CHANGING VIEWS OF RURAL BRITAIN

Why Services Matter

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Acknowledgements

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INTRODUCTION

Guy Palmer

Changing Perceptions of Rural Britain

This pamphlet focuses on the major service deficits which rural people face and suggests a new direction for policy to tackle the problem, aimed at bringing services closer to where people live, rather than expecting people to travel often long distances to reach the services they need.

In doing this, the pamphlet is contributing to the deep change that is taking place in perceptions of rural Britain, and perhaps of rural England especially. The most important shift is the loosening of the association between 'rural' and 'agricultural'. The recent Cabinet Office report on rural economies not only recognises the difference between these two but, through its proposals for promoting non-agricultural economic development in the countryside, seeks to widen it. Meanwhile, newer associations, such as that between 'rural' and 'environment' receive further practical support through the new Common Agricultural Policy Rural Development Regulation and the government's specific proposals for enacting it.

In developing the various arguments about rural service provision, this pamphlet also questions a number of popular perceptions, namely:

- The perceived close connection between country-town and country-side.
- The idea that poverty is overwhelmingly an urban problem.
- The idea that the only response to the geographical concentration of services in larger centres is to make transport to those centres easier.

Problems

The difficulties facing poor people living in rural areas have recently become front page news and moved onto the government policy agenda. It is now agreed that there are serious problems, even if these are not immediately visible to the casual visitor.

Drawing on extensive discussions held in recent months with people in different parts of England, Ken Jones' paper examines who rural people are, where they come from, what their expectations are and what their links are within the country. His key conclusion is that there is now a gulf between country towns and what he calls the 'deep rural', leading to doubts about whether the former can serve as a the basis of a regeneration strategy for the latter.

Many of the problems in rural areas are similar to those in inner cities. Peter Kenway's analysis of newly available data on the number of people receiving the main means-tested benefits (Income Support, Family Credit or Job Seeker's Allowance) shows the large numbers of poor people living in rural areas. For example, one third of recipients live in non-metropolitan counties, while every rural or semi-rural district studied has at least one ward where 1 in 6 of the population can be classified as living in poverty.

Whilst action is underway on inner city problems, much less has been done for rural areas. Although the problems may be similar, the priorities may be different. One important issue which has received relatively little attention, and which is the subject of this pamphlet, is that of service deficits for people living in rural areas. Such deficits cover both access/availability of services and service quality. Ken Jones' and Phil Smith's paper provides examples of the problems across the spectrum of services: from health through leisure and community services to shops and financial services. And these problems are not confined to the rural poor.

A New Policy Framework For Service Provision?

For at least the last decade, service provision, in both public and private sectors, has become increasingly centralised, with people then travelling to access these services. Whilst the economic reasons for this are clear, so is the potential impact on people living in rural areas, particular for the poor and the elderly.

The obvious response is to address the transport issues, but to some extent this only address symptoms rather than causes. More radically, all the papers in this pamphlet conclude that the policy framework should also include a drive to bring services, both public and private, closer to their recipients, wherever needs demand and the economics can be made to work.

Some Examples of Barriers And Innovations For Delivering Services In Rural Areas

Health services: In North Cumbria, local postmen, shopkeepers, what North Cumbria called 'community connectors' are being seen as a health resource – linking the isolated with service networks. In South Shropshire, there is a service providing locally responsive *young-person-led* provision to young people. Both these projects aim to overcome the conflicting issues of privacy of delivery and a limited number of outlets in rural areas.

Local resources: Pubs which are also shops and post offices, city-rim supermarkets with parking-lot farmers' markets and village schools with community IT facilities are hampered either by planning constraints or by revenue costs. Herefordshire is currently developing IT links between centres in a range of villages, but the training catalyst for the project is concerned that it is dependent on volunteer-led initiative in each village. A drop-in centre with free Internet access and subsidised services and a training facility is used by an average of 850 callers per month from a catchment population of under 6,000.

Community enablers or 'wardens' are already being piloted in some previously troubled inner-city estates, where these paid individuals co-ordinate the provision of services so as to maximise the use of existing facilities. 80% of villages have village halls or at least one shop/post office. Financial institutions, legal and counselling services, add-on and complimentary health services, charity outlets and local produce and meat suppliers could make use of currently under-utilised facilities such as these if properly co-ordinated on a regular schedule, with frequency of service being dependent on take-up. This model has been piloted in rural areas in Canada and Australia.

Shopping: A project is soon to be launched creating a virtual supermarket from the forty or so different businesses in the High Street. Using a smart card, customers will shop in whatever store they wish, but only pay once, at the end. This new idea gains added value for the community by retailers and customers using the locally-owned and operated **credit society** as the clearing 'bank' for transactions.

As discussed in Ken Jones' paper, such a framework will need to explicitly address the issues of 'deep rural', avoiding the assumption that market town regeneration will automatically help communities and in particular poor people within the rural hinterlands of towns. It will also need to focus on empowerment - providing ways of helping rural communities to help themselves. Finally, reversing the trend to centralise service provision will only be possible if the viability of such provision can be shown in terms of cost effectiveness and long-term commercial viability.

In this context, many of the initiatives necessary to redress the problem of service deficits in rural areas will require government action at the national level in terms of policy and on the regional and local levels in terms of implementation. Andy Harrop's paper provides a summary of current initiatives and concludes that a shift in emphasis may be needed.

Conclusion

The message that emerges from the papers is that a multi-dimensional approach to services is needed:

- A change in direction, pushing out services nearer to the consumer, where ways can be found that make economic and social sense.
- Challenging providers where the policy is being delivered in an unsatisfactory way, producing unacceptable service levels.
- The provision of some services utilising new technologies which overcome geographical isolation.

Much of what is written in this pamphlet is by way of hypothesis, to stimulate thinking and perhaps challenge received wisdom. This applies particularly to the underlying direction for policy being put forward, of seeking to shift services towards people rather people towards services. In the abstract, there is no doubt that this is a good idea. The question, though, is how much practical application it has.

In order to establish this, we propose to take this work forward through a series of detailed investigations in rural areas, both to understand needs better and to investigate emerging and innovative schemes for service provision that accord in broad terms with this perspective. In doing so, we will be working with both individuals and small, local groups, as well as rural councils and major, private sector service providers. On the basis of these investigations, we will then move on to develop a series of policy proposals, for government and others, in order to address the issues raised.

A COUNTRYSIDE CRISIS?

Ken Jones

Everyone says that there is a crisis in the countryside, so it must be true. But the nature of the crisis differs depending upon the pressure group or the segment of society being interviewed. Britain will never be the same if the Government bans hunting with dogs. There will be nowhere worth walking or spending weekends if farmers go to the wall. A new Tescos built on the outskirts of Little Grunge-on-Trent will result in a new Skelmersdale being built and the whole of Dartmoor becoming a suburb. There need to be 2½ million new homes built by 2015 and everyone wants to live in Kent.

The issues surrounding what are broadly called 'countryside issues' are becoming the focus of public attention in a way unequalled for decades. Everyone has their own agenda. An aura of confrontation has grown up - townie versus countryfolk. Each little lobby group or organisation claims that no one understands as well as it does.

Successive governments and agencies have played a part in addressing the issues, but have largely confined themselves to re-defining the problems in new terms.

From Bracey's study in 1952, through the work of Walker and Shaw in the 1970s and McLaughlin's comprehensive, *Deprivation in Rural Areas* of 1985, to the more recent reports *The Future of Rural Society* and *Faith in the Countryside* (1997) and *Rural Audit* (1999), much has been written and discussed. All are agreed that over a quarter of all households in rural areas are living in or on the margins of poverty – and the degree of relative deprivation in rural areas is increasing**.** But there remains a mutual distrust and a sense of confrontation between what one side sees as know-it-all city folk and the other as constantly grumbling rural dwellers.

Sometimes it seems unclear what the questions are, let alone what answers there may be. What is the countryside? What is meant by a crisis? What are the problems? Are there solutions?

This paper discusses trends in the countryside and its people, drawing out the implications for tackling poverty and social exclusion. It draws on the interviews undertaken during the study and a review of research literature.

Defining The Countryside

To a resident of Acton or Brightside or Ladywood, any place outside of the city can be seen as 'countryside' – even Walton-on-Thames, Fulwood or Balsall Common. To suburban or commuterland dwellers, the country is probably the traditional shires made up of villages and small towns.

Ludlow, Shropshire

Ludlow is a small market town in South Shropshire. It is the administrative centre for the district council. It is the centre of one of the most farming dominated districts in England. Over 20% of the population of the area is employed in agricultural and ancillary work.

It has a regular, outdoor market. It was one of three animal marts in South Shropshire / North Herefordshire (the others – in Bromyard and Leominster – have now been absorbed). The animal mart has now been taken out of the traditional town centre market place and re-sited on the outskirts of the town. A proposal for a farmers' market has been actively opposed by local traders

Another suggestion to develop a large supermarket close to the centre of town has the support of the local authority in the hope of encouraging people to do all their shopping in Ludlow rather than travel to Shrewsbury for the 'big shop'.

The town has been actively promoted as a tourist centre and boasts three Michelin-starred restaurants.

Look a little closer, however, and it is not at all obvious that rural counties or even districts constitute a homogenous 'country' world. One of the primary problems recognised during the research into this paper is the issue of whether local centres within rural areas are truly rural: are 'country-towns' part of or separate from 'country-side'? London sees Bromyard as rural, Bromyard itself isn't too sure what it is, and the villages of North Herefordshire definitely see it as not being rural at all.

If the same question had been posed in 1950 – or even 1960, possibly even 1970 – these market towns would have been accepted by the villages and countryside round about as being very much part of a single rural community.

Dorchester, Dorset

Dorchester is a town on the main line from London. It has a significant part-week commuting population. It has not had a major animal market for many years. It already boasts two major supermarkets – one in the town centre and the other on the edge of the town. It is the administrative centre for both Dorset County Council and West Dorset District Council.

A recently developed farmers' market has been very popular and is based outside the town in a new housing development. The local traders are keen to encourage it into the town centre. A proposal for a fast-food outlet on the peripheral by-pass is being actively opposed.

This town still sees itself as the town for the surrounding farming and village communities, yet it has a closer association with London than has Ludlow.

Now, though, country-towns like Ludlow or Dorchester are still fully part of the countryside community only to the extent that they are the centres for local government, large-scale shopping and service headquarters.

The reason for this change is twofold, and each of the two has forced rural dwellers to look in different directions and ignore market towns.

First, ***there are no longer the strong ties of work, leisure and family that bonded towns to their surrounding villages and the farming community.*** For example, the interaction between farm and village children and young adults and those in the nearest town has diminished. Towns now have a vibrant nightlife – at least as compared to previous generations – and the Young Farmers Clubs, the churches and county shows are no longer the focus for social life. Nightclubs and bars in small towns attract town-based youth, but many of those living in the surrounding villages and farms cannot easily access them either because of a lack of transport or because of the pressures of farm life and work.

The result is that young farmers do not usually marry 'town' girls. The town girls work in the towns or go to college and few are prepared to marry onto a farm – a way of life which seems distant and unattractive. The contact between town families and relatives in the hinterland is, thus, much reduced.

Meanwhile, few family farms now employ people from the local towns. The economics of modern agriculture make small or medium sized farms only marginally viable and there is no capacity for employing people beyond the family. Many such farms have only kept going in recent years through borrowing on the capital value of the land and real property – effectively 'living off the estate'. This increased sense of isolation from the small-town community on the part of farmers has further severed the links between country towns and the surrounding area.

Second, ***country dwellers have developed more links with distant towns and many now skip the local centre altogether.*** Local hospital closures, rationalisation of local government, the merging of marts and abattoirs and the growth in large, city-rim supermarkets have all resulted in rural people (including farmers) going further, to larger centres for services they would previously have accessed at the nearest small town.

The overall consequence is that a three-part England is developing – not just town and country, but big town (or city), market town and the 'back' country. Each of these levels looks on the next as different. This change has resulted in a crisis of identity for many small towns: older, native inhabitants see themselves as 'of the country', whereas younger generations and recent incomers see themselves as 'of the town'.

This analysis suggests that any intention to focus rural regeneration exclusively on the revitalisation of market towns may well help those towns, but is unlikely to address social exclusion in the villages and countryside of England.

Defining Rural People

The nature of the inhabitants of traditional rural areas has changed substantially in the decades since the Second World War. There are now four distinct population groups in most villages: the 'native inhabitants', the 'incomers' (many of them retired), the 'dormitory dwellers' (who use the village as a satellite suburb) and the 'weekenders' (who own second homes in the village). Many of those interviewed observed that over half of village residents are now *in* the country, rather than *of* the country.

Villages differ and each of these groups differ, but some social problems are commonly enunciated:

- Retirees often move to a rural 'idyll' without much awareness of the working environment to which they were moving. Villages are not dormitory suburbs. Farms work early every morning and the harvest must be brought in, even if that involves working all night under lights. Village dwellers have to live with that and it is no use telling a neighbouring farmer to "keep your sheep quiet" after shearing!

- People accustomed to going home after work to a suburban semi often live in a neighbourhood with little interaction between residents of surrounding homes. A long, tiring day at work means that available free time is spent gardening, resting or socialising with close friends. There is little community involvement. The same lifestyle translated to a village results in an increasingly isolated existence. Locks are still bolted and impromptu visitors discouraged. Only when crises occur – such as the death or illness of a partner – does the survivor realise that he/she has lived in a community for several years without accessing it.

- Some incomers, principally those who were active in their former community or who are younger and have children in the village school, can become over-dominant in local organisations. Unaware of the slower pace and natural conservatism of rural people, they can become impatient with the time it takes to do things and to change traditional methods. 'Native' inhabitants can feel pushed aside and taken-over by these well-intentioned newcomers, causing obvious friction.

It is inevitable that fewer village and country residents will be employed in agricultural or other traditional countryside occupations. The number of retirees is also likely to grow. In these circumstances, it is vital that the links which bring all facets of the community together are encouraged.

Villages with a higher proportion of people attending the local church or with a local school can be more cohesive. Close a village shop and the vital thing lost is not just the place to buy a loaf of bread or a postage stamp, but also the principal place of cross-fertilisation between the various social groups of the village and surrounding farms. A shop helps break down barriers between long-time residents and recent arrivals - it is a focus for the village.

While village services are only a vital lifeline for a minority, they should matter to everyone: they bind together fragmented communities, reduce isolation and defuse social tensions.

Change In The Farming Community

There is increasing economic and social pressure on family-sized farms and most farms are under 100 hectares. Family farms, like village services, make a valuable contribution to the local community – a contribution disproportionately greater than that offered by larger, more economically advantageous, units.

- Farming families are often heavily involved in volunteer activities, send their children to local schools and support local services.
- Family farms make a vital contribution to the maintenance of the environment. Despite the EU's 'agri-environment' measures funding and other support is, however, still largely geared at food production, with little targeted to help farmers care for the countryside.

The Oxfordshire Farming Study 1999 showed that over 57% of the farmers in the county were over 50, with almost 30% over 60. Half of this total expected to retire within 10 years and an even greater proportion did not expect a family member to take over the farm. This is not only a problem in terms of the continuation of the family farm, but also points up the growing crisis in the lack of provision for retirement for farmers.

The government recently consulted on introducing EU early retirement support for farmers and farm workers. This support would, however, only provide part of the answer because farmers could not retire if there was no one to take over their holdings .

Now Is The Countryside Defined?

What is the countryside for? Is it just a pleasant extended garden for the cities? Is it a sink hole of uneconomic primary industry? Is it a huge retirement home? Or do real people with real problems live and work there? Is it important to the country as a whole?

People who live in the smallest village or in the most remote hill farm are not inherently different from those living in Hackney or Hallam. Their needs and problems are similar, although they often have different priorities among those needs and thus a different order in the scale of problems.

Problems of poverty, housing, economic restructuring, fragmenting communities, the trade-off between development and sustainability are issues for both rural and urban worlds. Perhaps the main difference between the two is that in the inner cities, these issues are being addressed whereas in rural areas they are not, to anything like the same degree. As a part of that, the deficit in the provision of services in rural areas is a subject long overdue for attention at the national level.

RURAL POVERTY: LOST IN A SEA OF STATISTICS?

Peter Kenway

Making Rural Poverty Visible

Rural poverty is often considered invisible, especially to those admiring pretty villages and green pastures. To make matters worse, it is also often all but invisible within the statistics that researchers use when they are studying poverty. Only the much-quoted McLaughlin study *(Deprivation in Rural Areas*, 1985*)* has conducted sufficiently detailed analysis to show the extent of rural deprivation but this research is now 15 years old.

In the last year, however, the Department of Social Security has started to make data available on the number of recipients of the main means-tested benefits for each ward in the country (where a 'ward' is the area represented by one or more councillors). With some 11,000 wards in the whole country, this is clearly a pretty substantial data set, making it possible to map the distribution of poverty far more precisely than has been possible in the past.

The need to combine the numbers of benefit recipients with other data, particularly on population and population density at ward level, means that we have only carried out an initial, selective analysis of the data, concentrating on 17 districts within our main areas of interest in this pamphlet, plus a further 7, clearly non-rural, reference districts in the same part of the country as well as 4 London boroughs (2 inner and 2 outer). They districts and boroughs are:

- ***Cumbria***: Allerdale, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland
- ***South and West Derbyshire***: Derbyshire Dales, High Peak and South Derbyshire.
- ***Dorset***: East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck and West Dorset.
- ***The Marches***: Bridgnorth, Herefordshire, North Shropshire, South Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin.
- ***Reference districts***: Barrow-in-Furness, Bournemouth, Bromsgrove, Coventry, Derby, Poole, Worcester and the London boroughs of Harrow, Havering, Islington and Southwark.

How Many Poor?

The means-tested benefits for which we have data here are:

- Income Support, for those who are not available for work.
- Family Credit, for those who are in work.
- Income-based Job Seekers Allowance, for those who are seeking work.

The total number of people receiving one of these benefits in England at any one time in 1999 was about 4.8 million. The number of benefit recipients cannot, however, be equated to the number of people in poverty:

- First, these statistics measure recipients rather than people dependent on those benefits.

- Second, some people who are eligible do not claim their benefits, and it has often been suggested that such under-claiming is higher in rural areas. Since rural poverty is often characterised by low-wages and high levels of subsistence self-employment, rather than high unemployment, such under-claiming is likely to include the low paid just as much as those not in work.

- Third, many people who are too 'rich' to qualify for means-tested benefits still live below the government's official poverty line of half average income.

Nevertheless, the DSS data is still the most powerful tool available for mapping significant variations in levels of poverty.

Depending on whether or not housing costs are taken into account in the calculation, there are between 11 and 14 million people living in households with below half average income *(Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 1999)*. As a rough rule of thumb, then, the number of benefit recipients should be multiplied by at least a factor of 2 in order to get a measure of the extent of poverty.

Patterns Of Poverty At County, District And Ward Level

County Level

Table 1 presents some basic information on population and recipient numbers broken down by the type of local authority. The data is for England only.

Table 1: Benefit recipients and population: by type of local authority (England)				
Type of authority	*Recipients (millions)*	*Recipients (% of total)*	*Population (% of total)*	*Recipients per 100 population*
Metropolitan Counties and London	2.3m	48%	37%	12½
Unitary Authorities	0.9m	18%	17%	10
Non-metropolitan (Shire) Counties	1.6m	34%	46%	7
Total	4.8m	100%	100%	9½

Non-metropolitan counties clearly do not equate to rural, while unitary authorities are by no means wholly urban. Even so, this division certainly helps to develop an understanding of the extent of poor people in rural areas:

- While the metropolitan counties and the unitary authorities certainly contain the majority of benefit recipients, there are still 1.6 million, equal to one third of the total, to be found in the non-metropolitan counties (columns 1 and 2).
- 7% of the total population in the non-metropolitan counties are benefit recipients compared to 13% in the metropolitan counties - less numerous, therefore, but certainly significant (column 3).

District Level

In order to go beyond the county-level, the analysis below uses data on population density to provide a definition of rural and then looks at how the proportion that recipients represent as a share of the total population varies between different areas.

Table 2 provides such an analysis for the 28 selected districts. The districts have been grouped into 4 types, based on population per hectare: rural - less than 1; semi-rural - 1 to 5; semi-urban - 5 to 25; and urban - above 25 (with a roughly five-fold ratio between the highest and lowest density in each group).

Within these four groups, the districts have been ranked according to the average proportion for the district (column 1). Columns 2 and 3 then show the wards in each district with the lowest and the highest number of recipients as a share of the total population.

Table 2: Recipients per 100 population: by district and district type

	Average (mean)	*Minimum ward*	*Maximum ward*
Rural districts			
Eden	5.0	1.7	9.5
Derbyshire Dales	5.3	2.6	9.1
South Lakeland	5.4	1.8	15.0
North Dorset	5.9	1.8	10.2
Bridgnorth	6.2	1.5	10.8
West Dorset	6.8	3.1	15.5
South Shropshire	7.2	1.8	12.9
North Shropshire	7.4	3.4	11.4
Allerdale	8.9	1.5	21.0
Copeland	10.0	2.7	21.2
Semi-rural districts			
Bromsgrove	5.1	2.5	9.7
East Dorset	5.1	1.6	8.9
Purbeck	6.3	3.6	8.7
South Derbyshire	6.7	2.3	10.5
High Peak	7.6	3.3	18.0
Carlisle	9.0	2.4	15.7
Herefordshire	10.3	4.9	19.4
Semi-urban districts			
Havering	7.1	2.4	15.1
Poole	7.8	3.2	11.5
Worcester	9.2	4.5	14.8
Telford and Wrekin	10.9	3.2	17.8
Barrow-in-Furness	12.2	4.6	22.5
Urban districts			
Harrow	8.0	3.6	13.0
Bournemouth	12.1	6.6	24.8
Derby	12.1	3.0	25.9
Coventry	12.5	3.3	23.0
Southwark	20.1	5.6	27.7
Islington	21.4	16.9	28.0

- Looking at the first column, the lowest average anywhere is 5%. Multiplying this by 2 to get a measure of the poor, none of the districts in this sample has fewer than 1 in 10 people who would be classed as in poverty.
- Looking at the third column, every rural or semi-rural district has at least one ward where the recipient share exceeds about 9%. Multiplying by 2, all these districts therefore have at least one ward where 1 in 6 of the population would be classed as in poverty.
- Some rural or semi-rural districts - Allerdale, Copeland, High Peak or Herefordshire - have 'worst' wards that stand comparison with the 'worst' wards in urban areas, including urban areas in inner London.

Ward Level

Table 3 takes the analysis a step further, by classifying wards within districts using the same population density criteria as were used above to classify districts. Every entry in the table shows the average number of benefit recipients per 100 members of the population for the wards in each category of ward/district pairing.

Table 3: Recipients per 100 population: classification by ward and district

	Rural wards	*Semi-rural wards*	*Semi-urban wards*	*Urban wards*	*Total*
Rural districts	4.7	7.7	8.9	9.5	6.9
Semi-rural districts	4.7	5.2	7.1	10.4	6.8
Semi-urban districts	5.5	7.3	8.7	9.3	8.9
Urban districts	-	-	10.2	14.8	14.0

The table shows that semi-urban and urban wards are to be found everywhere, even in rural districts.

The totals in the last column suggest that when one looks at whole districts, there is no difference between rural and semi-rural districts and only limited differences between them and semi-urban ones. More striking results are to be seen from the individual columns:

- In each type of district, the percentage of recipients increase as the wards become more urban.

- Rural wards look pretty similar whatever type of district they are in (noting that they are not to be found at all in urban districts), as do both semi-rural wards and semi-urban.

So, while there are differences between different types of wards, with the recipient share lowest in the rural wards and highest in the urban, it looks as if wards are in some sense 'independent' of the type of district in which they fall.

In these general terms, this is clearly a strong statement, which must immediately be qualified for two reasons. First, its general truth can only be established by examining all the 11,000 wards in the country as a whole, rather than just this sample. Second, it might not be the case if the rates of benefit take-up differed significantly by district.

Finally, table 4 draws on the same data to show the distribution of recipients within each type of district according to the type of ward they are in.

Table 4: Percentage of recipients in each district, classified by ward

	Rural wards	*Semi-rural wards*	*Semi-urban wards*	*Urban wards*
Rural districts	28%	21%	39%	12%
Semi-rural districts	11%	20%	45%	24%
Semi-urban districts	1%	4%	40%	55%
Urban districts	-	-	12%	88%

Looking therefore at the first two columns (where the same qualifications apply as to the previous results): in rural districts, about a half of all benefit recipients actually live in rural or semi-rural wards; in semi-rural districts, this share falls to about 1 in 3; while in semi-urban districts it falls to 1 in 20.

Conclusions

The analysis above suggests that:

- ***'The poor in rural districts are actually not invisible in the statistics'***. All our statistics show significant numbers of poor people outside of the main urban areas. While there are wards with as few as 1% of the population claiming one of the means-tested benefits, none of the districts in the sample has an average lower than 1 recipient in 20, equivalent, on a cautious calculation, at least 1 in 10 in poverty.

- ***The regularity in the pattern appears to lie at the ward level***. This is a strong statement, to be treated as no more than a working hypothesis. What it means is that on our four-fold classification, each type of ward has a broadly similar number of recipients per head irrespective of the type of district it lies in (with a rise in the number of recipients per head of population as one moves from rural to urban wards).

Some Implications For Service Provision In Rural Areas?

First, ***in thinking about services in general, the needs of poor people should be given high priority***. At district level, there are always at least 10% of people who would count as being in poverty using the government's definition. There will, of course, be many more whose incomes are only a little above those levels.

To live in or near poverty and to lack decent access to services is a text-book example of social exclusion. People in poverty without key services are not only deprived of things most of us take for granted, they are also deprived of the means by which they can escape the trap of poverty and exclusion.

Some of the problems with services in rural areas are likely to be experienced right across the income spectrum. But, for those living in poverty, spending extra on transport costs is either simply impossible or involves diverting a massive slice of income from spending on other necessities.

Second, ***the majority of poverty in rural and semi-rural districts is to be found in urban and semi-urban wards.*** Meeting the service needs of poorer people in rural districts, therefore, requires due attention to an urban dimension as well as a rural dimension.

Third, to the extent that poor people in rural areas lack adequate services *because* they are poor, the causes of their problems are likely to be similar to those that apply in urban areas. Of course, the very much lower population densities, adds an extra dimension - but it is an extra one, not the only one.

Collectively, these observations would imply that answers to problems with services in rural areas will combine general solutions appropriate everywhere with particular solutions appropriate to areas of low population density.

THE RURAL SERVICE DEFICIT

Ken Jones and Phil Smith

Which Services?

Services are a broad category of provisions which make life liveable. They can range from the necessities like basic utilities, food shops and healthcare, through lifestyle enhancers like adult education and refuse collection, to things which make life more enjoyable like drop-in centres and swimming pools.

Table 1 provides a list, no doubt far from exhaustive, which indicates the wide range of services which most people today take for granted.

Table 1: A classification of services

Non-commercial services	***Commercial services which sometimes receive public money***	***Commercial services which do not receive public money***
Doctors, nurses and clinics.	Public transport.	The mail and post offices.
Hospitals and ambulances.	Child care and after-school clubs.	Banks and other financial institutions.
Police and judicial system.	Nursing homes.	Complementary medicine.
Social services: disability and geriatric assistance.	Dentists and chiropodists.	Church halls.
Schools, further and higher education.	Leisure centres and sports facilities.	Shops and garages.
Roads and street lighting.	Community centres and drop-in centres.	Veterinary services, abattoirs, animal markets.
Refuse, re-cycling and environmental protection.	Vocational training and re-training.	Electricity, gas and water.
Job centres and career advice.		Telephone and IT services.
		Lawyers, accountants, etc.

Imbalances In Service Provision Between Rural and Urban Areas

The pattern of service provision has become very sparse. For example, of the 58 villages in South Shropshire, only 1 in 10 had a doctors' surgery - and fewer had a police station. Half had a pub, but only 2 in 5 had a post office and only 1 in 3 a shop (*South Shropshire Action Plan 1999/2002*, 1999).

Statistical evidence on the provision of services in rural areas has been gathered by the Rural Development Commission. In 1997, this showed that only 1 village in 4 had a daily bus service, just half still had a school, and fewer than 3 in every 5 villages had a permanent shop (Countryside Agency website)

It is difficult to say whether or not the situation is getting worse. It is, however, certainly true that there are a variety of factors which ensure that service deficits are being more readily perceived:

- In the last 20 years, Britain has become a much more consumer-orientated country. Across the country people expect excellent services that match the quality of the best provision on offer.
- Many more people are moving to rural communities after retirement. They bring with them city-based expectations in terms of services. They are generationally less likely to access services via new technologies. Their need of social services and healthcare is heightened by their age.
- The size of families has decreased. Many more farmers have no family at all. The number of young families in smaller villages has declined. All this adds up to the textbook recipe for village school closure. Dormitory families then move to villages, bringing young children with them and find the drive to school is likely to be a round trip of 4-6 miles (or up to 20 in very rural areas).
- The good work of advocacy groups for the aged, disabled or those with special needs has increased the demand for services from rural residents. People are much more likely to demand their "rights" today and people in rural areas no longer have lower expectations in terms of services than do urban dwellers.

***Toward solutions**: The high provision of libraries is the result of the success of mobile library networks. A traditional 'travel-to' service based on a large catchment population has been miniaturised and transformed into an out-reach service with improved quality service that requires minimal travel by customers.*

The two graphs on the next few pages illustrate the lower level of provision of two local authority services in rural areas.

Leisure provision and care in the home have been selected as contrasting examples of the way services are delivered. Care in the home is by definition an example of an out-reach service delivered to each user; to use leisure centres and swimming pools customers necessarily need to travel – often a considerable way. In terms of accessibility most other services can be placed on a spectrum between swimming pools and in-home care. Of these services, pharmacies, children's playgrounds, and old people's day centres are all examples of services where provision *per capita* is also lower in rural areas.

Service imbalances can be potential justified by rational arguments, for example, that it costs more *per capita* to provide services in rural areas (particularly if there is out-reach provision), or that uptake of service provision is lower in rural areas because, where the population is more dispersed, it is harder for most people to reach a travel-to service.

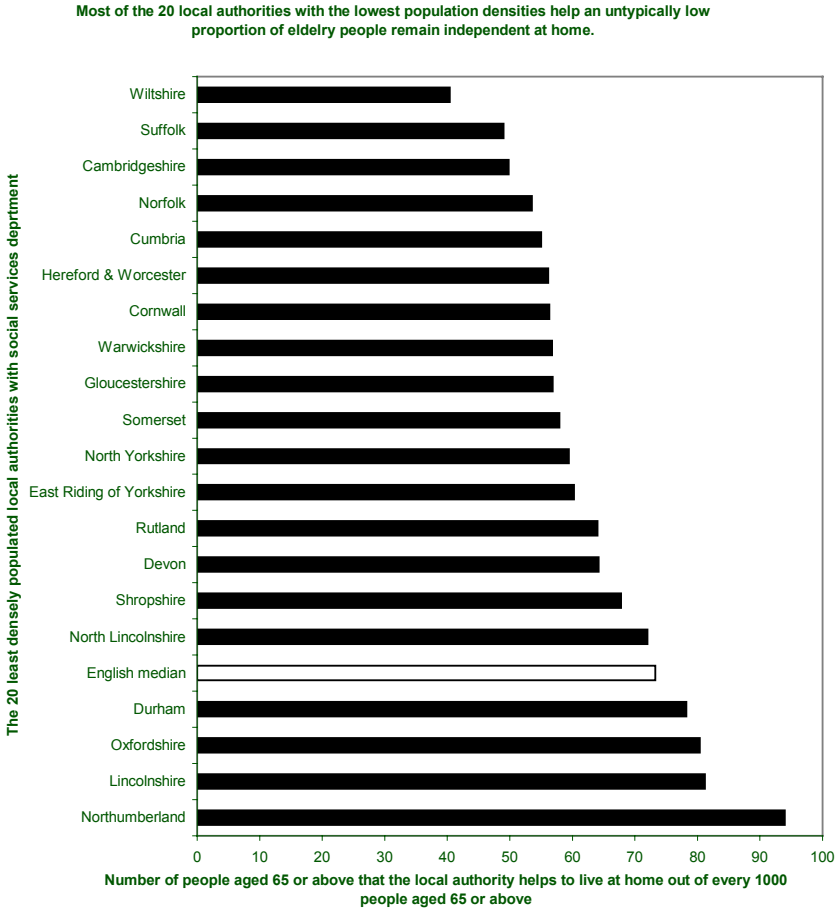
But whatever the reasons for lower service provision, the perception of rural consumers is likely to be that they receive unequal treatment. Whilst lower *per unit of area* provision is obviously acceptable, lower *per capita* provision will mean that service catchment areas are even larger and the services consequently more difficult to access.

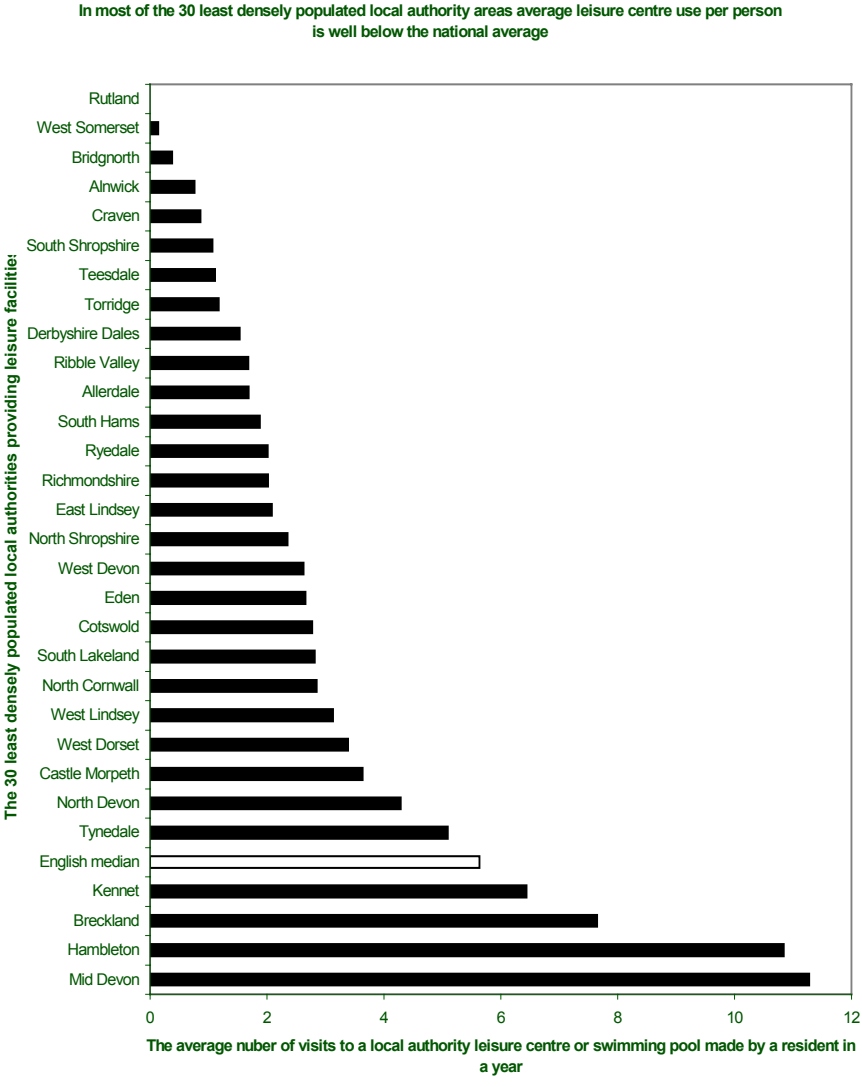
This analysis at local authority level does not include possible disparities of service provision within rural counties and districts. The conversations we had during the course of this study suggest there are three core perceptions about service provision within rural areas:

- Rural villages lack basic services; provision is often getting worse.

- Small towns have seen many medium-scale services disappear in the last twenty years. Some towns are no longer equipped to provide for the everyday needs of their residents or the surrounding villages.

- Large towns offer an 'urban' level of service provision. Residents of large towns suffer less from the service deficits that the surrounding area may face. People living in small towns and villages need to use these large towns ever more often.




In most of the 30 least densely populated local authority areas average leisure centre use per person is well below the national average
The 30 least densely populated local authorities providing leisure facilities
Rutland
West Somerset
Bridgnorth
Alnwick
Craven
South Shropshire
Teesdale
Torridge
Derbyshire Dales
Ribble Valley
Allerdale
South Hams
Ryedale
Richmondshire
East Lindsey
North Shropshire
West Devon
Eden
Cotswold
South Lakeland
North Cornwall
West Lindsey
West Dorset
Castle Morpeth
North Devon
Tynedale
English median
Kennet
Breckland
Hambleton
Mid Devon
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
The average nuber of visits to a local authority leisure centre or swimming pool made by a resident in a year

Some Problems With Services In Rural Areas

The rural service deficit is not just a question of a shortage of provision.

Health and Social Care

Smaller communities often present unique issues in terms of privacy in both the need and provision of health and social services. There is a distinct 'goldfish bowl' atmosphere which can lead to a reticence to access needed services viewed as socially demeaning.

In rural Herefordshire, a trial project had a social service bus visit villages to bring advice, counsel and form-filling facilities to those unable to access town offices. The project failed in some villages because the bus was sited in very public places – everyone could see who went in. Further, the bus came infrequently and many residents forgot when it was next due. Similarly one person we interviewed commented that some farmers are reluctant to discuss mental health problems with their GPs and many elderly couples insist on caring for each other without outside help.

***Toward solutions**: In North Cumbria, local postmen, shopkeepers, what North Cumbria called 'community connectors', are being seen as a health resource – linking the isolated with service networks. In South Shropshire, there is a service providing locally responsive young-person-led provision to young people.*

Leisure Services

The lack of these services is one of the most commonly noted problems in many communities. Surveys in Herefordshire and Derbyshire both revealed that leisure access was one of the dominant service issues for local residents.

Leisure services provide places for young peer groups to meet. As Jones and Jamieson found in their study of 1997 *(Migrating or Staying : Decision-making and Behaviour among Young People in Rural Scotland)* with the absence of structured leisure facilities in rural communities and the lack of public transport to attend town-based facilities as an established group, village youths tend not to go to such facilities at all because of suspicion of threat from town groups. The only place to congregate is the village bus stop or small square – where they are then seen as a threat by older residents.

Community Centres

A lot of money has been spent in the past few years on village halls and other community resources, this being one of the focus areas for the Millennium Commission National Lottery funding. In some areas, new village halls have been built to serve a cluster of small villages - leaving transport issues unresolved. In other areas, village halls have been built or refurbished in almost every tiny community sometimes often resulting in the facilities being under-used.

Meanwhile in village schools, a recent innovation is the provision of funds to offer IT facilities housed in the school for the use of the local community. The initiative was taken with the aim of introducing older people to the possibilities of computers and the Internet, possibly lessening their individual isolation from web-based remote service providers. Such schools can become not only a focus of learning, but also of community life for parents and grand-parents, providing facilities for wider community, youth and even business purposes. But, of course, if village schools are closed such opportunities disappear.

The capital investments made recently in local schools and halls are in danger of not fulfilling their potential because of a void in village life. Villages may have superb facilities but there is often no one to act as a catalyst for their co-ordinated use. Gone have the days of the paternalistic squire or the church as the hub of all activity.

Toward solutions: *Community enablers or 'wardens' are already being piloted in some previously troubled inner-city estates, where these paid individuals co-ordinate the provision of services so as to maximise the use of existing facilities. 80% of villages have village halls or at least one shop/post office. Financial institutions, legal and counselling services, add-on and complimentary health services, charity outlets and local produce and meat suppliers could make use of currently under-utilised facilities such as these if properly co-ordinated on a regular schedule, with frequency of service being dependent on take-up. This model has been piloted in rural areas in Canada and Australia.*

Retail

The withdrawal of retail from villages is the most noticeable feature of rural service crises. The site of boarded up village shops, pubs and post offices has been familiar for years.

One topical example concerns the risks to future of village post offices, with the government's recent announcement to push automated credit transfer of benefits. If this initiative is pursued without reference to the possible knock on effects, the move towards paying benefits directly into bank accounts could well result in many fewer customers going to post offices, leaving them commercially non-viable, with adverse consequences to the whole of the village community.

But this example also illustrates the possibilities: if all the major banks and the Post Office could agree partnership arrangements whereby people could access their bank accounts at the local post office, then the post offices could remain viable and, indeed, access to financial services in rural areas could potentially be improved. (*Meaningful Choices: The policy options for financial exclusion*, 1999)

Toward solutions: *At the moment planning regulations or magistrates rulings bar pubs from operating as retail outlets or post-offices. A change in the law would allow the village pub to become a multi-purpose site that could house a general store, post office and video-shop.*

Small towns are suffering from exactly the same sort of retail withdrawal as villages. This process has not attracted the same publicity village shop closures receive. The slow decline of a formerly bustling shopping centre is not such a sudden, community-shattering event as the death of a villages only shop.

Toward solutions*: In Kington, Herefordshire, a project is soon to be launched creating a virtual supermarket from the forty or so different businesses in the High Street. Using a smart card, customers will shop in whatever store they wish, but only pay once, at the end. This new idea gains added value for the community by retailers and customers using the locally-owned and operated credit union as the clearing 'bank' for transactions.*

Training

One important service in rural areas is training and re-training. Rural skills are less and less needed in the agricultural sector largely as a result of the sudden and recent decline in farm incomes, which has led to fewer farmers employing non-family members as workers. The result is that surplus farm labourers and local school-leavers need help learning skills they will need for tourism, service industries or light manufacturing which are the rural growth industries.

If training is not available locally unskilled workers tend to gravitate towards urban areas – either to access training or to seek unskilled work. Good local training will contribute towards ending such migration.

Transport: Access to Remote Services

In terms of rural service deficits, transport is usually seen as the big issue. The is because the provision of services to people who live in rural areas is increasingly undertaken by assuming that consumers will travel to the services rather than the services being provided where the consumers live. Service providers then concentrate on offering services at hub centres – small towns or the suburbs of comparatively nearby bigger cities.

In rural areas, transport usually means car. Figures for 1994-96 showed that the proportion of journeys made by car was 69% in rural areas, compared with just 59% in the country as a whole.

Survey results in 1999 clearly show, however, that many rural residents do not regard a service which can only be accessed by driving as an adequate service. For example, *Indicators of social and economic need in Midlands uplands* (1999) found that, even though only 12% of local households were without access to a car, lack of access to leisure centres, supermarkets and doctors were each considered to be serious issues by around 30% of survey respondents. The report concluded:

Access to services is difficult for a large section of the population, and is particularly acute for those without cars; 27% say they have difficulties accessing a doctor for example, rising to 57% among those from households without a car. Having said that, car ownership is high, with 88% of households having access to at least one car, compared with 70% nationally. The need for a car is clearly prioritised by households, which is likely to make running costs a considerable burden for those on low incomes; for example, over half of those with household incomes under £120 a week own at least one car.

This evidence suggests that many members of the community find it difficult or inconvenient to reach remote services. Furthermore, for a disadvantaged minority, access to remote services is simply impossible without special assistance and, for poorer people, remote services can only be accessed by sacrificing other important needs.

Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire

In Tenbury Wells, the Teme Valley Rural Challenge has been charged with helping to re-generate a community threatened by local industrial closures. The small town is in Worcestershire, but is just yards from South Shropshire and just a few fields away from Herefordshire. The place is on the cusp of no less than five local authorities – two counties, two districts and a unitary authority.

The town epitomises many of the service deficit criteria discovered in researching this paper. It is a small town soon to lose its last link with farming – the weekly market. The old market area is to be converted into a supermarket. The townspeople are largely incomers with no local ties to the surrounding village community. There has been no co-operation in the provision of cross-border services between local authorities – even transport authorities did not liaise.

The plans for town re-generation accent the needs of Tenbury and the other two mini towns in the area. There is no remit – and no work done – to counter service deficit in the surrounding countryside or villages.

What Could Be Done: Some Observations

Clearly, it is always likely to be right to look for ways to improve transport in rural areas. But we think that attention should be broadened beyond transport, towards what might be taken to be the deeper causes of the problem that appears as the rural transport deficit. That deeper cause is the provider-driven paradigm, which places the emphasis on bringing people to a convenient delivery point predicated by the needs and priorities of the provider rather than the consumer. ***We believe that the time has come to address this problem head-on, rather than focusing attention on dealing with the transport symptoms of the problem.***

There are alternatives to simply expecting people in rural communities to travel ever more to access services.

First, new technology could be utilised so that remote services can be accessed without transport. The possibilities are obvious, from ordering the weekly shop to managing one's bank account. But we suggest that it will be important to see existing trends develop so that they involve the whole community, with the local provision of information and communication technology centres and advice as the key. Rural communities are sufficiently small, wealthy and cohesive that it is possible to imagine local technology centres working for the benefit of the whole community.

Kington, Herefordshire

IT might seem the ideal way of 'bringing services to people'. But even this can fall foul of badly thought-through schemes to reward providers.

As part of an integrated project to utilise IT in ways to limit the effect of geographical isolation on service provision in West Herefordshire, a community-owned company was established in Kington in 1994. KC3 (Kington Connected Communities Company) offered local unemployed direct access to job vacancies by logging-on to the data base at the Hereford Jobcentre.

The service proved a great success in lowering unemployment levels in the town and surrounding parishes. However, in their performance-related statistics, jobcentre staff received no credit for jobs found through this private IT project. The system of presenting the vacancies on-line was changed in 1997 and KC3 is refused access to the vacancies. Prospective employees now have to travel the 30-mile round trip to Hereford for up-to-date vacancies.

Second, more services can be pushed-out towards their users. Unlike new technology, however, promoting out-reach services involves reversing rather than riding a trend. In the world of the bottom line, the only way private or public services are likely to be pushed-out to users will be through adjusting operating environments so that out-reach is necessary, efficient or profitable. For this to be the case, it may be necessary for government intervention to show that ***infrastructure is present*** in terms of public sector funded facilities to help commercial operations supply services in a financially viable environment.

Finally, it is unclear how much reliance can be put on ***volunteers***. Villages are now composed more of service consumers than of service providers. Older populations with the remaining working people often employed many miles away and unavailable to offer help to volunteer agencies because of work and travel times has put a great strain on the voluntary sector. Many farmers also now work longer hours as bought-in help is no longer economically viable, so their contribution to community-help schemes is reduced.

WHO IS TAKING THE RURAL INITIATIVE?

Andy Harrop

Responsibility for developing and implementing public policy for rural England is shared by many different public organisations, ranging from the EU to the local initiatives of parish councils. Public bodies are also not the only organisations involved in designing and delivering strategies and initiatives for rural England: voluntary and community organisations are involved at every level in designing and delivering their own policy initiatives, in participating in the planning and implementation of publicly-funded strategies, and in trying to persuade public organisations to adopt new agendas.

The Government

Responsibility for rural issues in government is split between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions. Policy is not neatly divided into 'agriculture' and 'the rest'. For example, MAFF has responsibility for all policy relating to the EU Common Agriculture Policy, which extends well beyond support for the agricultural sector into other areas of EU rural development policy.

Aspirations? Towards A Rural White Paper

As part of the preparation for the Rural White Paper, the DETR published *Rural England: a Discussion Document* in Spring 1999. The paper set out a number of principles for the framing of government rural policy, including:

- Ensuring economic vitality and sustainable development.
- Developing strong communities through securing the provision of public services and fostering community participation.
- Working towards a fair and inclusive society by reducing social exclusion, recognising diversity within rural England, and incorporating rural needs into the design of national policy.
- Establishing partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors, decentralising decision making and integrating rural and urban policy making.

The document committed the government to considering a wide range of issues in the communities and services element of the White Paper preparation: transport; education; utility provision; health; social services; access to justice; housing; local businesses; information and communication technology centres; childcare; community safety; and access to culture.

It was originally planned that the White Paper would be published in the Summer of 1999; it is now likely to appear in mid-2000.

Proposals? The PIU Rural Economies Report

The PIU (Performance and Innovation Unit) is a strategic, cross-departmental unit based in the Cabinet Office. It published a report on rural economies shortly before this pamphlet went to press.

The PIU Rural Economies Report proposals

1. **Improved government co-ordination and policy framework**
2. **An enterprising countryside:** (i) *planning that supports business and wider community needs; (ii) an improved skills base; (iii) ICT/transport/business-site infrastructure; and (iv) improved business advice and support.*
3. **Sustainable agriculture:** (i) *less production support; more agri-environment support; (ii) agriculture to be treated more like other businesses (e.g. planning); (iii) better business support - for diversification and product improvement; and (iv) extension of the shift from high-output farming to differentiated, high quality production.*
4. **An enhanced environment***: (i) protection of environmentally important NOT fertile land; (ii) deliberative planning process that considers environmental, economic and social issues together; (iii) better compensation for development - through charging or compensation in kind; and (iv) tourism charges and traffic management schemes.*
5. **Thriving and inclusive communities***: (i) improved access to transport (ending the restrictions on community transport; (ii) improved access to services* ***– enhanced ICT-use and multi-function, out-reach service provision is proposed****; (iii) improved provision of social and affordable housing; and (iv) strengthen market towns.*

DETR Initiatives To Support Rural Public Transport

The 1998 Budget committed £150 million to support rural public transport. The funding is divided into three strands:

1. **Subsidies for extra socially necessary services** *make up the bulk of the funding. Local Authorities are encouraged to ensure that there is an appropriate network and minimum service levels.*
2. **The Rural Bus Challenge** *supports local authority or bus company innovation. In 1999, £11 million was allocated to the fund in England, with at least £5 million will be made available in 2000 and again in 2001. Projects supported include: assistance for taxi-buses, social service department vehicles and voluntary sector vehicles; on-demand buses serving small communities; information and publicity programmes; and improved facilities at rural inter-changes.*
3. **The Rural Transport Partnership** *is making £13 million available to support voluntary and community sector transport initiatives. There are three themes for projects: long-term improvements; co-ordination of local authority, voluntary and community services; and integration of bus, rail and taxi.*

The Countryside Agency

The Countryside Agency is a new DETR executive agency that began work in April 1999. It took on most of the functions of the Countryside Commission and the Rural Development Commission. One of the agency's major objectives is to promote social equity and economic opportunity in rural communities. It has a number of functions including the administration of several policy initiatives, the commissioning of research, and the provision of guidance and advice to central and local government and to the Regional Development Agencies.

Countryside Agency Programmes

Voluntary sector support: *£3 million of support for the 38 Rural Community Councils, £60,000 for ACRE and £90,000 for NCVO – providing advice and assistance for rural voluntary organisations.*

Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs): *The Countryside Agency provides half the funding for a maximum of 5 years for RHEs to work with local communities, housing associations, local authorities and landlords. There are currently 18 in England. They have a wide range of tasks, which stretch to an involvement in other services such as the delivery of community care, advice and information, and addressing the needs of young people.*

Rural Transport: *there are two grant schemes: the Rural Transport Development Fund (which provides grants for new and enhanced services); and the Rural Transport Partnership Scheme (which funds local partnerships which can take a strategic view of needs and solutions for an area).*

Village Halls: *£1 million of grants are made each year to maintain or improve the service provided by halls. £150,000 of loans were made in 1998 to support capital improvements.*

Village Shop Development Scheme: *the agency funds 50% of grants aimed at preventing further shop closures and maintaining and improving village shop performance. The other 50% is provided by a local partnership. The total size of a grant can be between £1,500 and £5,000; shop owners are required to make a matching investment themselves.*

The European Union

After several years of 'Agenda 2000' negotiation and preparation, the EU began a new seven-year funding cycle on 1 January 2000. The new funding regime will deliver rural development measures through four mechanisms: the CAP rural development regulation, structural funds (objective one), structural funds (objective two) and LEADER+.

The CAP Rural Development Regulation

The Rural Development Regulation, enacted by the Council of Ministers in May 1999, is a new element of the Common Agriculture Policy. Bringing together previously scattered development measures, as well as introducing new policy, the regulation sets a framework for EU-wide rural development programmes.

The UK government is responsible for developing an appropriate national programme of measures within the framework. Subsidiarity is further extended as the plan is being broken down into regional chapters, each based on input from regional-level partners such as RDAs. Some flexibility in implementation is also likely to be passed down to regional level.

In December 1999 Nick Brown, the Minister for Agriculture announced that UK Rural Development would be allocated £1.6 billion between 2000 and 2006. The majority of the budget will be spent on environmentally-friendly farming schemes and supporting farmers on marginal land. However £22 million is being spent on training, £40 million on improving marketing and processing and £150 million on a Rural Enterprise Scheme that will support all rural businesses.

Structural Funds: Objective One

'Objective One' is the programme for the economic development of EU regions with GDP per capita of below 75% of the EU average. Cornwall and the Scillies is the only largely rural region in England to receive this status, the others being Merseyside, South Yorkshire, West Wales and the Valleys.

The EU is providing Cornwall with about £300 million over seven years. This funding has to be matched by the domestic public sector and, it is hoped by the voluntary sector too, meaning that almost £1billion will be available.

The Cornwall and Scillies Objective One Partnership Draft Single Planning Document

Five priority areas for action are proposed:

1. **Medium, small and micro business support**. *Support will be delivered through services and facilities provision, support of investment by SMEs and accommodation and infrastructure improvements.*
2. **Strategic Spatial Development***: investing in sites and infrastructure. The priorities are: large-scale strategic transport projects; investments supporting major opportunities such as the Combined Universities in Cornwall and new freight handling facilities; investment in key towns and investment in people.*
3. **Community regeneration***: this priority area focuses explicitly on the needs of rural and coastal communities.*
4. **Integrated Area Plans** *for rural areas will encourage integrated approaches from health, education, social services, policing and community development and encourage shared facilities.*
5. **Regional distinctiveness**.

Once the strategic framework is adopted (expected by the middle of 2000), the Partnership's Programme Monitoring Committee will call for applications for specific projects that meet the specified strategic requirements.

Structural Funds: Objective Two

'Objective Two' is aimed at areas facing structural problems and undergoing social and economic conversion. This includes 'declining rural areas', defined as those with declining populations or with unemployment above the EU average. The government proposed a list of Objective Two areas in October 1999. Once the European Commission has confirmed this list, Single Planning Documents will be drawn up for each area, as has already happened for Cornwall. Invitations for project bids will not begin until at least late 2000. England will receive £2 billion over seven years for Objective Two, but the allocation between areas has not yet been announced.

LEADER+

LEADER+ is the 2000-2006 'Community initiative to assist rural development'. The programme will provide funding (which UK public bodies must match) for pilot rural development strategies. Eligible projects need to be local, partnership-based, internally coherent and relevant to mainstream EU programmes (either under CAP or the Structural Funds). The objective of the initiative is the introduction and wide dissemination of new models for rural development. Trans-national and inter-regional co-operation and networking are central to the LEADER programme. LEADER is a small-scale initiative: the UK allocation for 2000-2006 is € 106 million.

Regional Development Agencies

Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) are the new regional organisations with responsibility for economic development and regeneration. They are public bodies created by act of parliament and spending public money. However, they are intended to be semi-detached from government, contain a strong element of private sector leadership, and to act as the independent facilitators of partnership between central government, local authorities, and the private and voluntary sector. Three elements of the work of the RDAs are particularly relevant to rural policy: regional economic strategies, rural development areas and the single regeneration budget.

Regional Economic Strategies

Each RDA had to draw up an economic strategy in 1999. It is intended that these strategies act as the blueprint for the development of each region for at least a decade. The government's guidance obliged RDAs to take into account the special needs of rural areas in drawing up the strategies.

Most of the strategies do not, however, devote specific sections to rural policy. Instead they argue that strategic objectives such as boosting training and employability, developing information and communication technology centres, supporting business development, and promoting regional commercial identity are as important for rural areas as they are for urban areas. In line with the government's thinking, strategies stress the inter-dependency of rural and urban economies.

Creating Advantage – The West Midlands Economic Strategy - an example of a strategy in a region with major urban centres and deep rural areas:

There are four 'pillars' to the strategy, are all intended to apply both to rural and urban areas: developing the business base; improving learning and skills; creating the conditions for growth through providing appropriate transport infrastructure, business sites and housing; and regeneration of deprived communities.

Within this, the RDA is preparing a rural-urban links action programme which will concentrate on: promoting awareness of respective issues and needs; leading urban-rural co-ordination in the food industry; developing tourism and leisure; promoting urban fringes and market towns as the meeting point of rural and urban communities; developing transport; and facilitating the exchange of good practice.

The strategy acknowledges that deep rural areas do face some specific problems including an over-reliance on agriculture; a small range of business and job opportunities; poor access to transport, job markets and training; and severe shortages in affordable housing.

The actions proposed by the strategy include: market town development; brownfield development in villages and farms; communications infrastructure provision; and transport provision.

Rural Development Areas

RDAs have taken over responsibility for rural regeneration and Rural Development Areas from the Rural Development Commission. Rural Development Areas currently cover 35% of English land area and 6% of English population. Such areas receive support for integrated rural development programmes, and individual businesses can also apply for support. Although RDAs will for the time being continue to use Rural Development Areas as the administrative basis for allocating grants, in the longer term they will develop new rural regeneration areas (such as the West Midlands' Regeneration Zones) under the framework of regional economic strategies.

Single Regeneration Budget

The Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) is a geographically-based initiative, now the responsibility of the RDAs. SRB projects approved in 1999 will receive £1 billion of government money over life-spans of up to 7 years.

Some of the new SRB projects in 1999

Cleator Moor, Cumbria *(£5 million) – developing services; business support; tourism development; community infrastructure; credit unions.*

Cumbria – Rural Regeneration *(£5 million) – develop tourism industry skills and tourism outside the Lake District; assist local businesses.*

East Lancashire – Rural Enterprise *(£12 million): establish 10 rural Community Resource Centres; improve transport and communications; outreach delivery of education and skills.*

Mid Lincolnshire – Rural Services Access *(£1 million): exploiting opportunities from a new rural bus service: employability and crime measures; community capacity building.*

Northumberland *(£30 million): enhancing education, skills and prospects; addressing health and social needs.*

South Kent *(£10m) – identifying needs; building capacity; tackling isolation and service loss; economic development; improving access to affordable housing.*

Staffordshire – rural community regeneration *(£8 million): diversification of rural industries; micro-business and tourism development; skills development; service access; community safety; capacity building; youth projects targeted against out-migration.*

Suffolk - Market Town Regeneration *(£2 million): business support; learning centres; community resources; rural transport schemes; childcare.*

Upper Teesdale – Tourism Development *(£0.6 million).*

Warwickshire and Worcestershire - Rural Retail Partnership *(£3 million) – provision and regeneration of retail services.*

The Voluntary Sector

ACRE and Rural Community Councils (RCCs)

Rural Community Councils are county-level charities which aim to support rural communities and disadvantaged people within them. ACRE - Action with Communities in Rural England - is their national umbrella body.

ACRE lobbies at a national level, offers its members policy, research, support and information services, and administers some specific projects:

- **Rural Action for the Environment** – a £1 million per year scheme funded by the Countryside Agency and English Nature that provides half the funding for village environment projects.
- **CountryWork** – a £1 million, five year scheme funded by the Countryside Agency, BT and the Post Office that helps communities create jobs, training or job-seeking opportunities. The project has funded: moped loan schemes; child care groups; community enterprises; and local training.
- **Twenty-first century halls for England** – ACRE administered the distribution of around £8 million of lottery grants over three years for the building or renovation of village halls. It is now seeking funding to extend the project. At the moment, the Countryside Agency provides up to £150,000 for a **Village Hall Loan Fund**.
- **The Village Hall Service** – this provides RCC village hall advisers with information, training and support.

Individual RCCs' undertake a wide range of initiatives, including: the development of a community enterprise centre in a former school; village day care centres; the formation of a credit union; support for a network of out of school clubs; village health forums and training for health volunteers; a volunteer transport scheme; and a children's play project.

Other Voluntary Organisations Providing Open Advice

Action for Market Towns – *a Countryside Agency supported membership organisation that provides information, support and networking for small towns.*

ECOVAST – *the European Council for the Village and Small Town is a European-wide lobbying and networking organisation that advises the European Commission on rural issues.*

Institute of Rural Health – *a charity devoted to research, information provision, support for rural health professionals and promotion of the use of information and communication technology centres in rural medicine (e.g. telemedicine)*

NCVO – *The National Council for Voluntary Organisation's Rural Team offers a rural dimension to all voluntary sector debate, supports national voluntary organisations develop appropriate rural strategies, supplies information on innovative rural voluntary sector initiatives and works on specific projects (at the moment: youthbuild partnerships; healthy living centres; and on the retention of money and services within the rural economy)*

The National Rural Enterprise Centre – *part of the Royal Agricultural Society. Its activities include research, consultancy, information provision and project support. It hosts two online services* **Inforurale** (*an information gateway for rural development) and* **RuralNet** *(an ICT gateway and on-line conferencing, publishing and support service for grass-roots rural project workers).*

VIRGIL – *a Europe-wide network of rural development NGOs.*

ViRSA – *The Village Retail Services Association offers advice to local communities and maintains a network of field workers to assist with retail development projects.*

Is The Right Direction Being Pursued?

'Social exclusion' is often presented as geographically-concentrated issue affecting areas with very high levels of poverty and multiple, reinforcing problems. Defined in that way, it is largely an urban phenomenon. Yet for almost everyone in rural areas, access to services is inconvenient. For the elderly, people with disabilities, teenagers, and poor people accessing services involves spending a prohibitive amount of time and money - or is simply impossible. These groups in particular, and to some extent rural dwellers more generally, are unable to participate fully in work and leisure, or achieve acceptable levels of wellbeing, with these service deficits. These deficits are a form of social exclusion for many in the countryside.

The logic of this analysis is that service provision needs to be at the top of public sector rural policy agendas. At the moment, service delivery too often receives only a passing mention that is at odds with the importance rural communities attach to the issue, as well as with the government's commitment to tackling social exclusion.

In contrast, many voluntary organisations and grass-roots partnerships are focusing on meeting service needs.

The positive feature of government, RDA and EU policy is that they present frameworks that enable communities to tap into funding to address the needs that they have identified for themselves. This question, however, is whether this is sufficient or whether a greater level of government leadership is required.

EPILOGUE: A WAY FORWARD?

Peter Kenway And Guy Palmer

The pamphlet is a first step in the development of a new policy framework for service provision in rural areas, aimed at bringing services closer to where people live rather than requiring them to travel long distances to reach them.

The insight that opens up this new perspective is to see the problem of transport in rural areas as more a symptom than a cause. Better transport is still worth seeking but it not address the deeper issue that the pattern of services is being driven by provider interests rather than the needs of citizens, with the public sector being as guilty here as the private. This must be reversed if a lasting answer to service problems in rural areas is to be found.

What makes sense from the provider's perspective sometimes imposes costs on citizens. For example, the closure of local outlets reduces delivery costs but increases the time and money costs to citizens of reaching more distant ones. There are social costs too: A school is not just a place where children are taught, but also one where parents meet and which, through its facilities, offers a place for all kinds of activities in the 75% of the time when the children are not there.

In thinking about what 'bringing services closer to where people live' might mean, it is useful to distinguish between services directly to homes and those provided in local centres on the one hand, and existing services and new ones on the other. The diagram illustrates this idea with some examples:

	Keeping existing services	**Extending new services**
Directly to homes	• Postal services at a uniform price • Utilities e.g. water	• Use of the Internet • Foodstuffs
In more local centres	• Post offices, schools	• Multi-purpose shops, pubs etc • Service centres

In going forward with this idea, there are two key steps. The first is to talk with people in rural areas precisely which service deficits might be addressed in this way. In undertaking these discussions, one would be looking to establish a sense of how much this new perspective could contribute towards meeting rural service needs, as well as a sense of what matters here, to whom, how much and why. In other words, how much potential does this idea have to meet these problems?

The second step involves working with government - local, regional and national - as well as with service providers, to establish what could reasonably be done. Our previous work on services and social exclusion suggests that if the problem is to be tackled successfully, it will not be sufficient to rely on altruism or voluntary action. Rather, government will need to focus on creating an environment in which service providers, private and public, make self-interested decisions that lead to the types of outcome that rural people desire. Creating this environment will involve both spending money (for example the provision of public infrastructure for use by private service providers) and setting standards (for example defining the obligations of larger service providers).

Is the rural service deficit a special case or does it have wider resonance? We believe the latter: there is significant poverty everywhere and there are service deficits everywhere too. 'Rural' and 'urban' are different but they have many problems in common and tackling rural problems is bound to open new vistas on urban ones too.

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