learning difficulties, dementia and carers. Also house a library in a rural area with poor transport links [Community-led creative arts and celebration, ENG]

Our dementia-friendly Nostalgic cinema… therapeutic for people with memory problems and their families. Besides engaging the brain and stimulating emotions, being part of an audience enjoying a film helps people with dementia and their carers to feel less isolated [Community cinema, ENG]

Feelings of exclusion from local society for those with dementia or Alzheimer's, Parkinson's Disease, strokes and the outside world and those who do not suffer from these conditions. People have come together regularly, even being collected and driven to the meeting and felt part of a group. They have been valued for their contributions in singing and just being there [Community music group, SCOT]

Inspiration, Physical and Mental wellbeing, creativity, community cohesion; 2 key people volunteering their time / determination / good vision [Art and wellness centre, ENG]

Elderly

Many of the elderly face particular challenges around isolation, loneliness, mobility and connectedness, with projects showing the benefits of mixing of generations, the provision of meeting places, bus services, shopping opportunities and connecting people:

> *Loneliness in the older generation... It has worked as people now can join in with activities, they mix with others from different age groups and backgrounds [Community hub, ENG]*
>
> *Encouraged the elderly to socialise; offered a meeting place and opportunity to meet younger members of the community [Centre, WLS]*
>
> *Loneliness and solitude with elderly, less mobile communities – our bus services increased mobility, made communities more active and therefore decreased government spending on medical services for elderly people [Bus services for the elderly, WLS]*
>
> *Does shopping, provides social events for elderly; loneliness; inability to get out; gives inter-generational contact [Shopping support for the elderly, SCOT]*
>
> *Socialising for rural elderly. Reports from various people of how their mother/father enjoy their day there [Farming visitor centre, ENG]*
>
> *People connect isolated people to services e.g. health and social care; otherwise isolation and non-use of services. One person to connect people to help [Rural connecting service for the elderly, ENG]*
>
> *Tuesday lunch sessions in the village hall help with loneliness of old people; a minibus has been available to collect people [Rural lunch club for elderly, ENG]*
>
> *New village shop/post office has helped the elderly and those without cars to access basic provisions [New village shop and Post Office, ENG]*

Community transport

This is the essential "glue" that connects people to the community-based projects and services, with important outcomes of accessing jobs, services, and training, as well as making important social and cultural connections:

> *Difficulties in getting to and from work: people can hire scooters to help them access work [Wheels to Work, WLS]*
>
> *Bridged the gap between declining rural bus services and youngsters accessing vital educational or employment opportunities. Scooter hire and car hire not-for-profit to enable youngsters to access FE institutions and apprenticeship schemes [Wheels to Work, ENG]*
>
> *Social isolation - access to services, delivered by local people [Community transport, NI]*
>
> *It met a desperate need for people to be able to get into town for food shopping, healthcare and to see other people and be part of their community. Some users rarely get out of their homes without it. It also serves an after school club and community outings. [Dial-a-bus, WLS]*

> *Lack of public transport and taxis; barrier to getting out and about socially and to appointments. Willingness of volunteer drivers to provide essential and social transport. Run by the community for the community … Small number of individuals working very hard. Enables people without their own transport to get about [Inter-island community transport, SCOT]*
>
> *It provided a life-line to the vulnerable otherwise stuck at home alone; those otherwise isolated and struggle to have a social life and meet appointments etc. [Island community transport, SCOT]*
>
> *Social isolation/ difficulties in getting to doctors and hospitals; well set up and good volunteers [Community transport, SCOT]*

Community transport also allows *other* rural services to operate:

> *Good PR, good timing of event, strong links to local community transport groups. Local artists gaining greater recognition and increased sales [community arts and transport, SCOT]*
>
> *Firstly it allowed another organisation to offer a service that would not otherwise have been available to those most remotely situated. It also provides a transport link both locally and to more distant towns. [Community transport, SCOT]*

Arts projects

These have either broader inclusivity aims or are specifically about "bringing arts to rural communities". Diverse projects range from films and cinema, passing on skills to the next generation, and a collective art trail, to increasing people's confidence and mixing generations:

> *It aims to bring high quality arts and events to the local community - cinema showings, theatre, forest playgroup activities etc. [Community arts in existing community centre, ENG]*
>
> *Participation, access, and enjoyment of arts activities plus local community services e.g. transport; job and volunteer role creation [Arts centre, SCOT]*
>
> *Passing on generational skills and create skilled employment. The project started in 2003 and is still going strong with harps exported across the world. Around 110 harps made and sold annually [Harp workshop, WLS]*
>
> *It brought education to the area, and offered high quality training in something young people would never have had the opportunity to learn in situ. It had a clear purpose, committed tutors, and engaged well with those who attended. They dealt very well with my daughter's disabilities, and gave her confidence to proceed. [British Film Institute course for young people in rural areas, SCOT]*
>
> *Access to the arts; access to employment. It is rooted in the local community and responds to what local people want and need [Community arts, NI]*
>
> *Isolation amongst working artists/crafters and lack of selling opportunities; brought people together and helped promote their work to buyers [Local art trail, WLS]*
>
> *Yes, definitely has brought many people out into the spotlight and boosted their confidence [Community drama group, SCOT]*

A film was made history fact+ fiction. Met lots of neighbours, really, really good. People discovered so much; history and neighbours [Rural media company working with community, ENG]

Touring, supporting local community venues, schools or pubs to host film and performance for the local community. Increasing access to cultural opportunities by utilising facilities already within the community, supporting local people to have a say in the content of this and address transport as people can walk to the events [Rural touring arts, ENG]

Access to films in a social context. People enjoyed the excuse to go out and meet others [Films taken to village halls, ENG]

Activities engage community across a broad spectrum: education at primary school age, workshops and apprentice-type events to engage older community members; engaging and incorporating relevant small local businesses [Local history/community, ENG]

Broadband

The need for digital connectivity is recognised in a number of community-led projects, with benefits for businesses and communities, plus access to employment, educational opportunities, as well as overcoming isolation and providing a sense of connectedness:

Lack of broadband availability in this peninsula; committed, capable individuals persevering to overcome numerous obstacles - a very isolated community with a number of highly motivated social entrepreneurs [Community broadband, SCOT]

With over 75 properties now part of their scheme, this has enabled people to run their businesses and for families to stay connected. To promote business and sense of social wellbeing [Community broadband, WLS]

Improve communication links in sparsely populated county to improve work opportunities (small businesses/work from home) and reduce social isolation [County-level community broadband network, ENG]

Our broadband speed has gone up from 0.2MBS to nearly 10MBS. Local, community owned resource. Can speak to someone easily if any problems. Had problems uploading documents for e.g. funding applications, submitting university coursework (UHI) before community broadband [On-island community broadband, SCOT]

Enhanced broadband means many more people are able to make a living without leaving their area [Community broadband, SCOT]

Community owned not-for-profit company operated by volunteers; volunteer-based, created a new team and sense of community. Local people were involved in laying the cables and connecting it to the houses. New and old members of the community could see the potential. Innovative, community-led, community-owned and managed, no fat cats; return profits to source community [Community broadband, ENG]

This is a remote town which previously had very poor internet availability. This is a service people needed to access educational, social and business services. People worked hard to make it work. Enabled local broadband provision to many who couldn't access internet services previously [Community broadband, ENG]

Community-based website projects

These are key to connecting people who are already physically near to one another, but perhaps do not know one another, and/or are unable to be out and about as much as they would like:

> *Gets people communicating and sharing knowledge. Bringing together people from my village and surrounding villages, to promote events, buy and sell items, recommended services, finding accommodation and job vacancies etc. Because I live some distance outside the village has helped me feel connected for the first time since I moved here in 1998 [Local community-led website, ENG]*
>
> *Connect the home with the outside even when you cannot get out [Local neighbourhood website, ENG]*

Employment, training and skills

Community-based projects recognise the range of skills needed – not only for employment, but also in relation to having the confidence to apply for jobs and run businesses, as well as some basic home-making skills:

> *Social isolation, employment, training, access to services, digital inclusion, single identity – we now have affordable units/room hire, accessible, activities, outreach services, hub of community [Social enterprise community hub, NI]*
>
> *Lack of employment and income within local communities; the project employs local young people, brings people to the area allowing local community to access more income [Local employment project, WLS]*
>
> *Young people learning more about managing money effectively and training in the agriculture sector [Young Farmers Clubs, NI]*
>
> *Creates meaning and skill for people ostracised in rural areas and allows them to access support when few other services [Woodland-based training service, WLS]*
>
> *Brought together folks from all over the local area and beyond to talk about STEM; increased interest and engagement with STEM [Local science festival, SCOT]*
>
> *Overcoming barriers to employment through low-carbon enterprises. Progression from volunteering into wage-subsidy training placements and then supported to find work. Activities that tackle need: access to fresh local produce; recycling services with zero waste ethos; reuse furniture at affordable prices; community car club giving access to vehicle when needed [Environmental social enterprise, SCOT]*
>
> *Classes, supervises an apprenticeship scheme. IT classes bring people of all ages together and enables people to find work and become IT aware [Local learning centre, SCOT]*
>
> *Supports people to build their confidence to be able to gain skills/employment or volunteer in their community; those furthest from employment in a rural area [Rural community action project, ENG]*
>
> *Dedicated community engagement staff targeting young people needing alternatives to school and college, five year funding. Access to info and experience in rural employment for young people [Rural skills partnership, SCOT]*
>
> *Valuable subjects and skills taught in an accessible way, open and welcoming. Encouraging younger folk to stay in rural communities and to see that they can have a viable future there [Crofting training, SCOT]*

This project works with those furthest from employment. It runs Job Search Sessions and training courses free of charge for unemployed/or those wanting to change jobs, and links job seekers with local businesses. It particularly targets young people and those at the edge of the community, those with little or few skills, no transport and those who feel they have nothing to offer. The trustees and the staff are all local people and therefore have a unique understanding of the people and location. The training element of the scheme taps into the interests/hobbies of long-term unemployed and provides training and support [Local neighbourhood/community job search and support, ENG].

Isolation, poor training and lack of access to skills. Farmers now meet regularly, attending training and social groups; meet regularly with farmers you wouldn't normally meet, get to exchange ideas. Regular talks from industry experts. Driving force with local politicians. Provide training courses locally. It has had time to embed, grow and develop rather than it being a 1/2 year programme that starts and suddenly stops. Deliver what best suits the local community to keep it sustainable and meet changing needs in the future [Hill farming network, ENG].

Successfully tackled isolation of rural entrepreneurs, enabling rural SME entrepreneurs to network/ access training [Community enterprise network, ENG]

Food

Projects include ensuring local food is consumed locally, to those using the food-growing process to reconnect people with food and the land, and with one another:

This project addresses issues of local knowledge and social isolation; gives out allotments for any volunteers and offers courses on the growing seasons in the garden etc. [Walled garden, WLS]

Simple, consumer and producer-friendly system of trading... addresses supply chain barriers to local food producers to access consumers [Food collective, WLS]

The estrangement of people from their food production... people are engaging with the idea of growing their own and fruit and veg and starting to see the possibilities [Community project, SCOT]

Loneliness, access to fresh produce, inter-generational contacts [Island grow-your-own project, SCOT]

Total Dependence on mainland for meat products despite a strong community producing excellent quality beef and lamb on the islands. Promoted self-sufficiency within the islands, Added Value to products which can now be marketed uniquely elsewhere whilst also being available to local communities at a competitive price. Reduce Carbon footprint and food miles for a local food source." [Island abattoir, SCOT].

Getting local products to market; route to market for local producers. Community worked together. Everyone treated the same; large community buy-in, grass roots initiative [Island community retail outlet, SCOT]

The local producers, the local community and tourists supported the enterprise and everyone wanted access to fresh, local food [Local farmers' market, SCOT]

Drive to push local food into the market place. Profitable and growing business [Local food network, ENG]

Opening up trade opportunities for local food producers and bringing the community together in the wake of the closure of the agricultural market. Hard work of many volunteers to get it off the ground. It has now been going for almost 20 years [Cheese Festival, ENG]

Energy-focused

Various projects typically focus on communities regaining control over their resources, community power-generation schemes and looking at what that power could do, in terms of enabling community spaces to be used:

> *Community-centred energy provision. Power given to local communities and individuals rather than big business [Community energy scheme, WLS]*
>
> *By improving the village hall's energy requirements made the place more comfortable and easier to both rent out for social/hobby occasions. It gave the community a feeling of involvement. Next step is to supply a multi-gym to allow more people to use the hall [Energy make-over of village hall, WLS]*
>
> *Home-visit-based and bespoke; helps to address fuel poverty and rural isolation [Community energy agency, SCOT]*

Community energy projects:

> *People could relate to it, and connect to it, as well as buy shares. Access to unrestricted finance for local groups [Local hydro scheme "A", SCOT]*
>
> *Unused resource converted to income for community projects. Many involved in funding thus have ownership. People with passion and energy to drive it [Local hydro scheme "B", SCOT]*
>
> *Community-funded and worked together to achieve cheaper electricity; self-investment and money saving [Local river hydro scheme, ENG]*
>
> *Much time and effort has gone into creating events and programmes to fulfil many local needs/requests - transport, education, social activities (wind energy resources, Scotland)*

Environmental priorities

Such priorities are nestled within other project types, as well as forming the basis of projects focused on environmental improvement for community cohesion:

> *A larger charity supplied information and helped get projects going. It led to groups of people coming together reducing isolation and also increased education and awareness [Beach cleaning, ENG]*
>
> *Farmers working with Environment Agency/local groups. Brings key people together with farmers who listen to the farmers' knowledge of many years and we all want to work together [Local catchment area group, ENG]*

Housing

Projects enable small numbers of houses to be built that meet local need, with specific benefits and outcomes of being community-led, including affordability:

> *Open negotiation with community association, District Councils, Housing Associations, Private Developers and the community (via a Housing Market Assessment) opened the doors for housing need to be addressed where it would count [Local rural housing enablers example, ENG]*

The design of the two family houses was heavily influenced by the specific needs and demands of the local community. They were delivered despite being told they would be too expensive and there was no housing need in the area. Both houses are now occupied and have helped strengthen the school roll. The local primary school had previously been under threat of closure. It has really buoyed the community - they have seen the impact – seeing is believing [Island community housing development, SCOT]

The houses are specifically for local residents and cannot be bought as a holiday home. The rents are fixed at an affordable rate. The project came out of the island itself: from the initial idea all the way through the project to allocating the newly built houses, we did the whole thing ourselves. We worked to get what we needed. [Island community housing development, SCOT]

Rural Homelessness and Lack of Homelessness Services in Rural Areas. Provides direct accommodation for six rough sleepers in the mainly rural areas locally. Partnership. House provides initial assessment of rough sleepers, with their needs and routes out of homelessness evaluated. It then provides 12 weeks of accommodation before more long-term accommodation can be secured [Rural homelessness charity, ENG]

Difficulty of finding affordable local housing for families; fuel (and absolute) poverty. Created housing to fill an identified need locally [Very energy-efficient housing, SCOT]

Community land ownership

Highlighted by respondents in Scotland, with two additional examples from England, the benefits listed by respondents are:

- It empowered people within a community, socially-included everyone, Trust brings in funding which can then be used to give back to the community... simple really... [Island community land trust, SCOT]
- Community striving for community identified priorities [Island community land trust, SCOT]
- Refocussing on the people who live there; the people choose the focus [Island community land trust, SCOT]
- Sense of possibility and emergence of a new, effective political voice [Island community land trust, SCOT]
- Led to empowerment, cooperation and equality [Island community land trust, SCOT]
- Appears designed to genuinely address local needs and remove bureaucracy, especially affordable housing [Community land trust, ENG]

Theme 7
How are new technologies being harnessed to address the challenges of "remote rural" living and working?

Key messages

1. There is a strong desire to harness the possibilities that new technologies bring. First though, rural areas must be given reliable, resilient, high-speed broadband and universal mobile coverage.
2. If this happens, rural people will innovate and then there can be a "bright future of digital possibilities", including access to remote services; attracting businesses to the local rural area; networking and connecting (locally and beyond); communal fuel buying to help those in fuel poverty; or even e-cars, e-buses and e-charging points.
3. Though keen to seize this potential, communities realise they must make sure those without technology are not excluded, and that both digital training and offline channels must be provided.

Broadband and mobile infrastructure must exist

The starting-point [12] is that, before considering the potential for new technologies, there is a need to ensure reliable, resilient, high-speed broadband and universal mobile coverage. If not, many of the possibilities that could be achieved through new technological applications simply will not be possible in rural areas, meaning communities will fall further behind and miss out on ways to develop and create new digital pathways. This relates not only to fixed broadband, but also to WiFi hubs in central village locations, as well as to the maintenance of broadband and mobile networks following installation, to ensure that benefits continue for individuals and wider communities:

> *Mobile phone network needs to be maintained; funding seems to be used to install but then maintenance is extremely poor; months without phone network in many places; it is our only broadband connection. [ENG]*

There are a number of reasons why the need for fast, reliable broadband and mobile coverage is increasing, including:

- falling behind relative to towns and cities, for example: "I get 0.3 meg broadband!! Friends talk of 100. What chance do I stand?" [WLS];
- the requirement to complete forms online for local and national government;
- safety of lone workers, including farmers and vets;
- existing and new businesses cannot thrive without such connectivity due to needing to be connected with their customers and clients; therefore new, high-tech businesses will not locate in rural areas, limiting employment choices, salaries and reducing young returners;
- home-working and long-distance/online education cannot take place without it, meaning out-migration from rural areas will continue as a default trend; lack of access to national business tutorials and "the kind of online training available to those with good broadband" [WLS];

[12] Respondents: 1,014

- online banking will not be possible, coupled with the reduction in physical banking services;
- lives may be (and in some cases are being) endangered or lost due to lack of remote access to specialist physical and mental health knowledge and care;
- social isolation, due to being "unable to view the outside world online, feeding into exclusion for rural people" [NI].

Collectively, these lead to the argument that there should be a "legal entitlement" to the same digital connectivity as cities, to overcome digital exclusion that is already taking place and will continue to deepen and speed up as technologies advance. In contrast: "Give people access to reliable broadband, and they'll innovate themselves" [WLS], with many exploring what having high-speed connectivity (broadband and mobile) would allow for their rural areas - some we would perhaps anticipate, some less so.

Websites and social media

Non-commercial websites are important, as information sources for "What's On" in the local (and neighbouring) community, a channel for constructive discussion on issues, concerns and opportunities that matter to people locally, as a direct (and easy-to-navigate) link to local government, a place to ask for and offer help (lifts, social care needs), to provide information for those new to the area, to promote local projects, services and events, or local job opportunities for both skilled and unskilled labour. They can also provide information in emergencies (linked to communication boards on roads) or a means to support and encourage participation in community buying schemes (oil, solid fuel, grit). Coupled with social media (Facebook, Apps) they can organise people to work together around specific projects, share good news stories around health and wellbeing and provide access to broadcast community or club talks as webinars to those who cannot come.

In addition to these community-focused aspects, the website could be used to boost tourism – having an "external" marketing focus. Interactive touchscreen noticeboards for those new to a rural community and for visitors could be placed centrally, providing local information.

Facebook is a really useful way to share information easily, including for linking up to local services, and for setting up friendship groups to overcome personal isolation. Mobile phone apps are highlighted as good for the community to share ideas, to discuss issues or problems in the community, and/or to access emergency home visit carers or district nurse.

"Smart" rural transport

There is significant scope for community-based electric cars available for cheap rental, charging points for electric cars at central village hubs, hotels and youth hostels (attracting people to them), and/or at bus stops (allowing for integrated transport), and the use of community-owned renewables projects to power such charging points. This would address fuel poverty and financial challenges for those who felt that they had to own a car, thereby increasing people's mobility and reducing their social isolation. It would also reduce the need for households to own more than one vehicle, reducing costs and carbon footprint. In addition to cars, a network of electric minibuses for an on-demand service, possibly using EV technology combined with charging points, could address many cost and isolation challenges.

"Smart" community-based, on-demand rural transport systems would enable shared shuttle services (bus and boat), community taxis, emergency lifts (such as to the GP) linking smartly with mobile prescription delivery, and grocery shops, banks or post offices could use community buses as an "Uber" for their business. This would make the delivery of services more efficient and effective, allowing greater access to (and therefore sustainability of) training courses, societies and carers, by giving accessibility to people without cars. Importantly, isolation being experienced by young people "caught between" villages and their towns would be greatly reduced and would support more learners (including but not only young people) to access school or college.

Driverless cars are seen as ideal for older people who may no longer have a driving licence and therefore feel trapped in their homes. These "self-guided personal transport systems" could be used as a community taxi service, bringing people to local community-based events, and have the potential to address many current isolation and access concerns, allowing people to access facilities and services.

Respondents also suggest integration of e-smart services through the use of Apps, for example to alert system users to service changes such as cancellations of buses, road closures, or to provide a local alert system for the arrival of a service, and a live information line for the buses on demand.

Energy and Renewables

Community renewable energy schemes, community energy sharing, and sustainable local energy schemes that share resources at lower costs among communities are all possible and desirable. Solar power systems on rural housing, renewable energy schemes to help people living in old houses heat their homes in an environmentally friendly and cheaper way, and affordable off grid energy are all seen as part of a green and sustainable future.

Social and economic inclusion aspects of rural poverty can be addressed through small-scale community-owned, cheaper renewable solar, hydro and wind energy sources. This is enabled through taking control of local energy consumption and sourcing, and through monitoring household consumption, focusing on energy efficiency, and collective buying.

Local community-led renewable schemes open up the possibilities of earning income for the wider community, re-investing profits in community outcomes. Renewable energy solutions reduce costs for public buildings facing challenging funding situations, such as schools, libraries and village halls. Green energy is a growing sector, offering employment opportunities in and for rural UK.

Increasing technical skills

Locally-delivered training will increase knowledge of, and capacity for, digital skills – for younger people (working against the assumption that all young people know how to use all digital technology) and the elderly.

The style of the training needs to be hands-on and practical, using computers or iPads. Provision can be group-based using online courses and/or face-to-face training, with a focus on gaining employment, starting or managing new technology projects, using IT to increase business product sales, cooperative website development to 'pool' and share product sales, running community web sites and administration needed for their upkeep, electronic community newsletters (as paper copies reduce over time), and mobile App development. A community education approach could teach the elderly how to use technology to support their lifestyles, including (for example) how to order food online from the (local) shop for home delivery, and/or use of iPads for staying in touch with family or friends.

Where space allows, digital fabrication facilities could be established, with loanable hand tools for a fixing and repair program, resulting in local upskilling and creation of interest. A "skills exchange" approach ("IT skills for bush craft skills") could/should be organised locally, using the community's website, Facebook page or Apps (see above).

The location of the training needs to be a rural hub, such as learning centres in local communities with access to good broadband facilities. Shared workspace hubs are really positive spaces for shared technical working – where community clusters work in partnership with one another and share resources. However, it was also noted that such opportunities must not be intimidating or too technical, and could in fact be created in a number of environments:

> *This is ok for some but older people can't see to do these things. They need to speak to someone to explain things. It all gets very confusing. Just having someone based at a doctor's surgery or village hall workshops where people can have help explaining bills and communications. [ENG]*

"Bright future of digital possibilities" in remote rural UK

With a foundation of super-fast, reliable broadband and universal mobile coverage, there is a breadth of opportunities that exist for remote rural UK's businesses and wider communities:

- Remote access to e-services: e-health, medical advice, medical tests, centres of expertise, Apps, Skype appointments (cutting out 200-mile round trips for 10-minute appointments), dental appointments, optician tests – reducing expense and discomfort for those with chronic conditions requiring repeat visits; Apps as reminders to take medications; E-health supporting independence and self-management; counselling; financial services; legal services; social services; technical safety services (e.g. for farm management); specialist consultants; digitised village halls as rural hubs for CAB, credit unions, pharmacies; "rural Uber";
- Attracting businesses to the local rural area: diversifying the local economy, encouraging people to move to the area which increases the sustainability of the community; smart use of technology by rural businesses to reduce costs, e.g. drones for land and building surveys; Apps or online ordering to help small community shops sell online for delivery to local customers; supporting innovative local projects such as community energy production, community housing and transport/housing/service-sharing schemes through smart technology and Apps; enabling more jobs to be carried out from home rather than having to travel to a centralised office, allowing more companies to set up, stay and grow in rural communities – helping retention of younger people; potentially higher-paid work from home jobs, including national and local government; more home-working means more people out-and-about in the community during the day, reducing isolation for those who are not able to travel outside the community; remote teaching, serving students worldwide from home; work remotely and sell locally-sourced products, opening up the rural economy; opening up direct selling opportunities and ability to bulk-buy resources by connecting with other businesses; collective marketing of high quality products from small producers to "remove the remote aspect", using Apps to show producer locations, opening hours, employee numbers, more about the product; and "loyalty schemes" for using local businesses;
- Networking and connecting: between locals and being connected to the "outside world"; having Skype meetings so not having to travel; access to education, training and jobs; information about clubs and social networking opportunities; communication and reducing isolation; Skype book reading clubs; film-making about history and culture of local communities – sharing with others online and building "an epic community film"; creating e-books of local legends; facilitating communication between children and schools; live streaming to inspirational lectures (e.g. TED talks); viewing entertainment; connecting to more distant rural skills centres, plus FE/HE otherwise restricted due to high costs; still being at the core, the centre, by accessing lived streamed meetings; share and distribute information; participation in democracy; lift-sharing through smart Apps; open food networks could help coordinate local food deliveries through web ordering; Apps for local child care solutions; investing in tools and equipment to maintain community, use online system to loan these to members of community to take pride in local place.
- Communal fuel-buying to help those in fuel poverty: energy bills are usually higher in rural areas, due to being off-gas and dependent on oil/electric heaters; older housing stock increases fuel poverty. Community oil or electricity buying leads to lower pricing, can create delivery options that would not otherwise exist, and help those in fuel poverty.

Connecting or isolating people?

Not all rural residents are online, through choice and/or through personal circumstances that prevent them accessing or using online technology and resources; such circumstances typically relate to age, confidence or low income (or a combination). Steps must be taken to ensure that people are given training opportunities, and therefore reduce the chances of them becoming isolated. If they then choose not to use digital technology, then at least they have had the option of seeing what is available:

> *More training and community hubs to encourage the older residents to use technology. Tech is not important enough to a lot of the elderly for them to be making more demands for better access. Make it as important to them as it is to the young. [ENG]*

> *One of the biggest issues has been training and access for non-users. Many council/NHS services are now only available online and residents need training to access these. Free access is currently available via the library but the council are considering charging residents for use of the computers. [ENG]*
>
> *Technology links directly to employment these days; if you're job-seeking, you're expected to be able to access JSA-related websites. You're automatically excluded if you have poor internet access. [ENG]*

Steps must also be taken to create offline opportunities for those who are not online, to make sure they are not left out. For example, community energy buying and community transport could still benefit those who are not using digital technology or Apps, with others in the community providing support to enable full participation with these digitally-enabled services:

> *Many of the most rural areas have poor coverage, and many of the most isolated people wouldn't use it anyway. Lift-sharing, sharing resources and information, etc. can be improved using the internet, as long as those who don't have it are included. [WLS]*

Theme 8
Sustainable remote rural communities: changes, resources and recommendations?

Key messages

1. Changes and resources:
   a) While communities are being active themselves, they also recognise that certain parts of the "bigger system" must change with specific resources needed for rural communities to be sustainable to 2030 and beyond.

   b) The top three changes communities say they need across rural UK are a reduction in the closure of key services such as banks, post offices, and pubs; fairer funding for rural areas that compensates for higher costs of improvements; and to improve rural broadband and mobile coverage.

   c) To achieve this, thousands of #HaveYourSay respondents pointed to the priorities of investment in digital connectivity; rural issues becoming more of a priority on the public policy agenda; and greater joined-up thinking. This is because it is clear to respondents that the spectrum of challenges they face as remote rural communities are all interlinked.
2. Building on the respect and listen agenda:
   a) Individuals and communities across rural UK have a breadth and depth of experience, wisdom and knowledge that they wish to share, both with other communities and with those creating policies that affect rural areas, communities and businesses.

   b) Rural communities wish to be listened to, understood and respected, with action taken to feed into coherent policies designed for rural areas. The diversity of communities must be recognised – some lead the way, with all the skills they need to navigate and seize all the opportunities available; others will need support to develop their capacity and confidence to navigate uncertain futures.

   c) Those providing policy and practical support will need to enhance their understanding of, and respect for, rural communities, building communities' lived experience into their decisions and approaches. This rich evidence-based report provides a valuable starting point to do just that.

What *must* change?

Respondents were asked to choose from a "must change" list "to help remote rural communities increase their own sustainability". The top three responses [13] across rural UK are to reduce closure of key services e.g. Post Offices, Banks, village halls, pubs etc., to provide fairer funding for rural areas that compensate for higher costs of improvements and to improve rural broadband and mobile coverage, including through innovative approaches. In summary across the UK:

- The top three "must change" are the same across all four jurisdictions;

[13] Respondents: 1,296

- What we also see is an emphasis on "soft infrastructure" in the top ten: joined-up thinking to deliver a coherent rural policy; a flexible planning system; flexible local services; better national indicators to understand rural poverty; longer-term programmes; as well as rural policy with "teeth";
- There is also a focus on capacity-building within rural communities, including on "developing young leaders" (Wales, Northern Ireland).

What resources are required to address the challenges of "remote rural"?

Respondents were asked to choose from a list of resources needed to face their challenges, with the top three responses [14] across rural UK being to invest in broadband and mobile coverage, for rural issues to be a priority on the public policy agenda and for there to be joined-up thinking between agencies. However, for the respondents in England, the third priority is "affordable housing – dedicated investment programmes", which also appears in the top ten for Scotland and Wales. All four jurisdictions also prioritise in their top ten, a "public awareness campaign: rural delivers for everyone", as well as "ensure every community has a facility, meeting place, or community space".

Respondents were given the opportunity to offer additional ideas. They prefaced their suggestions by emphasising that:

- there are rural areas that are "on the radar", cared about and appreciated by tourists as high value, and rural areas that are not, described as "post-industrial", for example. The challenges and the resources needed are very different in these two types of areas;
- rural areas experience different challenges (and require different resources) depending on "which rural" you are living in – described variously as post-industrial, "chocolate box" with very hidden challenges, wilderness, crofting, intensive farming, tourist honey-pots, and over-developed rural on urban fringes.
-

These are all types of rural. They face different versions and mixes of the challenges listed above, and therefore require resource-mixes – outlined as follows - that are tailored to their rural.

Funding and investment (including for infrastructure)

In addition to specific funding and investment requirements, focused on public transport, housing, roads, piers, broadband, community land and asset ownership, respondents noted that principles and approaches need to be applied to deliver a step-change in how rural challenges are addressed:

- Public agency staff should go to rural areas, rather than expecting self-employed people on low incomes to travel to distant cities to discuss potential project proposals;
- Create *multi-agency offices* in rural areas (reduce their costs, maximise their usefulness), that help individuals and communities to navigate the "maze of help bodies and organisations that can be overwhelming" with a directory of their attributes and services, plus by opening doors and making introductions;
- Ensure funding is based on local need rather than only on pre-existing funding models based on other criteria;
- Prioritise the principle of fairness, for example, rural fuel pricing that recognises rural distances are a necessity.

Services

Investment in affordable, pre-school childcare and small rural schools is seen as essential, since these "form the heart *and future* of these communities" without which "employed families won't move in and the trends of retirement villages will continue". In addition, budget increases are needed for healthcare to meet growing demand, specifically for mental health support to address increasing isolation due to the challenges outlined above.

[14] Respondents: 1,385

Innovation focus

Challenges must be resourced through a broader range of ideas that allow for exploration of innovation that suit local needs:

- Innovative approaches to public transport, such as electric short-haul buses in a distributed network with hubs, rather than a few long-haul coaches;
- Rural businesses to set up and create jobs to match housing developments;
- Support active retirement, rather than seeing the elderly only as service users;
- Infrastructure investment that generates income streams for communities to control and invest;
- Affordable housing as part-buy/part-rent schemes;
- Incentives for companies to invest in rural areas rather than urban;
- Incentives to doctors and teachers to work long-term in rural communities.

Building on skills and capacity within communities

Agencies must recognise rural communities' in-built "talent and drive, and take risks to support this". With this as *the fundamental principle*, there needs to be core funding to enable "more collaborative nurturing of communities", linking existing skills with further development of in-community skills, and up-skilling of communities around specific developments, including local energy initiatives, health and social care, local housing projects, education. This approach will broaden the number of people working within communities beyond "the usual suspects", and assist with strengthening community-led decision making. This approach has to be strategic, becoming *a new norm*, or *way of working*, requiring resources similar to a capacity-building, LEADER-type approach - an "investment mechanism" that actually strengthens communities to get to a point that prevents the cycle of needs for grant funding:

> *Helping local communities to develop plans for resilience and to develop local economies, similar to Transition initiatives. Thinking outside the box for service delivery, e.g. collectively owned autonomous vehicles providing integrated, shared public transport for the whole village; more health delivered by digital consultations; more digital teaching in schools to expand the curriculum; more car free transport routes between settlements so people can use active travel options - walk, cycle, ride; Community owned renewable energy generation with local peer-to-peer selling. [WLS]*

Listening to communities

To reach such a point of maximising strengths, communities ask to be listened to better. Solutions should be "mapped" with communities, through "meaningful consultation and evaluation, not as a box-ticking exercise", with evidence that listening has taken place, including for those who feel in a minority in rural settings (including LGBT+ groups). This approach (a) deliberately builds on the "talent pool" of the rural population, including the wide spectrum of all rural businesses; and (b) actively shapes resources around what is heard from local level, choosing not to follow a "one size fits all" template. This approach recognises that "remoteness doesn't mean dead", but that there is much knowledge and energy within rural communities. This can and must be used to shape a longer-term coherent approach to rural, that allocates resources in terms of "impacts in 30 years not 3".

What resources are required to address challenges in "very remote" rural communities?

Analysis of responses [15] to the open-ended question identified three major themes: *strong, coherent communication; support for services and the local economy;* and *strategic interventions*.

[15] From 1,167 respondents

Strong, coherent communication

Firstly, respondents note that it is important to communicate, raise awareness and be heard – as a counterbalance to being "off the radar" simply due to geographical remoteness. Secondly, increasing cooperation with others is a priority, both those within "very remote" rural and those more centrally-located, to create a shared "voice and power to change things". Thirdly, in being heard and coordinated, making sure that the messages are not all negative and about the challenges: "Please remember people like living and working in very remote rural locations".

Support for services and the local economy

A fundamental starting-point is that there must be support for local services, even when they are uneconomic, due to social outcomes that services also deliver (for example, in terms of overcoming isolation, loneliness and improving mental wellbeing); this is a reorientation that sees the financial aspect as only one (important) element of what services deliver and achieve for remote rural communities. In addition, respondents wanted:

- Improved reliability of public transport, including ferries;
- Improved housing provision to remove reliance on private sector;
- Incentives to medical staff to work in rural areas;
- Create more travelling pop-up services that serve more than one location:
    - Travelling medical clinics and dedicated liaison nurses/support workers to help the elderly access healthcare;
    - Visiting healthcare teams e.g. podiatrists; nurse; GP; counsellor;
    - Mobile banks/pharmacists/films to village halls/pop up events;
    - Mobile job centres, rather than asking unemployed to attend distant job centres.
- Set minimum service provision standards, for example preventing hospital closures if they result in unacceptable journey times from very remote communities;
- Support and allow schools to be multi-use centres for communities;
- Mental wellbeing support:
    - More people trained with Mental Health knowledge of people on the spectrum;
    - More funding for mental health services plus arts and community projects;
- Overcoming isolation:
    - Buddy neighbour schemes for those who are cut off geographically;
    - Organisations to help people when weather is bad i.e. get food to them;
- Local economy:
    - Focus support on short supply chains built on provenance;
    - Coaching and advice for existing and new tourist businesses;
    - Location-dependant training grants / apprenticeships repayable if you leave the area within 3/5 years;
    - More companies having remote workers;
    - Suitable green vehicles, such as bio-diesel, for remote workers (such as farmers).

Strategic interventions

There is a need to "scale-up" to strategic actions that will have a broader, longer-term impact:

- Deliveries:
    - Achieve universal delivery charges (through a combination of legislation and subsidies) to ensure online businesses deliver to islands and other "very remote" rural communities;
    - Supermarkets on mainland to structure in cheaper delivery options for "very remote" communities, rather than penalise them.

- Cost-reduction:
  - As a minimum: standardise fuel costs irrespective of location (compared with now, where there can be a 15p+ difference in costs depending on location);
  - Reduce fuel duty in rural areas, to counter the rural price premium currently being paid, and recognise higher mileages in rural areas;
  - Reduce rural broadband fees, to counter relative monopoly provision in rural areas;
  - Free or affordable transport for final year school children and students living and studying locally;
- Infrastructure – "very remote rural" first:
  - "Outside-in" approach to ensure the most remote/slowest premises and communities still without the service are connected first;
  - Initiative to introduce 5G phone coverage to rural areas first.
- Investing in community structures:
  - A nationwide, strategic, Village Halls / Community Buildings programme - investing in professional expertise and physical infrastructure, perhaps creating a bank to help fund projects;
  - Houses better adapted for an ageing population, with more rural areas meeting needs of older people e.g. becoming dementia-friendly communities.
- Being smarter and fairer about small population numbers:
  - Legal changes to funding formulas and criteria, to redress the imbalance caused by low / sparse population;
  - Fund cross-boundary provision to create critical mass of population group, rather than multiple local authorities trying to provide a reduced service to multiple local authority areas;
  - Priority funding. Formulae for staffing in schools for example does not take unique challenges into account. Less staff and funds allocated due to small population. Does not reflect needs and particular difficulties rural communities face;
  - Ensure multiple factors taken into account when judging need, including criticality of service to community.

Respondents' overall recommendations

Analysis[16] led to the emergence of eight themes. The first six echo those already observed in the survey findings: *Funding and investment; Digital infrastructure; Transport; Affordable housing; Services;* and *Energy*. The fact that respondents are repeating these themes as their Final Recommendations demonstrates their central importance. The final two themes are new: *Listen, understand and respect, then lead on Actions and Policies; Respect community and build capacity*.

Funding and investment

Firstly, funding should recognise the specifics of rural contexts including the higher costs of community improvements due to logistical challenges, the distance and dispersed nature of populations, and the needs of a predominantly elderly population (in terms of dependence on services). Funding should be "fair and equal", taking into account these characteristics of rural populations and geographies. Secondly, funding should be for local solutions, for "community activists" who are trying to improve local services, for local volunteers, community champions who provide vital services, and to:

> *Allow local communities more control and autonomy over how money is allocated and what developments are permitted [SCOT]*

Thirdly, to have meaningful impact, funding should be focused on *long-term investment* rather than short-term spend, with investment put into resources and training. There is a real need for "longer and more generous funding support" that gives "proper resourcing" to "develop and sustain the communities themselves to deliver the expected public good":

[16] From 1,129 respondents

> *A pivotal one is less short-termism in funding and policy. Long-haul options. Value the unremarkable things that make communities work. [SCOT]*

Longer-term funding support is also needed to address entrenched, and often hidden, rural poverty, not only directed at addressing the symptoms of rural poverty itself, but also investing in what might change circumstances for those in poverty, including innovation and employment:

> *Help poverty-ensnared communities become more sustainable through financially-supported innovation [ENG]*

One example of long-term investment is supporting community purchase of land and assets which would then enable further community investment, by enhancing community confidence and giving an asset-base and collateral for follow-on investment:

> *Communities could be helped more to buy/ build community assets e.g. Post office, pub, holiday houses, wind turbine, surrounding farm land [ENG]*

Funding should be focused on supporting *rural infrastructure and hubs, businesses, young people and education*. Public infrastructure underpins and affects all other community effort and is an area where it is more difficult for communities to act on their own and in isolation, due to the scale of investment (geographical and financial) required. Respondents called for government intervention and resourcing in transport and broadband, and in community halls (or other similar multi-functional hubs). Businesses should also be a focus of investment – receiving targeted start-up and research and development funds. Coupled with high-speed broadband, this will enable not only the creation of jobs in rural areas, but also for young people to realise they can remain with meaningful local employment:

> *Invest in communities who are investing in the future of their young people. Focus on removing the barriers that make it hard for them to stay. [SCOT]*

In addition to focusing on business opportunities, respondents wanted investment in education provision, not only for young people, but in order for people in all rural areas to be able to gain the education they desire without having to leave their locality.

Digital infrastructure

Digital connectivity is no longer a luxury but a necessity and needs to be available in rural areas at a standard comparable with the rest of the UK. Communities are not surviving without broadband, because "too many services are now online only", broadband is needed "to allow local new business to grow", and "local services increase the younger demographics living rurally". The alternative is "economic isolation", because internet and mobile access is now a "fact of life" and that "businesses cannot function without it"; it is needed for social interaction, to "encourage economic prosperity" and to "lessen challenges on people and businesses":

> *Broadband and mobile phone signal must be universally available and affordable to all, perhaps part of council or national tax because of DVLA, NHS and DWP requirements. [SCOT]*
>
> *High speed broadband for all. It's 2018. It's needed for everything, and disadvantages our families. [NI]*

Transport

If the trend is for key services to close, then transport services to remaining services must be strengthened and improved. There was a call for public transport to be subsidised to enable its continued operation. Low cost 'green' rural transport network between communities was also wanted, plus increased frequency on rail routes to allow for more commuting from surrounding remote rural areas into towns. Respondents proposed that vehicle fuel and car ownership in rural areas

should also receive a form of rural subsidy, since car travel is essential rather than a luxury due to remoteness of services. Rural community minibuses should also receive a fuel discount to support their sustainability:

> *It has to be access, whether by car, ferry, helicopter or train, if you can't get out then nothing can get in, doesn't matter if it's 6 foot of snow or floods, it's all about access [SCOT]*

Affordable housing

There is a fundamental need to focus on rural homelessness, with specific, tailored financial assistance targeted at how this plays out in rural areas, particularly as it is often hidden. It was therefore argued that a proportion of rural housing must therefore be "truly affordable", reflecting local wages rather than only what the market will pay. Such an approach also:

> *Encourages people to stay in the rural communities that they work in by providing subsidised housing, thus providing a nucleus of spending power which would encourage the growth of other services. [SCOT]*

Affordable housing for rent, particularly targeted at young people who have grown up in the community, is seen as critically important, since it will allow them to remain in the community and "earn a living":

> *Housing! You can't keep villages alive without affordable rentals to start young people in villages [ENG]*

The lack of affordable housing for young families is also linked to the rise in second home ownership which leads to young families being priced out of the area, resulting in communities "losing, wholesale, local skills and knowledge".

Planning is an integral aspect of affordable housing availability, specifically around the need to create more opportunities for the conversion of buildings to housing "without red tape" and with less "differences between policy and its application" on the ground. There is a need for "easier planning" for small-scale developments, such as "one/two houses proposed by locals/farmers/Parish councils", and/or the building of "small eco-homes for single people/ small families on small plots of land" which could be designed sympathetically to "blend into the landscape". In some rural areas, many people live in caravans or chalets out of season, and "would not choose to live in a modern housing development", so there is a need to "allow people to build homes and businesses on land in their own communities" which recognises and facilitates flexibility in design that fits the variety of needs that exist.

Services and community hubs

Respondents called for priority to be given to community hubs, for social interaction, with dedicated, flexible, free community spaces and free WiFi, enabling small business to co-work, plus 'workshop' areas to rent and encourage new businesses to the area. Experience and evidence shows the "importance of a community meeting place for community cohesion", particularly places with buzz and atmosphere where you feel you can "pop in" rather than only "go for an event" and then leave. Tailoring the space to what the community needs is essential:

> *Every village/rural community must have a physical hub of their own; managed locally to meet local needs and offering quality services e.g. not chicken nuggets and chips in a basket if the community wants a goat's cheese, beetroot and pine nut salad with a balsamic glaze! Literally and metaphorically speaking. This may mean compulsory purchase of an existing building/land. [WLS]*
>
> *Secondly, rural population numbers are small, so services must be designed around this, being flexible, rather than having a penalising model; there should be a "fairer policy on cost of services to remote communities": Offer/maintain services even where population is relatively low [SCOT]*
>
> *Services cannot be population-size-determined only. Standard locally-sustained village amenities must be supported [ENG]*

One way to address this sensitivity to local context is through ensuring that services are community owned and that "more local shops or businesses are run by local people". Much more effort and resource must be put into supporting locally-led and owned service provision, since it is tailored to the scale of need, and locals can be flexible and innovative in responding to, and anticipating, that need.

Health care services must be maintained, not only because of the value of the services themselves but also because of the additional wellbeing, community and socio-economic benefits they bring:

> *We need more health services and health care. People should not have to travel so far and be away from loved ones [SCOT]*
>
> *Give us back decent healthcare locally as this is a major cause for people leaving the area and deters people from moving here [SCOT]*
>
> *Similarly, the added value of keeping rural primary schools open should underpin service-related decisions: Support local small primary schools and protect from closure - young families inject new life into rural communities and will not come without local schools [ENG]*

Energy

Respondents expressed a desire for a system of strategic subsidies and grants for local renewable energy provision plus training to support community enterprises in renewables, leading to increased local employment and broadening of skill-sets. Community-owned renewable energy is a viable revenue stream, as well as individuals investing in renewable technology on their properties. There is some frustration at the processes required to enable such individual developments:

> *Allow us to install new technologies without being hampered by planning restrictions - lots of rural houses would love to install wind turbines, ground source heating or electric micro hydro [WLS]*

The two final themes (below) generated the most recommendations from respondents and might be termed the "soft infrastructure" that underpins the functioning of rural communities. These are seen as as essential as the hard infrastructure (broadband, mobile, community and business hubs, transport, health and education) in the sustainability and resilience of rural communities.

Listen, Understand and Respect - then lead on Action and Policies

There needs to be "someone" – a human contact who is approachable, listens and takes note of what is said to them:

> *Listen to those who know what rural life is all about and how to give it a positive future. [SCOT]*
>
> *Listen to what the locals need, not what a distant Department thinks they need [ENG]*
>
> *Rural communities MUST have their own voice. Decisions made for us without asking us almost never work. [SCOT]*
>
> *We have the grass-roots knowledge of what our community needs; ask us, help us, fund us! [SCOT]*
>
> *Recognition by central government that rural areas are more expensive but are providers of much good [SCOT]*
>
> *Improve understanding across government about rural life for the non-wealthy. Deprivation is patch and poorly understood. Low wages rather than benefits recipients which is a different cultural challenge to support. [ENG]*
>
> *A voice directly to policy makers or money to do the research to create the evidence [NI]*

There is a strong desire to share local expertise, knowledge and awareness of rural life "from the ground up" . This matters, because "one size cannot fit all". A UK rural community knowledge network should be created, building on the Recharging Rural research:

> *To get remote communities across the UK to join forces and work as one to influence policy changes that will benefit all rural areas. [ENG]*
>
> *A mechanism such as a federation of rural communities to share best practice, facilitate joint initiatives and to act as a powerful lobbying body for rural communities. [SCOT]*

The network would enable exchange of what is similar and what is different across rural UK, taking care over transferability of ideas and policy, particularly from urban to rural contexts, due to the specific and varied characteristics of rural areas, as well as the cultural and policy differences within each UK jurisdiction. Specifically, there is a need for "understanding that successful policies in cities do not work in the rural areas":

> *Focus on impact and not drawing comparisons with urban areas [ENG]*
>
> *Stop thinking in abstract, top-down terms about "communities". Start thinking from the ground up, about the effects on INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE [SCOT]*

Differences between rural communities, and between remote communities and urban areas, must be systematically recognised, ensuring that the long-term impacts are assessed "before policies are imposed on communities":

> *Flexibility needs to be given to rural and island councils to allow them to drive change locally. We live and work here. We know what works and it's not what works for Glasgow. Give us the freedom to get on with it. [SCOT]*

"Rural-proofing" of national and local policies, legislation, funding and service delivery is strongly recommended. Although rural-proofing mechanisms are in place, respondents suggest more needs to be done to deliver policies that are sensitised to rural contexts:

> *Confidence and recognition of rural needs - Make available resources to explore local ownership instead of imposing things from far away - seek and support local solutions [ENG]*
>
> *IMPROVE NOT REMOVE - this relates to helping small businesses thrive to reduce closures and also helping to retain services such as banks and local minor injury units that may not be commercially/economically viable, but integral to self-sustainability. [SCOT]*
>
> *Stop closure of facilities because 'not enough people use them' or because the cost is 'above average'. [ENG]. Understand impact in terms other than numerical e.g. if a town has 800 people, it may still be punching well above its weight and have huge significance for a wide area [SCOT]*

In addition to listening to communities and tailoring policies to rural characteristics, any rural policies need to deliver coherent, visible action linked into an overall vision:

> *A strong rural policy that has a voice and "teeth" led by those that have a genuine understanding and knowledge of rural life and the people in it [ENG]*
>
> *A rural policy - if we can work out a way of pulling everyone together towards the same end goal, then we follow that plan. [SCOT]*
>
> *Vision from policy makers that builds on potential not just mitigation of problems. [WLS]*

> *A joined-up strategy and action (e.g. planning department allows new house building while schools and other services are closed) [SCOT]*
>
> *Rural economic development strategy [WLS]*

Rural communities are already, or desire to be, proactive and engaging with policy; this is not a passive approach that waits for policy, funding and interventions to happen around them:

> *Communities have the ideas, the experience and the energy to make themselves more sustainable - but have to jump through legislative and funding hoops to make it happen - we need understanding of rural challenges from the top down and translate those into policy. [SCOT]*

Respect community and build capacity

While there is awareness that many rural communities work well together, nonetheless "sometimes a community needs to be shown how to work together". A poignant quote, echoed by others, states simply that people need to communicate because "loneliness is the worst thing". There is a need to:

> *Focus on how to make communities a mixture of people - including the young [ENG]*
>
> *Build and support genuine capacity and confidence to represent, campaign and deliver innovative (and sometimes just the same) solutions [SCOT]*
>
> *Provide innovative opportunities for people in the communities together and talking - not stuffy drop-in consultation - something more vital e.g. action competence [WLS]*
>
> *Engage and support the volunteers willing to take a lead in their communities [ENG]*
>
> *Give young people brought up in rural communities and who understand them the chance to live there and contribute as adults. Stop the erosion of communities through the young blood being forced out [ENG]*
>
> *Build capacity by involving people at all levels especially young people to encourage them to contribute [NI]*

Ways of building inclusion and capacity sit on a spectrum. At one end, there are approaches to "promote cohesion within the community" by creating informal opportunities for people and groups to come together, learn about each other, help one another, "share experiences, wisdom and life" and value the "rich, collective knowledge" through processes that:

> *Enable communities to see themselves as assets, not bystanders [ENG]*
>
> *Invest in the people, show them they are valued and give them a sense of pride in doing something for themselves and the community [SCOT]*
>
> *Listen to the people in these communities and work with them to build on the best of what they already have to create a brighter future [ENG]*

At the other end of the spectrum, gatherings and meetings are more focused and directed, with grassroots, organised groups delivering identified needs and community events and groups creating a sense of belonging and therefore shared action:

> *Local group drawn from services and communities that collaboratively identifies key issues and has the power and autonomy to direct funds to where it is needed outcome based [ENG]*
> *Community development skills and support to enable community led decision making and solution finding [ENG]*

There is an emphasis on training, to increase community confidence, and in relation to specific issues, topics and/or businesses, to enhance the capacity and sustainability of rural communities:

> *Funding and advice. We all want to do it, but few have knowledge and funds together. [WLS]*
>
> *Provide ways for communities to better themselves via making money [NI]*
>
> *Education on options that communities can use to improve their own lives e.g. how to embark on sustainable energy production, local food production and marketing, how to create a truly vibrant local community that produces a large amount of its own needs. People don't know how yet - education can help e.g. showing people Food Assemblies, common smallholding skills, renewable energy skills and grants, teaching forestry development. [SCOT]*
>
> *Training in trades/crafts of use within local communities....& funding for local businesses & workshops that create & supply essential goods & services to local people [ENG]*
>
> *Funding to help local businesses encourage, train and employ local school leavers - we need more than just fish farms and the local supermarket. Every child with any brains or ambition has to leave the island and the community can only lose by that. [SCOT]*

There is a strong emphasis on the need to invest in "the power of community", to enable people to "create opportunities for themselves". This is not a passive approach, rather, it is one of mature (formal and informal) partnerships, where training and support work together:

> *Rural communities do need to help themselves and when they take the initiative society needs to recognise their needs and work in partnerships to find solutions and not say the challenges are too difficult to solve [ENG]*
>
> *Let communities get on with it! Too often support whether from grant givers, support agencies or via legislation comes burdened with so much unnecessary and inappropriate bureaucracy that it becomes a barrier to progress. [SCOT]*
>
> *Statutory partners need to act as enablers and facilitators and then stand back [WLS]*
>
> *Give communities the means to generate their own income whether that is from renewable energy, world class visitor attractions etc. [SCOT]*

One key strength and resource within rural communities is the farming sector, seen as business specialists with collective breadth and depth of experience. Farming, farmers, crofters and the wider food sector, need to be recognised – "have respect for their knowledge and contribution to rural life", since "without farmers our local community will collapse". Farming is described as a way of life, enabling young people to remain inspired to carry on working in the land-based sector and therefore be embedded in rural communities – from small through to large farms, crofting, or related business, including food and drink:

> *Strengthen crofting communities - create more crofts - allocate them to young (under 40) people and families. Modern crofting creates employment, biodiversity, innovation, demand for services and are the very best example going of ''sustainability''. [SCOT]*

> *Develop more small rural businesses producing food and drink which is available for local food shops/restaurants/ hotels featured on the menus and in the shops as a local food [SCOT]*
>
> *Significant investment in the local food economy [ENG]*

A key final recommendation is for a "rural community watch list", comprising the "top ten" indicators of the "health of a community", created by the community and made available to the community to monitor. If some are seen to be decreasing (using a traffic light system) then the community could make informed choices as to how to respond. This approach reflects the overwhelmingly proactive, action-focused nature of these recommendations, where support is framed in terms of being simply a catalyst for community-led change.

How do the responses chime with the body of evidence?

The research literature on resilient rural communities, while not totally in agreement, broadly states that communities live in a context of disruptive change (rapid or slow burn), with communities and individuals having varying degrees of control or "agency" over what happens.

There are some general principles of community resilience: the ability to learn, adapt, reorganise and change; create a positive direction of travel; able to "bounce forward" creatively; function in the midst of crisis, mobilise community resources at multiple levels; and collaborate with relevant stakeholders within and beyond the community.

There are some interlinked factors that support community resilience: social, economic and cultural capital; natural, built, political and financial resources; people-place connections; values and beliefs; knowledge, skills and learning; social networks; diverse and innovative economy; leadership and community infrastructure; equitable and sustainable resource use.

Community resilience is seen as a process, where positive resources are balanced with vulnerabilities. "Human agency" is key to this balancing act, with people being able to imagine, dream, plan, and make deliberate choices for their individual or collective futures.

The #HaveYourSay survey answers echo key features of community resilience: Context of both rapid and "slow burn" disruptive change: rural remoteness is a process that is happening to people as they experience loss and decline in services and infrastructure ("slow burn"); while technology-enabled change gives opportunities for a "bright future of digital possibilities" that many wish to seize and innovate around, whilst also sensing that if infrastructural investment is not made in remote rural areas, communities will quickly lose out and fall further behind (rapid).

Vulnerabilities include: growing social isolation and multi-layered remoteness; rural poverty; economic/business decline; and infrastructural weakness through loss and service centralisation; plus low capacity in some communities. Resources include: human agency in action; great awareness of change; excitement and readiness for change; connections deliberately created for social inclusion; mobilisation of community and external resources for action; building skills and capacity; protecting assets; imagining futures with creative openness; plus awareness and mobilisation of multiple collaborations locally and externally to strengthen remote rural communities.

What does the literature tell us?

Community resilience takes place in a context of disruptive change (rapid or slow-burn). Individuals and communities have varying degrees of control or "agency" over what happens to them. The general principles of community resilience require the ability:

- To learn, adapt, reorganise and change;
- To harness capacity to a positive direction of travel (or trajectory);
- To "bounce forward" with creativity;
- For community members to use community resources;
- To function amid crisis;
- For collective activity focused on adaptation at community level;
- To collaborate and learn with relevant stakeholders within and beyond the community of place.

The factors that enhance community resilience have been variously described by researchers as:

- Capitals (social, economic, cultural);
- Resources (natural, built, human, cultural, social, political and financial);
- Strengths (people–place connections; values and beliefs; knowledge, skills and learning; social networks; engaged governance; a diverse and innovative economy; community infrastructure; leadership; and a positive outlook, including readiness to accept change);
- Capacities (economic development, social capital, information and communication, and community competence);
- Components (Equitable resource use; Economic diversity; Civil engagement; Rich leadership; Sustainable resource use; Biodiversity; Learning, skills and knowledge).

Researchers also highlight: that these factors are interrelated, playing different roles at different times; that the key is to use them for action rather than let them lie dormant; and the importance of resource diversity rather than single resource dependency. Community resilience is also seen as a process, where resilience at one point in time does not guarantee it for the future – there is the need to adapt, and balance resources with vulnerabilities. "Human agency" is key, defined as the ways in which people within communities deliberately behave, imagine futures, make decisions and plans, and act as individuals or collectives.

Community resilience and the #HaveYourSay survey responses?

If we now look briefly at the responses to the #HaveYourSay survey questions, we can see the extent to which these echo the characteristics of community resilience defined in the research literature.

- How people work together to help *themselves* to address future challenges: responses demonstrate strong awareness of the "stressors", the context (local, regional and national), collaboration, and the need for constructive connections and relationships to generate action. They demonstrate the factors and principles of rural community resilience, particularly in terms of "reading" the landscape, and bringing together local priorities within a larger context of 'slow-burn' change.
- Successful community-led projects that aim to remove barriers in remote rural communities: The 550 projects show evidence of community resilience. The overwhelming majority demonstrate a focus on linking people with one another, fostering and creating social capital, ensuring people are brought in and not excluded, providing services or taking people to services, and providing enjoyment, wellbeing and pleasure through activities, arts and human connection. The projects demonstrate action, mobilisation of the communities' resources and strengths, and adaptation in the face of on-going, and sometimes substantial, change in their (service) environment.

- How new technologies can be harnessed to address the characteristics of remote rural living and working. The responses demonstrate the "human agency" and "imagining" elements of community resilience; an awareness of the "slow burn" and rapid immense changes being brought about by digital technology; excitement and readiness to change, with creative openness to the possibilities that this change brings. Once again, we also see the human connectedness element coming through, through the prioritisation placed on people-place connections and social inclusion in the face of change.
- What *must* change and the resources required: Respondents recognise the wider context within which their communities live and work; the cultural and political resources of the wider landscape, and the need for these to be "mobilised" in ways that work with, rather than against, their communities. Respondents show readiness to accept change, while demonstrating: a desire for collective activity with multiple stakeholders, and connecting local and external "capitals", strengths and resources. They also show strong awareness of change, where that change is coming from, and the need for multi-level action to achieve positive outcomes.
- Final Recommendations: The assertive stance that comes through strongly, shows an awareness of the need to be listened to more effectively, and that interventions need to take place. Such collaboration and shared learning are at the heart of rural community resilience.

Concluding comment

The #HaveYourSay survey answers echo key features of community resilience:

- Context of both rapid and "slow burn" disruptive change: rural remoteness is a process that is happening to people as they experience loss and decline in services and infrastructure ("slow burn"); technology-enabled change gives opportunities for a "bright future of digital possibilities" that many wish to seize and innovate around, whilst also sensing that if infrastructural investment is not made in remote rural areas, communities will quickly lose out and fall further behind (rapid).
- Vulnerabilities include: growing social isolation and multi-layered remoteness; rural poverty; economic/business decline; and infrastructural weakness through loss and service centralisation; low capacity in some communities;
- Resources include: human agency in action; great awareness of change; excitement and readiness for change; connections deliberately created for social inclusion; mobilisation of community and external resources for action; building skills and capacity; protecting assets; imagining futures with creative openness; plus awareness and mobilisation of multiple collaborations locally and externally to strengthen remote rural communities.

Report Recommendations

a) Recommendations for The Prince's Countryside Fund

i Bring together local, regional and national stakeholders and policy makers in a UK-wide Connected Communities Forum to examine the barriers, challenges, required resources, changes and recommendations described in this report to identify and prioritise action areas and responsibilities;

ii Identify how the next generation can be further engaged and supported to create sustainable rural communities through access to employment, training and skills development by consulting with young people;

iii Develop a Village Survival Guide: designed as a practical guide with resources including case study examples to assist rural communities in building their resilience and a top ten resilience checklist;

iv Work together with wider stakeholders on effective communication of clear, balanced and evidence based messages about 'remote rural' showing the challenges, contributions and opportunities;

v Continue with vital funding of community-led initiatives, using the Recharging Rural evidence base to guide future interventions across 'remote' and 'very remote' rural UK;

vi Bring together technical and rural expertise to explore ways in which digital technologies can be further harnessed to address isolation and remote rural service delivery, strengthen and attract rural business and drive the economy, e.g. Rural Apps for on demand shared shuttle services, mobile apps for local delivery from local shops, pharmacies and other services; connecting to web based resources such as business advice and learning;

vii Investigate opportunities to provide further training and skills in rural areas for digital including linking in with other providers.

b) Recommendations for rural stakeholders

i Foster improved knowledge exchange and learning between remote rural communities across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales;

ii Raise greater awareness and clarity of the ways in which 'remote rural' contributes to the UK as a whole;

iii Rural stakeholder organisations to review their organisation's current strategy and service delivery by examining the barriers, challenges, required resources, changes and recommendations described in this report;

iv Identify 'remote rural' champions in individual stakeholder networks to help to build a rural talent pool across the UK;

v To maximise impact, consider and identify roles in the rural sector and how to join up with other organisations across the UK. Reflect on the individual opportunities availably in each jurisdiction in the light of current policy context;

vi Involve the private sector, regional, and national enterprise agencies in specific ways with their innovative ideas, experience, and commitment;

vii Work creatively with partners to make local spaces multi-use, e.g. doctor's surgeries by mums and toddler's groups, pubs as libraries and shops, schools used by after-school clubs. Share examples through the UK network where this has been achieved.

c) Recommendations for policy makers

i Review current mapping and definitions of rural and remote rural, to reflect evidence of "experience of remoteness", in order to inform policy development;

ii Consider the implications of the sustainable necessities of rural life – car/transport, broadband and mobile and affordable housing;

iii Working with rural stakeholders and communities, drawing on evidence from the Report, to review indicators of rural community well-being;

iv Respond to the Recharging Rural survey respondents' desire for (i) cross-sectoral "joined up" rural vision and strategy within each UK jurisdiction and at local government levels, plus (ii) act on evidence around tailoring national policies to rural realities;

v Review current funding and service delivery (rural-proofing) within rural UK jurisdictions to include consideration of the interlinked effects of service reduction, plus the social, economic, environmental, cultural and wellbeing contributions of countryside;

vi Recognise the contribution of volunteers and make sure they are supported.

d) Recommendations for rural communities to be sustainable and build their resilience

i Be active in sharing community achievements with others in 'remote' and 'very remote' rural communities in the UK including how to effectively engage with the harder to reach or ways in which isolation and loneliness has been tackled in your area;

ii Proactively use knowledge and learning from other remote rural communities and case studies through national and regional bodies, networks and online discussion groups;

iii Include young people fully in community decisions, drawing on strengths of inter-generational mix and helping to train future rural leaders;

iv Be innovative in considering community assets with opportunities for "pop ups", use of new technologies, flexible multi use spaces, and mobile services;

v Work with stakeholders to identify creative and ambitious approaches to a "joined up" future for services, seeking specialist advice and guidance where necessary.

Recharging Rural

A report to The Prince's Countryside Fund
July 2018

About The Prince's Countryside Fund

Established by HRH The Prince of Wales in 2010, The Prince's Countryside Fund aims to enhance the prospects of family farm businesses and the quality of rural life. We believe that the British countryside is our most valuable natural asset and its contribution to our everyday life cannot be underestimated.

To help support and secure the future of the countryside we:

- Provide more than £1.1m each year in grant funding to projects across the UK thanks to support from our partners, events and donations
- Celebrate and promote the value of the countryside
- Lead projects to strengthen farm businesses, such as The Prince's Farm Resilience Programme
- Commission research into issues affecting farming families and rural communities
- Bring together individuals and businesses to help tackle current challenges
- Help communities in crisis through our Emergency Fund

To find out more and download the full report please visit **www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/research**

About Scotland's Rural College

Scotland's Rural College – winners of the Queen's Anniversary Prize 2017 – supports innovation and sustainable development in agriculture and the rural sector in Britain and internationally. It is one of the UK's leading agriculturally-focused higher education institutions, offering a unique blend of research, education and consultancy.

SRUC's research and education activities operate from six campuses and eight farms and research centres across Scotland. Its consultancy arm, SAC Consulting, supports more than 12,000 farms and rural businesses across the UK from 25 consultancy offices and eight veterinary disease surveillance centres.

Professor Sarah Skerratt, Director of Policy Engagement, SRUC.

Rural Policy Centre **www.sruc.ac.uk/ruralpolicycentre**

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