



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

A photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground is a lush green field. In the middle ground, there are several stone buildings, including a white-painted stone house with a red door and a sign that reads "Public House". To the right is another stone building. In the background is a large, green, grassy hill under a blue sky with white clouds.

## Delivering for rural England – the second report on rural proofing



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# 1. Foreword

Our country has many successes and strengths, but our Levelling Up White Paper made clear that while there is an even spread of talent, the same cannot be said of opportunity. That is why we are on a mission to level up and as the minister responsible for rural affairs in England, I want to ensure that rural areas – and the people living within them – are given the opportunity to flourish.

A young person in the rural Yorkshire Dales should have the same opportunities, be it career prospects, access to education, public services or connectivity, as someone in Leeds or Manchester. A business on Dartmoor should have access to the same opportunities and support as a business in Bristol or London. People in rural areas should be living long and fulfilling lives, with sustained rises in living standards and wellbeing.

Rural areas, like the rest of the country, are feeling the cost-of-living challenges. We are supporting families with the cost of living with £37 billion this year alone and we recognise that Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine has contributed to an economic climate that is being felt all the more by rural households and businesses. Higher fuel prices are hitting rural areas hard, given the longer journeys people often have to make. Increases in the price of heating oil are adding to the burdens of those who live off the gas grid. With the cost of agricultural commodities closely linked to global gas prices, food and farming businesses are being impacted by increased input costs including fertilisers, livestock feed, energy and fuel. We have taken steps to mitigate these costs, but they are not the whole solution.

We are growing our economy and getting people into good, well-paid jobs but know that we need to address the rural productivity gap. Our Food Strategy recognised the importance of the food sector in our levelling-up agenda and as we seek to maintain and boost the domestic food production that gives us national resilience, our plans will ensure opportunities for employment, apprenticeships and upskilling. £5 billion for Project Gigabit will bring gigabit-capable broadband to 85% of the UK by 2025, and our £1 billion Shared Rural Network deal with mobile operators will deliver 4G coverage to 95% of the UK by the end of 2025 – to ensure that people working in the most rural parts of the Lake District can be as connected as people working in Birmingham.

We have put in place a new schools funding formula in England, to end the previous postcode lottery and deliver for rural schools across the country. Our historic funding boost for the NHS is delivering more doctors and nurses. To boost health outcomes – and support rural businesses – we want to continue to help people to connect with nature and the countryside. We will continue to work with the health service, mental health charities, and land managers to make sure that the value – and not just amenity value – of our green spaces is recognised and that they are protected for future generations.

When it comes to rural crime, we are recruiting more police officers, we have taken steps to crack down on illegal hare coursing, fly-tipping and livestock worrying, we are investing in tackling county lines and we are taking ambitious steps to tackle domestic abuse in rural settings.

We want people in rural areas to be able to own their own homes, and to support the delivery of rural housing the government has already announced plans to ‘Build Back Barn’, to make sure that disused agricultural buildings can be converted into homes. We will be looking at what more we can do in terms of rural exception sites, and we will also ensure that there is a presumption against building solar farms on the best and most versatile agricultural land. Developing a home-grown renewable energy sector is crucial to delivering lower energy bills, but it cannot be at the expense of our farmland.

While there are many challenges, there is every reason to be optimistic for the future. In parallel with this report, we are announcing the [Rural England Prosperity Fund](#), which is integrated into the [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) (UKSPF), supporting productivity and prosperity in places that need it most. For eligible local authorities, the rural fund is a rural top-up to UKSPF allocations. It supports activities that specifically address the particular challenges rural areas face. It is complementary to funding used to support rural areas under the UKSPF.

It will provide capital grants to rural communities and businesses to support their development and growth. This could include things like the purchase of equipment or modifications of property, and it will extend the reach and impact of UK Shared Prosperity Funding into rural areas as we level them up. This will build on our new farming schemes and the grant funding that we are providing to support farmers and growers with their investment plans in the years and months ahead.

We are addressing the rural productivity gap, levelling-up opportunities and outcomes, and looking after the rural areas and countryside that so many of us are proud to call home.



*Richard Benyon.*

The Rt Hon. the Lord Benyon

## 2. Executive Summary

Rural areas contribute hugely to the life of our nation economically, socially and culturally. 85% of England's land mass is rural, rural areas are home to 9.6 million people (17% of England's population) and the rural economy is worth £260 billion to the economy (15% of England's output). They grow and produce much of our food. They are home to the natural landscapes which are so important to our collective wellbeing and to addressing climate change. The government is committed to making sure that the needs of people and businesses in rural areas are at the heart of policymaking so that they can benefit fully from new economic and social opportunities while retaining their essential character.

This is the second report on rural proofing. Since publication of the first, two major developments have set a new strategic context for action to support the rural economy and rural communities. First, the economic climate created by the war in Ukraine is being felt as much by rural households and businesses as it is by their urban counterparts and presents specific challenges.

The high price of fuel has in particular a big impact in rural areas because of the necessary dependence on cars and the longer journeys travelled. Increases in the price of heating oil are adding to the burdens of those who live off the gas grid.

The government understands that millions of households across the UK are struggling to make their incomes stretch to cover the rising cost of living and is providing £37 billion of support this year, targeted at those who are most in need. The package will see millions of the most vulnerable households receive at least £1,200 of support in total this year to help with the cost of living, with the vast majority receiving at least £550 of help. The support package includes help with energy bills and additional payments for the most vulnerable including pensioners and people with disabilities.

Second, the government has published its landmark Levelling Up White Paper. Levelling up is at the heart of the government's agenda to build back better after the pandemic and address regional disparities across the UK. Rural areas are an integral part of this agenda and there are features of rurality which offer particular challenges to be addressed. This report will show how the government is taking a holistic approach to tackling these issues in rural areas including through its important new farming and environmental policies. It sits alongside the government's Food Strategy and the Agricultural Transition Plan. Together, these set out the framework for the government's commitment to rural England.

This second report presents an evidence-based picture which helps us to understand what levelling up might look like in rural areas and provides a basis for future priorities. The report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse, 'Levelling up the rural economy: an inquiry into rural productivity'<sup>1</sup>, has been a welcome and thoughtful addition to the debate.

This report also summarises the considerable progress that has been made against last year's five key priorities. For example, in terms of improving connectivity, 30% of rural premises now have access to gigabit-capable connections compared with 19% in January 2021. The government has taken a significant step in tackling rural crime by introducing legislation in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act to crack down further on illegal hare coursing and our new measures came into force on 1 August ahead of the start of the next season.

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1. [Levelling up the rural economy – an inquiry into rural productivity](#). April 2022.





Connecting people with nature and the countryside has important benefits for wellbeing.

The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has continued its work to connect people with nature and the countryside, with important benefits for wellbeing and for rural businesses. The England Coast Path is on target to be fully walkable by the end of this parliament. These priorities will remain important in the year ahead.

But more must be done. The data shows why. The productivity rate in rural areas has fallen behind the England average. Although improving, digital connectivity remains worse than in urban areas. Public transport is not always available to those who need it to access services, education or work and may not be viable in many rural areas. Median earnings are lower for those working in rural areas. Poverty is more dispersed among relative affluence, making it more difficult to identify and tackle.

This report sets out how rural interests will be systematically integrated across the government's approach to levelling up. We will work to improve spatial analysis so the impacts on rural communities can be more easily assessed. As we develop each of the 12 levelling up missions, we will consider the rural perspective. We will work with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to consider how the Levelling Up Advisory Council can offer specific insights into the design and delivery of levelling up in rural areas. Alongside this, the government remains committed to rural proofing its policies across the board and Defra will continue to support departments in rural proofing their work in order to secure good outcomes for those in rural areas.

### 3. Understanding the rural context

The government's ambition is to level up the UK by spreading opportunity more equally across the country and bringing left-behind communities up to the level of more prosperous areas. That includes rural areas where productivity is generally lower than the England average and where access to services is poorer.

The Levelling Up White Paper provides a clear plan to address regional disparities across the UK. It sets out a framework of six 'capitals' which, acting in combination as a complex economic ecosystem, play an important part in driving geographical disparity.

#### Levelling Up – the Six Capitals in Rural Areas

**Physical capital** is the physical capital stock used to produce goods and services.

Gross fixed capital formation is a measure of investment by companies. Analysis of recent work by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) suggests that gross fixed capital formation in predominantly rural authorities<sup>2</sup> totalled £63 billion in 2020 (19.8% of England total).

In 2018 capital investment per employee in predominantly rural areas was around 92% of the level for England as a whole.

**Human capital** is essentially the skills, health and experience of the workforce.

Education attainment levels provide a good proxy indicator for human capital. Data suggests that people living in rural and urban locations are equally well qualified. In 2020, 96.9% of working age people living in all rural areas had at least one qualification compared with 96.2% in all urban areas.

When skill levels are looked at from a workplace-based perspective, the story is different. A higher proportion of people working in Predominantly Urban areas have qualifications at NVQ4 or above than those working in Predominantly Rural areas.

**Intangible capital** covers innovation, ideas and patents.

Broader innovation activities were undertaken by 58% of rural businesses and 57% of urban businesses surveyed between 2012 and 2014, the most recent data analysed. This suggests that being situated in a rural or urban settlement had little effect on the innovation practices of businesses surveyed.

**Financial capital** is resources supporting the financing of companies and include peer-to-peer loans, business loans, credit card loans and a wide range of other financial mechanisms.

Slightly more rural businesses (18.1%) said obtaining finance was a major obstacle compared with their urban counterparts (16.8%)<sup>3</sup>. The difference was greater for those businesses in the more rural authorities (21.3%).

2. Predominantly rural authorities are those with more than 50% of the population in rural areas or in hub (market) towns

3. ['Shining a spotlight on small rural businesses: How does their performance compare with urban?'](#) Phillipson and others, Journal of Rural Studies, Volume 68, May 2019, pages 230-239 (viewed on 26 July 2022)

### **Social capital: the strength of communities, relationships and trust**

There are no internationally agreed quantitative definitions of social capital, nor are there directly measured estimates of the stock and flow of social capital. Instead, proxies or indicators are used, linked to the outcomes associated with higher levels of social capital.

As the Levelling Up White Paper notes, in many rural communities, local belonging and social connectedness is high. In 2020-21 71% of people living in rural areas reported feeling strongly or fairly strongly that they belonged to their immediate neighbourhood, compared with 63% in urban areas.

Local engagement and voluntary activity are strong. There are 10,000 village halls or community buildings across rural England, the bulk of which are run as charities by some 80,000 local volunteer trustees.<sup>4</sup>

### **Institutional capital: local leadership, capacity and capability**

There is at present no consistent or reliable statistical means of capturing these concepts. Various proxy measures do exist, capturing one or more institutional factors. Parish councils provide the backbone of many rural communities. There are about 10,000 parish and town councils in England and 100,000 councillors who serve in these local councils<sup>5</sup>.

Additionally, **natural capital** is an important seventh element for levelling up. This capital considers the value of the natural environment for people and the economy. Natural capital in rural areas accounts for the majority of the UK value – roughly £900 billion out of the total UK asset value of £1,230 billion (2019) – or 74%. The recent report ‘Levelling up the rural economy: an inquiry into rural productivity’ identified the growing focus on natural capital as a potential ‘game changer’ noting:

***“The emergence of natural capital and the metrics by which it will be measured has huge potential for improving rural productivity, not least by opening up new markets and measuring elements of the natural environment”.***<sup>6</sup>

As noted in the technical annex to the Levelling Up White Paper, data on these capitals is often not available at the right geographical level to allow local comparisons or the assessment of differences within regions. Defra will continue to work with the Levelling Up Taskforce and the ONS to improve the quality of spatial data that will allow high quality rural analysis.

The Levelling Up White Paper noted that geographical disparities were often hyper local with differences within regions or cities often larger than the differences between regions and that rural areas were not always underperforming. Nonetheless, there are features of rurality which offer common challenges and which need to be addressed to achieve the government’s ambitions for levelling up. These are set out below.

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4. ‘The Changing Use of Rural Community Buildings’, Action with Communities in Rural England 2009.

5. National Association of Local Councils.

6. [Levelling up the rural economy – an inquiry into rural productivity](#). April 2022.



## Rural productivity

Productivity is at the heart of levelling up, underpinning economic growth, jobs, earnings and the ability of a community to thrive. Rural areas are diverse but while some are thriving, productivity generally has fallen behind:

- The productivity rate in predominantly rural authorities has not kept up with the rest of the country. In 2001 on average, it was 89% of the England average; in 2020, it was 81%, reflecting the relative increase in London's contribution to England's overall productivity.
- 21% of the population of England lives in predominantly rural authorities, but these areas contribute only 15% of England's Gross Value Added (GVA)<sup>7</sup>.
- In 2020, the GVA per workforce job in predominantly rural areas was £45,500 and in predominantly urban areas (excluding London) it was £51,700 (provisional estimates).
- Median workplace-based earnings are lower in rural areas (£22,900) than in urban areas (£25,400).

There are several reasons why productivity may be lower in rural areas:

- The rural economy is based on a bedrock of small businesses. A greater proportion of people are employed by small and medium enterprises in rural areas than in urban areas.
- Agriculture and tourism, sectors traditionally associated with low productivity, are significant employers in rural areas.
- Rural areas do not benefit to the same extent as urban areas from agglomeration effects, although urban-rural linkages are important and rural businesses form an important part of supply chains.
- Rural areas suffer from poorer connectivity, both physical and digital.



The rural economy is based on a bedrock of small businesses, such as this father and son building firm in North Yorkshire.

## Connectivity

Digital connectivity in rural areas lags behind urban areas.

- In terms of broadband in England, 70% of residential and commercial premises in urban areas have gigabit capable broadband compared with 30% in rural areas.<sup>8</sup> 98% of urban premises have superfast capable broadband compared with 85% of rural premises.<sup>9</sup>

7. A measure of the output of the economy. These figures are compiled at local authority level, not [Lower-layer Super Output Areas](#) level, and the corresponding population percentage is provided here.

8. This is largely due to the one-off upgrade to Virgin Media's existing cable network infrastructure, which is predominantly located in urban areas.

9. Ofcom Spring 2022, England only, Commercial and Residential premises, Urban and Rural as defined by Ofcom, [Connected Nations update: Spring 2022 – Interactive report - Ofcom](#)

- More than 99% of rural premises in England are able to access a decent broadband connection (i.e. a connection of at least 10Mbit/s download and 1Mbit/s upload) from either a fixed wired or fixed wireless access connection. 6% of residential and commercial premises in rural areas in England cannot access a decent broadband connection from a fixed wired network alone. This compares with 1% of premises in urban areas.<sup>10</sup>
- In terms of mobile phone connectivity, approximately 133,000 premises in rural areas in England do not have indoor 4G coverage from any Mobile Network Operator (MNO). Overall, 96% of premises in rural areas have such coverage from at least one MNO compared with almost 100% of urban premises.<sup>11</sup>
- Places identified by the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as the 20% which are non-commercial (supported through Project Gigabit) or Very Hard to Reach are predominantly in rural areas.

## Accessibility

In rural areas, public transport may not be available or a viable option for those who need it to access services, shops, education or work, owing to distance and population sparsity. This particularly limits access for those without private transport. Car dependency (and fuel consumption) is high.

- 14% of households in rural towns and 5% in rural villages and small settlements have no car or van.
- 50% of the rural population lives in areas that have the poorest accessibility<sup>12</sup> to services based on minimum travel times, compared with 2% of the urban population.
- Average weekly household expenditure on transport costs in rural areas is £114, compared with £76 in urban areas.
- The average minimum travel time to a hospital is a little over one hour in rural areas, compared with a little over half an hour in urban areas.
- Children have further to travel to schools, particularly at secondary and tertiary level, and this has an impact on school hours and capacity to take-up after school activities.
- The greater distances which need to be travelled in rural areas and the distance between settlements may increase range anxiety and charging anxiety in people considering switching to electric vehicles, potentially reducing uptake in rural areas.



In rural areas, access to services, shops, education or work can be limited for those without private transport.

10. Ofcom Spring 2022, England only, Commercial and Residential premises, Urban and Rural as defined by Ofcom, [Connected Nations update: Spring 2022 – Interactive report - Ofcom](#)

11. Ofcom Spring 2022, England only, Commercial and Residential premises, Urban and Rural as defined by Ofcom, [Connected Nations update: Spring 2022 – Interactive report - Ofcom](#)

12. Poorest accessibility = are in the lowest 10% decile

## Rural hardship

There is little difference in median earnings between those living in predominantly rural areas and those living in predominantly urban areas. However, median earnings for those **working** in predominantly rural areas are lower than for those working in predominantly urban areas.

House prices are higher compared with earnings for those working in rural areas. In 2020, the average lower quartile house price was 8.6 times the average lower quartile earnings of people working in predominantly rural areas. This compares with 7.4 times in predominantly urban areas (excluding London).

The high cost of rural housing in relation to local earnings has resulted in people being priced out of their local area, making it difficult to sustain a healthy population balance. The lack of affordable housing can make it difficult to recruit key workers (teachers, care workers, etc) in rural areas.

Fuel poverty' describes a household living in a property with a [fuel poverty energy efficiency rating](#) of band D or below and which, when the required amount to heat their home is spent, is left with a residual income below the official poverty line. The 'fuel poverty gap' is the amount of additional income which would be needed to bring a household out of fuel poverty.

Fuel poverty is an issue in rural areas where 1 in 3 households do not have a mains gas supply and hence are more likely to be reliant on oil or solid fuels for domestic heating. In villages in a sparse setting, this rises to 2 in 3 households.

The relatively higher proportion of older housing stock in rural areas can lead to less energy efficient homes. This, in turn, can cause higher levels of fuel poverty. In 2020, the average fuel poverty gap in rural villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings was just over twice as high as the average for England as a whole (£501 compared with £223).<sup>13</sup>

## Data and research

Defra has continued its research programme to improve the evidence base to support rural proofing. In November 2021, Defra published a rural wellbeing framework<sup>14</sup> to provide guidance to policymakers and evaluators on the most effective approaches to support and improve wellbeing in rural communities. It will soon publish the following:

- 'Rural England: Local Perspectives on Economy and Community' explores the lived experience of addressing local opportunities and challenges for rural communities and businesses across eight case study areas.
- 'Exploring the lived experience of Rural Youth: Challenges and Opportunities' surveys young people's experiences of growing up in rural areas and how that influences wellbeing and life choices.
- 'The Role of Migration in Rural Entrepreneurial Ecosystems' examines the contribution of inward migration to business in rural areas.
- 'Rural Affordances and the Environment for Opportunities' assesses the diverse nature of rural business environments and how these influence relative performance. The results are being used to construct a toolkit to enable local authorities to design effective interventions to support local business.

13. [Statistical Digest of Rural England](#). August 2022.

14. [Defining and Measuring Rural Wellbeing - Guidance for Defra policymakers and evaluators' 2021](#)



- 'Lessons for the Success of Community Led Local Development' uses case studies to examine the success of different community led approaches in order to understand the essential factors for delivering positive outcomes.

Defra will be publishing an updated 'Statement of Rural Research Priorities' shortly. This will identify the research themes which would most usefully contribute to the focus and effectiveness of the government's wider policy agenda in respect of rural areas.

## 4. Levelling up rural England

Levelling up is about unleashing opportunity, prosperity and pride in places in every part of the UK. As explored throughout Section 3, rural areas have their own specific challenges that must be tackled if they are to be levelled up. This section sets out how the government is driving action to improve:

- low productivity by strengthening the rural economy
- connectivity by developing rural infrastructure
- access to rural services
- management of the natural environment

### Strengthening the rural economy

There are many successful rural businesses. They provide high levels of employment, support families and play an important part in vital supply chains. This was very clear during the pandemic response. However, there are challenges. Productivity in rural areas is generally lower than the average. There are well-recognised problems with digital connectivity, and it may be difficult to find the right skills in the local labour market. These challenges were set out in the recent report by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse.<sup>15</sup>

### Funding

The £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund invests in infrastructure that improves everyday life. It delivers genuine local priorities across all nations and regions of the UK. The first round of funding awarded included multiple successful projects in rural areas such as County Durham's project in Bishop Auckland, which will boost tourism and improve transport links for local people, particularly those in deprived rural communities in the area. Successful bids for the second round will be announced in Autumn 2022.

One of the government's five priorities set out in the first rural-proofing report was the [UKSPF](#), the successor to the EU Structural Funds programme. This fund is taking advantage of the freedom restored by EU exit to provide a funding scheme which is tailored to meet local needs across the UK. The spending review in October 2021 confirmed that, at a minimum, total funding through the UKSPF will match the size of EU Funds in each nation and in Cornwall each year and will rise to £1.5 billion a year by the financial year 2024 to 2025.

The Fund will support a range of interventions in rural areas. Following the launch of the Investment Prospectus and allocation of funds to local authorities in April, local authorities are now preparing their investment plans setting out how they will spend their allocation to address local challenges.

<sup>15</sup> [Levelling up the rural economy – an inquiry into rural productivity](#). April 2022.

To provide more targeted support, Defra, together with DLUHC, has launched the [Rural England Prosperity Fund](#), worth up to £110 million, to replace funding for rural areas previously provided through the LEADER<sup>16</sup> and growth programme elements of the EU funded Rural Development Programme for England. This will provide targeted support to rural areas through capital grants for small businesses and local communities, delivered as a top-up to the UKSPF allocations of eligible rural local authorities.

Funding has already been provided to devolved governments to support rural communities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as part of the agreed replacement to the Common Agricultural Policy. The government is incorporating England's share of funding to support rural economies into the UKSPF to better streamline and simplify the spending landscape.

## Food and farming

Together, the recently published Food Strategy and the Agricultural Transition Plan set out the government's ambitious plans for food and farming which will invest billions of pounds in rural areas over the coming years, benefitting small local firms as well as improving agricultural productivity and the environment.

The Food Strategy sets out the government's objective of securing a prosperous agri-food and seafood sector which ensures a secure food supply and contributes to the levelling up agenda through providing good quality jobs around the country. Many small rural firms producing high quality produce have shown a strong commitment to increasing their domestic sales. We will continue to offer them specialised regional support and engagement to take up new innovation and growth opportunities. The government will also develop a joint vision for agri-food innovation with the industry, identifying shared priority areas for investment and action.



As part of the agricultural transition, the Animal Health and Welfare pathway will support farmers to produce healthier animals to the very highest standards of welfare.

The four key drivers of productivity growth in UK agriculture are people, innovation, competitive pressures and capital. These are underpinned by the wider business environment including the trade regime, infrastructure and regulatory frameworks.

The government has introduced a range of funding schemes to support productivity growth in farming and expects to spend around £600 million on grants and other support for farmers to invest in productivity, innovation, research and development. This includes the Farming Investment Fund, where the government has offered grants to the value of £48.5 million through the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund and launched offers totalling £65 million for the Farming Transformation Fund.

The Future Farming Resilience Fund provides free business support to farmers and land managers in England to help them prepare for the Agricultural Transition, specifically for the removal of Direct Payments.

<sup>16</sup>. The term 'LEADER' originally came from the French acronym for "Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale", meaning 'Links between the rural economy and development actions'.

The government has also committed to spend over £270 million through the Farming Innovation Programme and is supporting £120 million of investment in research across the food system in partnership with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) in addition to other funding packages.

The government recognises the benefits which farm diversification can bring to strengthening the wider rural economy. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides that planning policies and decisions should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and the erection of well-designed new buildings, as well as the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. DLUHC has held a roundtable with stakeholders to consider whether existing planning policy strikes the right balance between supporting farm diversification and strengthening the rural economy.

## Visitor economy

The visitor economy is a major source of employment in rural areas. Tourism related activities account for 15% of employment in rural businesses, rising to 34% in the more coastal rural areas, compared with 11% in urban businesses. The government wants to see a growing, dynamic, and sustainable tourism sector reaching its full potential and driving growth in every nation and region of the UK.

DCMS has worked with other departments to run a cross-Whitehall policy exercise, looking at how national government, local government and the private sector can work together to support the visitor economy at a regional level. The North East was chosen as a case study. The findings of the policy sprint will be considered by the IMG.

As part of the Tourism Recovery Plan, DCMS has established an **Inter-Ministerial Group on the Visitor Economy** (IMG). This group considers how policy levers across Government can best support the recovery, growth and development of the UK visitor economy as a whole, including in rural and coastal areas.

As part of the **Tourism Recovery Plan**, DCMS is exploring the development of a domestic rail product, with the aim of encouraging more domestic tourism and day trips around the country, including to rural and coastal destinations.

DCMS is also developing a Sustainable Tourism Plan, working with the sector to drive forward innovation and encourage greater sustainability. Supporting the development of this Plan is the Sustainability Working Group, which is chaired by Patricia Yates (CEO VisitBritain/VisitEngland) and reports into the government's Tourism Industry Council. There is rural representation on this Working Group.

## Training and skills

The All Party Group on Rural Productivity and the Rural Powerhouse noted in its recent report that “the inherent isolation of rural communities can make it difficult to access new skills and training opportunities”. It argued that skills provision and demand were critical to raising productivity in rural areas.

The Department for Education (DfE) is rolling out a comprehensive network of 21 **Institutes of Technology** across England, actively targeting the areas where this provision is most needed. These will help to strengthen local economies by providing a talented pool of people with the skills needed to unlock growth opportunities. Eleven are already open to students and a further nine are expected to follow during the financial year 2023 to 2024. The Institutes in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire and Humber specialise in land-based skills,



including Agri-tech and Food Manufacturing. Further Institutes will open during the financial year 2023 to 2024 including Lancashire and Cumbria, specialising in Agri-Tech/Precision Agriculture, and in the South-East, specialising in Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care.

Land-based colleges have a vital role in meeting skills needs in rural areas, delivering high-quality training for farming, forestry, and other key rural sectors. Landex, representing land-based colleges, has joined the new Green Jobs Delivery Group which brings together government, industry and others to ensure that the workforce needed to deliver government's climate and environment goals will be available.

**Apprenticeships** are available in a wide range of work in rural areas including farming, veterinary care, forestry and environmental roles. Forty agriculture, environmental and animal-care apprenticeship standards are already available and are being used now. Employers are working with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE) to develop new standards for 'Forest Craftsperson' and 'Assistant Farm Manager'.

## Developing rural infrastructure

### Digital connectivity

Improving digital connectivity is arguably the single most important way to support levelling up in rural areas. Digital connectivity is an important driver of productivity, enabling businesses and individuals to take full advantage of the growing opportunities available online, but it is more than just an economic necessity. It is also a matter of social justice. As more and more services, both public and private, are delivered electronically, the government does not want those who live in rural areas to be denied access to them simply because their broadband is not good enough or there is no mobile signal. The government wants them to be able to participate fully in a digital society. Major initiatives to improve rural connectivity - Project Gigabit and the Shared Rural Network - are delivering progress.

### Project Gigabit

The government will continue to deliver the £5 billion Project Gigabit as quickly as it can, providing record amounts of funding to support gigabit-capable infrastructure in hard-to-reach, rural areas. Its target, in line with the levelling up mission, is that at least 85% of UK premises will be able to access gigabit-capable broadband by 2025 with nationwide gigabit-capable broadband available by 2030. Areas which do not yet have superfast speeds remain a priority under Project Gigabit. Progress is reported via BDUK's quarterly updates published at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/building-digital-uk> and in [BDUK's annual performance report](#).

As part of Project Gigabit, up to £210 million has been made available for the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme. This enables rural communities to come together and form local projects to help connect their residential or commercial premises to gigabit-capable broadband. A member of the community can request a gigabit connection where a voucher is provided to a network operator to contribute to the costs of connection.

Up to £110 million is currently available through Project Gigabit to fund connections through GigaHubs. Under this scheme, public sector premises in hard-to-reach communities are connected to gigabit-capable broadband. This helps to level-up access to lightning-fast digital connectivity and helps with access to new digital services.

The government received over 3,300 responses to its call for evidence on 'Improving Broadband for Very Hard to Reach Premises'. These responses highlighted the challenges faced by, and potential opportunities available to, rural and remote communities. The government will use this evidence to assess policy options to help the small minority of premises (approximately 100,000 premises or 0.3% of the total) unable to access a gigabit-capable connection through either a commercial or government-funded roll-out. The government will publish further information later this year.

## Gigabit connections for schools



Staff and students in rural schools now enjoy better connectivity thanks to BDUK's Rural Gigabit Connectivity Hub scheme.

The staff and students at Borrowdale CE Primary School in rural Cumbria needed better connectivity to use the latest learning technologies, enable home learning and establish better contact with parents.

Thanks to the Building Digital UK (BDUK) [Rural Gigabit Connectivity Hub scheme](#), students and teachers can now access the very latest resources using gigabit-capable speeds, and the school has invested in iPad Minis that are available for all pupils, creating a level playing field for pupils regardless of background.

The school has even been able to install paid-for parking for local hikers, providing a small income.

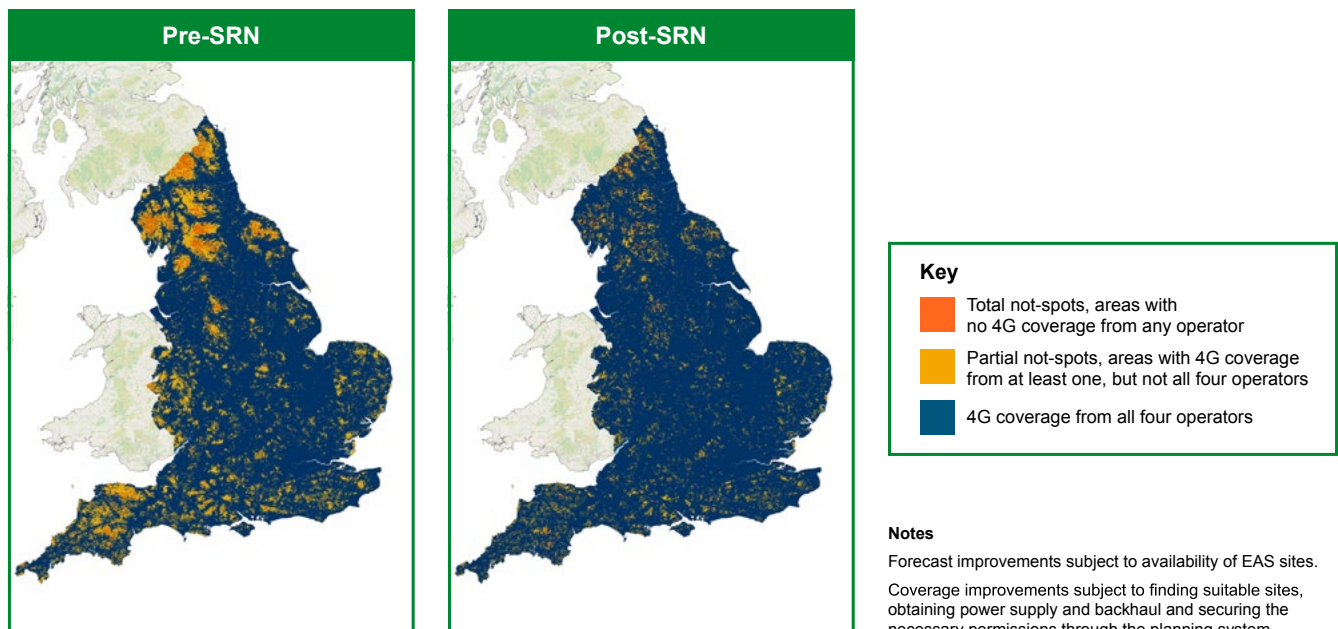
The surrounding area is now also benefiting from the presence of fibre, with both business and residential premises being connected to high-speed broadband for the first time.

## Shared Rural Network

The government wants people to have high-quality and reliable mobile coverage wherever they live, work and travel in the UK. Typically, rural areas have tended to be a less commercially attractive to mobile network operators and as a result some rural areas are underserved, lacking good quality reliable mobile coverage.

That is why the government is progressing the £1 billion Shared Rural Network (SRN) deal agreed with the four mobile network operators - with £532m invested by industry and £500m by government. The programme will lead to increases in 4G coverage across all four nations and it will improve mobile coverage for an estimated extra 280,000 premises and 16,000km of roads.

In rural parts of England, the four mobile network operators have already delivered 449 site upgrades and this work continues. The majority of partial not-spots in England will have been eliminated by June 2024. A partial mobile not-spot is a geographic area served by at least one, but not all four MNOs. The programme is on target to deliver this combined coverage to reach 95% of UK landmass by the end of 2025, and further coverage improvements in the more hard-to-reach areas will continue to be delivered until the start of 2027.



Shared Rural Network Coverage Forecast Improvements in England.

Ofcom's latest Connected Nations published in May 2022 showed that 4G mobile coverage across the UK currently stands at 92%, which is up from 91% in January 2021, as the early impact from the Shared Rural Network took effect. In 2021, 46 new Shared Rural Network masts were deployed through the industry-led part of the programme, including 24 sites in England. This is in addition to the 449 upgrades to existing masts that have been delivered in England by the industry since the Shared Rural Network was agreed in March 2020.

## 5G in rural areas

The government wants the UK to harness the significant benefits of 5G. All four national MNOs have commenced deployment of basic 5G, which Ofcom reports now is available from at least one MNO outside of at least 47% premises across the UK. However, full 5G will do more than support consumers using their smart phones - it will be transformative for businesses and public services, and there are important ways it can help in rural areas, for example, in supporting precision farming applications. The government's Wireless Infrastructure Strategy will set out a new policy framework for the deployment and adoption of 5G across the UK. Furthermore, measures in the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill, which is currently before Parliament, will optimise the use of existing infrastructure, helping operators to find it easier to expand and improve connectivity in rural areas. The mobile planning reforms introduced by the government earlier this year will also help the deployment of 5G networks.<sup>17</sup>

## Public Switched Telephone Network upgrade

In light of the telecoms industry's decision to upgrade its service by moving from the old Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) to new Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology, there will be a phased switch over with the network expected to be fully migrated by 2025. There has been concern in rural areas about how this might affect the availability of telephone services in a power cut as VoIP relies on mains power. Telecoms companies have a regulatory obligation to ensure that their customers can access the emergency services for a minimum of one hour in such circumstances and Ofcom has issued guidance on this. The government and Ofcom are working closely with all the relevant stakeholders to ensure all at-risk customers are protected and prepared for the upgrade process.

<sup>17</sup>. Ofcom's Connected Nations spring update (published on 20 May 2022) showed that non-standalone (basic) 5G is available from [at least one MNO outside 47-62%](#) of premises across the UK.



## Transport

Better public transport is essential to levelling up rural areas, which typically suffer from poor connectivity with infrequent public transport links to key destinations such as nearby towns, hospitals and railway stations.

The Department for Transport (DfT) aims to publish its **Future of Transport: Rural Strategy** in 2022. This will guide local authorities, transport operators, and the private sector towards a future transport which maximises the benefits of new technologies and business models for rural and remote communities. The strategy will explore how future transport solutions and interventions can tackle rural mobility issues, improve connectivity and accessibility, increase low-carbon travel options and deliver more integrated transport services. This will make it easier for people to access jobs, education, healthcare and opportunities to socialise. The strategy will be delivered through measures such as demand-responsive transport; digital and multi-modal ticketing; e-bikes and e-scooters; drones for delivery; and connected and self-driving vehicles.

## Public transport

DfT is increasing its focus on rural transport issues:

- It has commissioned Transport East, a sub-national transport body for Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock, to establish a **Rural Task Force** to develop a costed programme of work in rural areas and a database of best practice for rural projects. This work is intended to provide a better understanding of needs, challenges and next steps for investment in rural/coastal areas.
- Transport East is also establishing the **Rural Mobility Centre of Excellence** to develop ideas for bringing transformational change in rural mobility.
- This autumn, the government will publish new guidance on **Local Transport Plans**, bringing together all relevant existing policies, strategies and plans from across government departments which should be considered as part of a local authority's statutory Local Transport Plan. The new guidance will support local authorities to bring their plans in line with current government priorities and help improve long-term strategic planning and delivery of local ambitions. It will set out the factors local authorities will need to consider in planning transport for rural communities.

Under the **National Bus Strategy**, indicative funding allocations totalling over £1 billion were announced in April 2022 to support the development of 31 Bus Service Improvement Plans across England, including for rural counties such as Norfolk, Derbyshire, Cornwall and Devon. To date, the government has made available £1.9 billion of support to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on bus services in England outside London. For example, Shropshire Council has received £2.2 million in recovery funding and Lincolnshire County Council has received over £1.5 million.

Demand responsive transport has the potential to transform the local transport offer in areas where demand is more dispersed and the distances involved make meeting people's needs more challenging. In 2021, £20 million was awarded under the **Rural Mobility Fund** to roll out 17 pilot schemes in rural and suburban areas by the end of 2022.

The **Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas** scheme provides £270 million to local transport authorities to support the introduction of zero emission buses and associated infrastructure. This has supported the use of zero emission buses on rural bus services. For example, North Yorkshire County Council received £7.8 million to support the introduction of 39 zero emission buses and charging infrastructure, including on long distance services between Harrogate and Leeds.

## Moorlands Connect Rural Mobility Fund



Staffordshire's Moorlands Connect demand-responsive service has benefitted from a Rural Mobility Fund grant.

The Moorlands Connect demand-responsive service operating in the Staffordshire Moorlands ran a single-vehicle, Monday-to-Friday service, with the bus reserved for school journeys for one hour each day.

With the award of a £1 million grant from the Rural Mobility Fund, the service has been able to extend its operating area, add three new low-floor access vehicles with bike racks and improve the service to run extended hours six days a week, plus Sundays in summer.

The extra buses mean that local residents, including those with wheelchairs, pushchairs or bicycles, now have access to school journeys and work journeys in the peak period, reducing the number of journeys made by private car.

## Independent travel

Because there are fewer public transport alternatives, those who live and work in rural areas are more reliant on car usage. For people living in rural villages and hamlets, the average distance travelled per year is around 9,800 miles of which 87% is by car compared with an England average of 6,500 miles of which 77% is by car. This means that rural communities are particularly exposed to fuel price rises. In March 2022, the government introduced a 12-month cut in the main rates of fuel duty for petrol and diesel of 5 pence per litre. This is the largest cut in cash terms that has ever been applied at once to all fuel duty rates and represents savings for consumers worth almost £2.4 billion over the next year. This comes on top of freezes to fuel duty for 12 years in a row.

Rural roads carry 43% of road traffic but account for 58% of road fatalities<sup>18</sup>. DfT is establishing a new **Rural Roads Working Group** on road safety and the reduction of road traffic collisions on rural roads to be chaired jointly with Defra.

The government does not want rural areas to be left behind as the UK transitions to zero emissions vehicles. Establishing a network of public and private charging points will enable more drivers, both residents and visitors, to have the confidence to drive electric vehicles in rural areas.

New homes in England that have associated parking must have a charge point installed. These regulations also apply to new non-residential buildings and buildings undergoing major renovation, including homes, shops and workplaces, making it even easier for people to make the switch to zero emission vehicles.

The Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) has a number of grant funding schemes which provide funding for electric vehicle chargepoints including:

- **The £20 million On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme** makes funding available to UK local authorities, including parish councils, to install public chargepoints for those without access to private parking.

<sup>18</sup>. Road Casualty Statistics 2021, Department for Transport

- **The £450 million Local EV Infrastructure** fund, expected to launch in 2023, will provide funding to improve the availability of charging for drivers without off-street parking. This includes up to £50m in resource funding, to support local authorities to deliver public chargepoint infrastructure.
- **EV Chargepoint Grant Schemes** support residential and commercial landlords to provide chargepoints at rental and leasehold properties.
- **The Workplace Charging Scheme** provides businesses, charities and the wider public sector grants of up to £350 per socket for installing up to 40 charging sockets for their employees and fleets. The scheme has been widened to include small accommodation businesses and the charity sector, including many village halls, in order to accelerate uptake in rural areas and support the UK tourist industry.

OZEV is working with Ofgem to ensure that charging a vehicle is completely integrated with the government's smart energy system. This will deliver benefits to the grid and lower-cost electricity tariffs for those willing to charge flexibly.

The range of electric vehicles continues to increase year on year, with many having real-world ranges of over 200 miles and some well in excess of 300 miles. This is reducing issues with range anxiety.

## Housing and planning

We want to make sure that the dream of home ownership is open to people working and living in rural areas; that people can stay in the communities where they grew up, close to friends, family and jobs and that key workers are able to live in the communities they serve. Rural areas face a unique set of challenges in improving the availability and affordability of housing of all tenures. Sites for development tend to be smaller – often fewer than 10 units – and while that is appropriate to a rural location, they can be difficult to secure, more expensive to develop and slower to be delivered. Rural Housing Enablers based in rural areas have been shown to be an effective way to facilitate developments and the use of in-kind, on-site developer contributions to provide affordable housing within small communities.



Rural areas face a unique set of challenges in improving the availability and affordability of housing.

It is important that planning and other policies continue to recognise these challenges and support the appropriate delivery of rural housing through a variety of channels. A range of permitted development rights support agricultural development and farm diversification, including a right allowing the change of use of agricultural buildings to create new homes. The Government will carefully consider these rights and how we can further support farmers in growing and diversifying their businesses. As part of our comprehensive review of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) following passage of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, the government will also be looking at the existing policy framework for bringing forward rural exception sites and other forms of rural housing to assess whether it needs to be strengthened.



Developer contributions of affordable housing secured under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), have made a significant contribution in rural areas. This arrangement is due to be largely replaced by the new Infrastructure Levy. The government is clear that this change should not lead to a reduction in the provision of affordable housing in those areas that need it.

The needs of rural areas will be considered in the detailed design of the Levy, including in setting the site size threshold for affordable housing contributions to accommodate smaller rural sites and ensure adequate affordable housing provision. Local Planning Authorities will be able to set different rates or thresholds for different land values and development typologies in their area enabling them to adapt the Levy to the needs of rural areas. The exact details of the Levy will be subject to future consultation, including with rural stakeholders, to ensure that it will work as well in rural areas as in non-rural areas.

The government has announced that 2.5 million tenants renting their homes from housing associations will be given the right to buy them outright and has pledged to build a new social home for every property sold. Where this will be difficult, for example in small villages and in areas where there is limited land supply, an exercise of a Right to Buy may not be appropriate. DLUHC will work with housing associations to determine where rural and other broader exemptions might apply and to ensure appropriate safeguards against the loss of affordable housing in these areas.

Homes England has a target that 10% of all homes delivered through its programmes should be in rural areas in settlements with a population of fewer than 3,000. Homes England is developing a Rural Housing Strategy, which will help support this target. Grants are provided through Homes England's £7.4 billion share of the £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme for 2021 to 2026. Homes England's strategy and the Affordable Homes Programme aim to maximise delivery in rural areas to provide affordable homes for those that need them. The government recognises that homes in rural locations, where stock is limited, can be difficult to replace. For this reason, social and affordable rented homes in designated protected areas and rural exception sites are exempt from the new right to shared ownership and staircasing in shared ownership homes is limited to a maximum of 80% to keep affordable home ownership options available in rural areas.

The government recognises the impact that high levels of second home ownership can have. Second homes can reduce housing supply and push up house prices to unaffordable levels for local people. Where they remain underused for long periods they may also impact on local services and community cohesion. On the other hand, if they are used regularly, they may boost local economies and the tourism trade. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill is introducing a power for councils to apply a new discretionary council tax premium on second homes of up to 100%. It will also allow councils to apply a council tax premium of up to 100% on homes which have been empty for longer than one year (rather than two years as currently).

## Energy

Through the updated **Fuel Poverty Strategy** (February 2021) and the **Heat and Buildings Strategy** (October 2021), the government has committed to a number of measures to address fuel poverty and ensure that households have access to sustainable, low-carbon warmth as the country transitions to net zero, and has consulted on ending new fossil-fuel heating installations in homes off the gas grid from 2026.

These plans include:

- £1.1 billion allocated to the **Home Upgrade Grant** to provide energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating to low income households living in the worst performing off-gas-grid homes in England. Delivery is expected to run to March 2025. This policy is crucial to support fuel poor and less energy efficient rural homes.

- The **Energy Company Obligation** requires larger domestic energy suppliers to install heating, insulation or other energy efficiency measures. The government has committed to set up a four-year, £4 billion successor to the Energy Company Obligation across Great Britain.
- The £450 million **Boiler Upgrade Scheme** supports households in England and Wales, including off-gas grid homes currently heated by oil, to switch from fossil fuels to low carbon heating. The scheme opened to applications in May 2022 and provides grants of £5,000 towards the cost of installing an air source heat pump and £6,000 towards the costs of a ground source heat pump. Grants of £5,000 will also be available for biomass boilers in properties not suitable for a heat pump, provided they are in a rural location and not connected to the gas grid.

## Delivering rural services

### Education

Smaller rural schools found in rural areas do not have the same opportunities to find efficiencies as those elsewhere. A sparsity factor was therefore introduced in the **National Funding Formula for schools**. As a result, £95 million has been allocated to small, remote schools in the financial year 2022 to 2023, an increase of £53 million from the year before. The amount of additional funding which these schools can attract has increased to up to £55,000 for primary schools, and up to £80,000 for secondary schools – in both cases, a £10,000 increase from the year 2021-22.



Schools help to provide a focal point to rural communities and are afforded extra protections against closure.

By adopting an improved way of measuring a school's remoteness, 1,300 more schools will now be eligible to attract this support. As a result, in 2022-23 rural schools are gaining on average a year on year increase of 5.6% per pupil under the National Funding Formula, compared with the national average increase of 2.8% per pupil.

The government is reaffirming its policy on rural school closures. Schools help to provide a focal point to rural communities and therefore the government expects local authorities to adopt a presumption against the closure of rural schools. In support of this, DfE publishes a list of all local authority maintained primary schools designated as being rural and local authorities are required to consult this list when proposing a school closure. They are also expected to consider additional factors, including the impact on the local community, increased travel to and from school, and any alternatives to closing the school. DfE also extended protection to rural academies when the 'rural double lock' was announced in 2016. This means that both local and central government must agree before a rural academy closes. This was a specific signal of the importance of all local schools in rural areas, including academies.

## Health

The historic funding boost for the NHS is delivering more doctors and nurses, and the government has committed to build 40 new hospitals by 2030, backed by an initial £3.7 billion. Together with eight previously announced schemes, this will mean 48 hospitals delivered by the end of the decade, the biggest hospital building programme in a generation.

A number of measures are already in place to address the challenges of delivering health care in a rural setting:

- Pharmacies provide a wide range of pharmaceutical services and are easily accessible primary care providers. The £20 million **Pharmacy Access Scheme** provides funding to support pharmacies to stay open. Almost half (46%) of the 1,230 rural pharmacies in England qualify for this support. The scheme will remain in place until at least the end of 2023.
- The NHS **Community Pharmacist Consultation Service** makes it possible for patients to have a same day appointment with their community pharmacist for minor illness or an urgent supply of a regular medicine, thus improving access to services and providing more convenient treatment closer to patients' homes. It includes referrals from general practice and the government is now exploring whether this approach could be expanded further.

## Rural mental health



Access to mental-health support services in rural areas can be difficult but there are many examples of good practice around the country.

Staff offer self-management advice and support that helps people find the solutions to aid their recovery. Where appropriate, they can signpost people to other available sources of mental health support. No referral or appointment is needed, and both virtual and face-to-face drop-ins are available.

[Community Front Rooms](#), run by Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust are welcoming, safe spaces in Bridport, Shaftesbury, Wareham and Weymouth open to anyone over 18 who needs face-to-face mental health support. They are staffed by mental health professionals and people with lived experience of mental health issues and are there to offer support to those struggling with their mental health, or who feel they may be approaching a crisis point.

- The **Targeted Enhanced Recruitment Scheme** funds a £20,000 salary supplement to attract trainee GPs to work in areas of the country where training places have been unfilled for a number of years, including in rural communities. Additional government investment doubled the number of places on the scheme to 550 in 2021, and there will be 800 places in 2022. Trainee GPs help to ease workloads and increase capacity in general practice, allowing more patients to get the care they need. A further benefit is that trainees who are attracted to these areas by the scheme usually stay after training, helping to sustain the GP workforce in rural areas.



The Health and Care Act 2022 is a key part of the government's agenda to increase collaboration between health, social care and prevention to improve health and wellbeing outcomes. Integrated Care Partnerships will be asked to prepare **Integrated Care Strategies** setting out how the system will meet the health and care needs of the population within their footprint. Integrated Care Boards, as the local NHS commissioners, will have a statutory duty to have regard to this strategy when executing their functions including their statutory duty to reduce health inequalities, including through access to health services. Integrated Care Boards and Integrated Care Partnerships should make decisions as close as possible to the people that they affect and involve a wide range of people and communities in their work. The Department of Health and Social Care published guidance on the production of Integrated Care Strategies in July 2022 with the aim of the first strategies being published in December 2022.

NHS mental health support is provided on the basis of individual clinical need rather than for particular groups of people. Nevertheless, as the EFRA committee explored in its recent inquiry, there are special considerations that might need to be taken into account in rural communities, such as access to support services. There are many examples of good practice around the country such as Wellbeing Wheels, a bus service in the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin areas, which is improving access to health services for those who are geographically isolated in the area; health hubs run by the Somerset NHS Foundation Trust for farmers, agricultural workers and their families, set up in locations easy for farmers to access, such as livestock centres; and the Lincolnshire Rural Support Network, which provides pastoral and practical support to farming and rural people during periods of anxiety, stress and problems relating to their families and businesses. The support network was funded through the government's £5.4 million suicide prevention grant fund.

## Communities

Community action at the grass roots level plays an important part in maintaining services and amenities in rural areas. There is a high level of pride in place among rural communities, which are often characterised by their strength and resilience. The government wants to continue to support rural communities to flourish.

Defra is continuing its **grant agreement with the ACRE network** (Action with Communities in Rural England), which allocates funding to each of its 38 ACRE Network Members. Each Network Member supports a wide range of local community activities. They provide advice and training to volunteers and community groups as well as delivering community services such as good neighbour schemes themselves.

Defra has announced a new £3 million **Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund** to support capital improvements to village halls across England. This Fund will help ensure that the supported village halls can continue to provide a wide range of services and activities at the heart of their communities.

## Village Hall Improvements

At the heart of rural life, village halls provide a place for local communities to come together and play a vital role in improving life for those who live and work in rural areas. They provide access to activities, community groups, learning opportunities and post office services – even in the most remote of rural locations – and are vital in tackling loneliness.

In recognition of this, a Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund will soon be launched, providing £3 million of capital grant funding to support the modernisation and improvement of village halls, ensuring they will continue to deliver a legacy of lasting benefit to the rural communities that they serve.



Lamorna Village Hall in Cornwall is a thriving venue for community events, live music, small theatre, workshops and clubs.

The £150 million **Community Ownership Fund** helps communities to take ownership of assets at risk of closure, thus protecting, for example, the last shop or pub in the village. Since July 2021, community groups have been able to bid for up to £250,000 matched funding to help them buy or take over local community assets to be run as community owned businesses. So far, 46% of the projects funded in England at a value of £2.3 million have been in predominantly rural areas.

The new **Strategy for Community Spaces and Relationships** aims to strengthen community power including by exploring the spaces and relationships that help neighbourhoods to thrive. This will include considering how the existing Community Asset Transfer and Asset of Community Value Schemes can be enhanced.

Millions of people in communities across the UK will see their **ability to access cash** protected by new powers set out by the government in May 2022. For the first time, the UK's largest banks and building societies will be subject to new powers given to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to ensure the continued availability of withdrawal and deposit facilities in local communities across the UK. To support the FCA, the government will set out its expectations for a reasonable distance for people to travel when depositing and withdrawing cash.

## Devolution

As set out in the Levelling Up White Paper, DLUHC will carry out a review of neighbourhood governance in England including looking at the role and functions of parish councils.

The government wants rural areas to enjoy the same benefits from devolution as city regions, with strong local leadership and powers over areas such as transport, infrastructure and skills. Such 'County Deals' will allow local leaders in rural areas to adapt policy and trial new ideas most suited to their areas' needs. Deals will be able to choose alternative titles to 'mayor' if they feel it more suited to their area, such as Governor or County Commissioner. The government is currently discussing deals with areas such as Cornwall, County Durham, Norfolk and Suffolk.

### New drone to fight rural crime



Avon and Somerset police use a special drone to tackle rural crime.

Avon and Somerset Police has unveiled a special drone being used to tackle rural crime.

It is hoped the drone will help to stop hare coursing and poaching, vandalism and the theft of farm machinery, and that its use will lead to more prosecutions for rural crime. The drone can be deployed quickly and used to survey large areas of land to look for criminals, missing persons and stolen goods and has already helped recover £100,000 worth of stolen equipment in a single operation.

The force's drone unit also works in partnership with the Environment Agency to support fisheries officers in checking for illegal nets and out-of-season fishing.

The first rural proofing report identified tackling rural crime as a priority and it remains one. Although average crime rates are lower in rural areas than in urban areas, the government recognises that crime is still a cause of concern for many rural residents and is committed to supporting the police to take action.

In February the government published a total police funding settlement of up to £16.9 billion in the financial year 2022 to 2023, an increase of up to £1.1 billion when compared with the financial year 2021 to 2022. This includes government grants to Police and Crime Commissioners, flexibility for them to raise additional money locally from precept and funding for national police and crime priorities. Assuming full take up of precept flexibility, overall police funding will increase by up to £833 million (6.1% in cash terms) in the financial year 2022 to 2023.

The government is increasing the number of police officers by 20,000 by March 2023, the biggest increase in decades. As of March 2022, over 13,500 additional officers have been recruited – 68% of the target. This will help to ensure that the public is better protected, including in rural communities. Decisions about how resources are deployed are for operationally independent Chief Constables and elected Police and Crime Commissioners to make, based on local needs and priorities. Individual forces' progress in recruitment is published on gov.uk on a quarterly basis.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) has recently published its Strategy for Rural and Wildlife Crime 2022-25, with a strong focus on creating a more enduring strategic approach to policing rural and wildlife crime and recognising that this is a priority area for rural communities. The strategy provides a framework through which policing and its partners can work together to identify and tackle the issues which have the greatest impact on rural communities or wildlife and ensure that measurable progress can be delivered against these priorities. This includes developing a new, enhanced National Rural and Wildlife Crime Unit to provide intelligence, analytical and operational support to police forces and partners across the board on rural crime in addition to wildlife crime.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 provides further protections for those who experience domestic abuse and enhances measures in place to bring perpetrators to justice. 'Supporting victims' is a key



pillar within the recently published Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, which sets out key investments in the provision of victim support services. The government recognises that victims of domestic abuse living in rural communities may face unique barriers in accessing support services or making disclosures. These challenges are reflected in the Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance to support frontline agencies and services to identify and respond effectively to domestic abuse. The guidance will include information on best practice responses and multiagency working. The government's recently published VAWG National Statement of Expectations sets out best practice guidance on the commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) services, highlighting how local areas should commission effective services to ensure their whole system response to VAWG is as collaborative, robust and effective so that all victims and survivors can get the help they need.

In addition, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner has published early findings mapping the provision of domestic-abuse support services across England and Wales and will publish a full report later this year, to identify gaps in types of service provision, access to specialist support and variation across different regions.

The damaging impact of hare coursing on some rural communities has been a focus of concern. Hare coursing is illegal and, as well as cruelty to a wild mammal, it also causes serious harm to rural communities through its associated criminality including violence, intimidation, criminal damage and theft. The government has now acted decisively to crack down on illegal hare coursing through new legislation. The Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 introduces two new criminal offences relating to hare coursing activity and gives the courts and the police additional powers to deal with those convicted including, for the first time, the possibility of going to prison. These new measures came into force on 1 August 2022 in time for the start of the next season.

Defra has more than doubled its funding of the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) from £165,000 per year to over £1.2 million over the next three years. The NWCU is jointly funded by Defra and the Home Office and provides intelligence, analysis and investigative assistance to police forces and other law enforcement agencies across the UK to support them in investigating wildlife crime.

The theft of high value agricultural machinery, such as quad bikes and GPS units, can have a significant impact on farming businesses and remains a source of concern in rural areas. The Minister for Crime, Policing and Probation has written to manufacturers of agricultural and construction machinery seeking their commitment to do more to increase security. The Home Office and the NPCC lead for agricultural theft are also in discussions with manufacturers and insurers on preventing agricultural thefts.

Another area of concern is fly tipping. Here, Defra has provided additional tools in the fight against waste crime including the power to seize vehicles illegally transporting waste; new on the spot fines; new powers for the Environment Agency to lock the doors at problem waste sites; and the establishment of a new Joint Unit for Waste Crime to tackle serious and organised crime in the sector.

## Managing the natural environment

A pathway exists for the UK countryside to become a more verdant landscape, defined by pristine habitats, cutting-edge technology, and internationally competitive agri-food produce and the government is introducing a range of policies to make this a reality.

Food and farming are vital for the country's economy, playing an important role in delivering the country's food security, and they are at the heart of the government's levelling up agenda. The government is seizing the opportunities presented by EU exit to design a new approach which will support productive and sustainable farming and food production alongside environmental, climate and animal welfare outcomes. This balanced approach will enhance natural capital and with it opportunities for rural communities to thrive.

## Environmental Land Management

The foundations of the government's new approach are three new environmental land management schemes – **Sustainable Farming Incentive**, **Local Nature Recovery** and **Landscape Recovery**. Together, these schemes will pay for more sustainable farming practices and improve animal health and welfare. They will also bring environmental benefits by reducing carbon emissions, helping to create and preserve the country's habitats, and allowing landscape-scale environmental changes, which will be crucial steps towards achieving the government's 25 Year Environment Plan ambitions and carbon net-zero goals.

Through the three schemes, farmers and other land managers will be paid for delivering the following public goods:

- Clean and plentiful water
- Clean air
- Thriving plants and wildlife
- Reduction in and protection from environmental hazards
- Adaptation to and mitigation of climate change
- Beauty, heritage and engagement with the environment

The **Sustainable Farming Initiative** will pay farmers for actions which they take to manage their land in an environmentally sustainable way (going beyond regulatory requirements). The aim is to make the scheme attractive and accessible to a wide range of farmers, to help them maintain or introduce sustainable practices as a foundation for more advanced improvements available through the other environmental land management schemes.

**Local Nature Recovery** will pay for the right things in the right places and support local collaboration to make space for nature in the farmed landscape and the wider countryside, alongside food production. This will further encourage farmers to put less productive areas of their land to use for nature, as many already do. It could pay for activities such as managing and creating habitats, adding trees to fields or hedgerows and restoring peat or wetland areas.

## Regenerative Farming Practices



With funding from the [Farming in Protected Landscapes](#) programme, a farmer and a scientist were able to run a training course for farmers in the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to demonstrate that regenerative agriculture and holistic management practices which benefit both farming and the environment are achievable within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The training has begun to broaden the knowledge base of the local farming community, allowing farmers to make informed choices about their businesses and ways of managing their land sustainably and in keeping with their own goals, leading to profitable, nutritious food being produced in harmony with the local ecosystem and the wider global climate.

Andy Wear of Fernhill Farm was able to fund a training course with support from the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

The **Landscape Recovery Scheme** will focus on biodiversity, water quality and net zero through long term projects to enhance habitats and deliver land use change. Projects will be selected through a competitive process. The first round of projects, in 2022, will focus on species recovery and river restoration. A second round of pilot projects will be launched in 2023 and the proposed themes for that round will be published later this year.

## Access to the countryside

Improving public access to the countryside is a priority. This will improve people's mental and physical wellbeing and support local economies.

The **Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme** provides funding for farmers and land managers to work in partnership with National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to deliver projects for climate, nature, people and place. It focusses on the key challenges facing farmers in protected landscapes - helping to improve, and prevent damage to, the landscape and managing high levels of visitors. It also helps farmers and businesses to capitalise on the many social and financial benefits that visitors can provide. The programme will run until 2024.

Natural England is working to support everyone to enjoy and protect England's outdoor spaces. It has recently updated the **Countryside Code** to improve people's understanding of the countryside and promote socially and environmentally responsible behaviours. It has produced a version aimed at visitors to the countryside (April 2021) and a version aimed at land managers with public access on their land (February 2022). The 'Respect, Protect, Enjoy' principles encourage visitors to respect the communities and protect the environment while continuing to enjoy the countryside.

Natural England launched its England-wide map of green infrastructure in December 2021 as part of the emerging **Green Infrastructure Framework**. The map will help local areas identify priorities for creating and enhancing green spaces, including to address inequalities in access, bringing together data from over 40 individual environmental and socio-economic datasets. Figures derived from the England Green Infrastructure Mapping database show that distances to accessible greenspace are greater for rural communities on average. The full Framework will be launched later this year. It will show what good green infrastructure looks like and help local authorities, developers and communities to improve provision in their areas.

The **England Coast Path** will link up the best existing coastal paths and create new ones, allowing people to walk around the whole English coast. Work is progressing with over 500 miles now open to the public. When complete it will be the longest waymarked and maintained coastal walking route in the world, at 2,700 miles. This project is expected to bring significant benefits to local economies and communities as well as to recreational users and to public health. As a result of trips to use English coastal paths, £350 million is spent within local coastal economies many of which are in rural areas, estimated to support the equivalent of 5,900 full time jobs.



The England Coastal Path is expected to bring significant benefits to local economies and communities as well as to recreational users.



## Green social prescribing

The £5.8 million **Green Social Prescribing Programme**, running from October 2020 to April 2023, is a Defra-led, cross-government programme. It explores how to increase use of and connection to the natural environment through referral to green and/or blue social prescribing services within communities in England to prevent and tackle mental ill health.

Activities include local walking schemes, community gardening projects, conservation volunteering, green gyms and arts and cultural activities which take place outdoors.

### Green Social Prescribing



Green Social Prescribing explores how to increase connection to the natural environment to prevent and tackle mental ill health.

Transport has been identified as a barrier to attending Green Social Prescribing (GSP) activities, especially in rural areas. GreenSPring, one of the test and learn sites in the pilot programme, is setting up a project in the Derbyshire Dales to test whether availability of a range of transport options improves attendance at a nature-based wellbeing activity.

A programme of wellbeing sessions will be delivered by a green wellbeing provider (the Wellies Project) at a location in the Dales, with a range of transport options available, including community transport providers, local bus routes and, potentially, private hire vehicles.

## 5. Integrating rural across levelling up

The policy levers that influence rural communities and businesses are dispersed across government. To push forward the rural agenda, the government will work collaboratively across departments to drive progress and work in partnership with industry and civil society. In particular, the government will work to ensure rural policy is systematically considered and integrated into the levelling up agenda.

The Levelling Up White Paper describes five pillars of levelling up:

- 12 missions across a range of policy areas to be achieved by 2030.
- Proposals to re-orient central decision making, ensuring greater spatial consideration when forming policy and transparency over funding.
- Further empowerment of local decision makers through local devolution deals across England.
- A data and evaluation driven approach with interactive tools which will support local decision making.
- Enhanced transparency and accountability of this new regime.

A new statutory UK regime is being established to oversee levelling up, notably including a duty on the government to produce a new levelling up annual report on progress made against the missions and a new independent expert Levelling Up Advisory Council. These measures are included in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill currently before Parliament. Defra continues to engage across departments to ensure that rural issues are taken into account in policy development and in funding decisions.

Local devolution deals will include a specific expectation that local decision makers will take full account of the needs of their rural areas.

The Levelling Up Advisory Council will advise Ministers on the design, delivery, and impact of levelling up policy. Defra will work with DLUHC to consider how the Advisory Council can offer specific insights into the design and delivery of levelling up in rural areas.

The new annual levelling up report will set out progress on the missions across the UK, including in rural areas.

The rural perspective is an essential part of levelling up and will therefore be incorporated into work across all twelve missions. The missions are reviewed from a rural perspective in Annex A.

The government remains committed to rural proofing its policies. To support this, Defra has developed guidance and training materials for civil servants, to be hosted on the Civil Service Learning platform. An account of how rural proofing is carried out in practice is at Annex B.

# Annex A: Rural overview of the 12 levelling up missions

The Levelling Up White Paper outlined twelve ambitious missions as the anchor of the government's approach. Some of these missions directly address the particular challenges of rural areas; others provide the strategic direction from which to draw more bespoke rural approaches.

## 1 Productivity

### Mission

By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.

### Rural position

- Productivity and workplace based earnings are lower in rural areas than in urban areas.
- The rural economy is based on a bedrock of small businesses. A greater proportion of people are employed by SMEs in rural areas than in urban areas.
- Agriculture and tourism, sectors traditionally associated with low productivity, are significant employers in rural areas. Rural areas suffer from poorer connectivity, both physical and digital.

### Relevant policies

- Defra farming schemes are supporting the agricultural transition and boosting productivity.
- The Food Strategy contributes to the levelling up agenda through providing good quality jobs around the country and driving innovation.
- The [Rural England Prosperity Fund](#) will provide targeted support to rural areas through capital grants for small businesses.
- The Tourism Recovery Plan is boosting the domestic visitor economy, a major source of employment in rural areas.

## 2 Research and development

### Mission

By 2030, domestic public investment in research and development outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40%, and over the Spending Review period by at least one third. This additional government funding will seek to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.

### Rural position

- A third of rural firms have introduced new or significantly improved goods/ services/ processes, but only 8% have been involved in new-to-market innovation, despite many more expressing strong business capability for innovation.



- Although rural firms are relatively successful in securing capital for investment in physical assets, they appear less likely to seek funding for regular operational business improvements including research and development.
- The business base in rural areas is mainly SMEs so it may be difficult to leverage private sector investment to the desired level.

## Relevant policies

- The Agri-Food Chain Science Programme supports research to enhance the productivity, sustainability, resilience, and nutritional quality of UK agri-food products, an important part of the rural economy.
- Farming, growing or forestry businesses based in England can apply for a share of up to £1 million for feasibility projects from the Large Research and Development Partner Projects Multi-council Fund part of Defra's Farming Innovation Programme.

## 3 Transport

### Mission

By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.

### Rural position

- Based on minimum travel times, 50% of the rural population lives in areas that have the poorest accessibility to services compared with 2% of the urban population.
- People in rural areas travel greater distances and are more heavily reliant on cars than those in urban areas. Public transport provision is very limited or not available at all.
- Average weekly household expenditure on transport costs in rural areas is £114, compared with £76 in urban areas.
- There are perceived challenges to the uptake of electric vehicles in rural areas relating to range and charging anxieties.

## Relevant policies

- Implementation of the National Bus Strategy through Bus Improvement Plans.
- The reduction in fuel duty.
- The Future Transport: Rural Strategy will set out how rural communities can benefit from transport innovation.
- The UK Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy (published 25 March 2022) sets out the government's vision and commitment to make electric vehicle charging cheaper and more convenient than refuelling at a petrol station, wherever you live.

## 4 Digital connectivity

### Mission

By 2030, the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population.

### Rural position

- In terms of broadband in England, 70% of residential and commercial premises in urban areas have gigabit capable broadband compared with 30% in rural areas. 98% of urban premises have superfast capable broadband compared with 85% of rural premises<sup>19</sup>.
- 7% of residential and commercial premises in rural areas in England cannot access a decent broadband service (i.e., over 10mbps) compared with 1% in urban premises<sup>20</sup>.
- In terms of mobile phone connectivity 133,000 premises in rural areas in England do not have indoor 4G coverage from any Mobile Network Operator (MNO). Overall, 96% of premises in rural areas have such coverage from at least one MNO compared with almost 100% of urban premises.
- Lack of connectivity may prevent rural businesses, particularly farms and services such as environmental monitoring, from benefiting from the use of 5G based technologies.

### Relevant policies

- The continued roll-out of Project Gigabit and the Shared Rural Network, both on track to meet 2025 targets.
- The government is currently using responses from a call for evidence to assess policy options for Very Hard to Reach areas and will publish further information later this year.
- New legislation implementing changes to permitted development rights in the planning system to support mobile network development, including the deployment of 5G.
- The new Code of Practice for Wireless Network Development in England.

## 5 Education

### Mission

By 2030, the number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths will have significantly increased. In England, this will mean 90% of children will achieve the expected standard, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas will have increased by over a third.

### Rural position

- As of March 2019, 81% of secondary schools in rural areas had received 'Outstanding' or 'Good' inspection outcomes, compared with 74% in urban areas.

19. Ofcom Spring 2022, England only, Commercial and Residential premises, Urban and Rural as defined by Ofcom, [Connected Nations update: Spring 2022 – Interactive report - Ofcom](#)

20. Ofcom Spring 2022, England only, Commercial and Residential premises, Urban and Rural as defined by Ofcom, [Connected Nations update: Spring 2022 – Interactive report - Ofcom](#)

- Without economies of scale, small rural schools have proportionately higher underlying running costs. They also do not have as much capacity to take on trainees. Specialists may need to be shared between schools.
- Children have further to travel to school, particularly at secondary and tertiary level, and this has an impact on school hours and after school activities.

## Relevant policies

- The Schools White Paper will make it easier to form multi-academy trusts. This would enable schools in rural areas to share resources.
- The inclusion of a sparsity factor in the Schools' National Funding Formula has provided additional funding for rural schools.
- The presumption against rural school closures as government policy will support smaller rural schools to stay open.

## 6 Skills

### Mission

By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.

### Rural position

- There is no real difference in the levels of qualification possessed by people in rural and urban locations. In 2019, 96.6% of working age people living in all rural areas had at least one qualification compared with 95% in all urban areas.
- The main issue for access to training in rural areas is the distance to travel to college and the means to get there.
- SMEs employ a greater proportion of the workforce in rural areas and they may be less able to provide training opportunities.

## Relevant policies

- The Government's Skills for Jobs White Paper sets out a programme of change which fundamentally shifts the way in which skills policy is formulated and delivered. From new offers like Skills Bootcamps to changes to the system like Local Skills Improvement Plans, DfE skills reforms are designed to empower both local leaders and individuals, and create pathways to fulfilling careers for learners in all areas of the country. They include:
  - The roll-out of a comprehensive network of 21 **Institutes of Technology** across England.
  - The availability of apprenticeships in a wide range of work in rural areas including farming, veterinary care, forestry and environmental roles.
  - The roll-out of employer-led Local Skills Improvement Plans to help shape skills provision to meet local needs.



## 7 Health

### Mission

By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years.

### Rural position

- In 2018 in England, the average life expectancy was 79.6 years for men and 83.2 years for women. Life expectancy is slightly higher in rural than in urban areas.
- The rural population is older than the urban population and its average age is increasing faster with implications for health and social care needs.
- Distance can mean that some health services are less accessible. The average minimum travel time to a hospital is approximately one hour in rural areas, compared with approximately half an hour in urban areas.
- Delivering community based care can be more expensive in more sparsely populated rural areas.
- It can be more difficult to recruit healthcare professionals to rural areas.

### Relevant policies

- The £20 million **Pharmacy Access Scheme** provides funding to support pharmacies to stay open providing accessible primary care.
- The **Targeted Enhanced Recruitment Scheme** funds a £20,000 salary supplement to attract trainee GPs to work in areas of the country where training places have been unfilled for a number of years, including in rural communities.
- The involvement of rural communities and their representatives in the development of **Integrated Care Strategies** will help to ensure that local needs are taken into account.

## 8 Wellbeing

### Mission

By 2030, wellbeing will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.

### Rural position

- The differences in wellbeing between rural and urban areas are very small. Those living in Predominantly Rural areas, however, consistently show slightly better ratings of reported wellbeing than those living in Predominantly Urban areas between 2011 and 2019.
- Rural communities can offer a strong sense of belonging. In 2021, 71% of people living in rural areas reported feeling that they belonged strongly or fairly strongly to their immediate neighbourhood, compared with 63% in urban areas.
- Distance and sparsity may make it more difficult to access support services while isolation can exacerbate mental health problems and loneliness.

## Relevant policies

- The £5.8m **Green Social Prescribing Programme** aims to tackle and prevent mental ill-health through engagement in nature-based activities.

## 9 Pride in place

### Mission

By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.

### Rural position

- People living in rural areas tend to report more favourable feelings about their local neighbourhood than those living in urban areas.
- In 2021, 89% of people living in rural areas reported that they were satisfied with their local area as a place to live, compared with 77% of those living in urban areas.
- Many rural services are largely run by volunteers. These are often older people and it can be difficult to replace them when they step down.

## Relevant policies

- The new **Strategy for Community Spaces and Relationships** aims to strengthen community power including by considering how the existing Community Asset Transfer and Asset of Community Value Schemes can be enhanced.
- The £150 million **Community Ownership Fund** helps communities to take ownership of assets at risk of closure, thus protecting, for example, the last shop or pub in the village.
- Defra's £3m **Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Fund** will support capital improvements to village halls across England ensuring that they can continue to function as the heart of community life.
- Defra's continuing support for ACRE through grant in aid.
- The Government recognises the critical role that post offices – and postmasters – play in communities and for small businesses across the UK including by providing access to cash and financial services. The government provides an annual subsidy to ensure the viability of rural and community branches which has been maintained at £50 million a year and will remain at the same level until 2025.

# 10 Housing

## Mission

By 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government's ambition is for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas.

## Rural position

- Houses in rural areas are relatively less affordable. This can result in people being priced out of their local area, making it difficult to sustain a healthy population balance or recruit key workers.
- There are currently no figures for comparing rents between rural and urban areas.
- High levels of second home ownership in some rural areas can reduce housing supply and push up house prices to unaffordable levels for local people. Where they remain empty for long periods they may also impact on local services and community cohesion.
- The age of the rural housing stock means it is difficult to implement many energy efficiency measures.
- In rural areas 1 in 3 households do not have a mains gas supply and hence are more likely to be reliant on oil or solid fuels for domestic heating. Heating oil prices are unprotected by a cap and have increased significantly over the period February 2022 to June 2022.<sup>21</sup>

## Relevant policies

- The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill will introduce a new discretionary council tax premium on second homes of up to 100% and allow councils to apply a council tax premium of up to 100% on homes which have been empty for longer than one year. This could help to reduce price pressure and also help to raise funds for local authorities to invest back into the local community.
- Homes England has set a target for 10% of affordable homes to be delivered in rural areas. It is developing a rural housing strategy.
- Government financial support for domestic energy measures is targeted at the worst performing homes and off-grid premises.

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21. The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy produce official statistics on heating oil prices as part of their [Road fuel and other petroleum product price statistics](#). The most recent dataset was published in July 2022.



# 11 Crime

## Mission

By 2030, homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst affected areas.

## Rural position

- Average crime rates are lower in rural areas than urban areas. Rural areas are, therefore, less likely to be the worst-affected areas for serious violence, homicide and neighbourhood crime.
- In 2021, the rate of violence against the person was 22.6 per 1,000 population in Predominantly Rural areas compared with 30.0 per 1,000 population in Predominantly Urban areas.
- The rate of recorded crime for crimes such as robbery, residential burglary, and vehicle offences (theft of, theft from or interference with a vehicle) is also lower in rural areas than urban areas.
- Other crime types, not specifically covered by the Crime Mission, cause particular concern in rural communities. These include hare coursing, the theft of high-value agricultural machinery and fly tipping. Where appropriate, the government is taking action to address these concerns.

## Relevant policies

- To achieve the reductions in serious violence, homicide and neighbourhood crime required by the Crime Mission, the government is delivering:
  - The **Safer Streets Fund**, which provides investment into innovative as well as traditional interventions to improve the safety of public places. In the 2021 Spending Review, the Home Office announced that the Fund will continue for the next three financial years (until the financial year ending 2025), totalling £150 million of Government funding.
  - The network of **Violence Reduction Units**, which bring together local partners to tackle the drivers of violence in their area. These units are delivering a range of early intervention and prevention programmes to divert people away from a life of crime and £64 million has been made available for them this financial year (2022 to 2023).
  - **'Grip' funding for the police** to carry out targeted and visible patrols in areas where there is greatest risk of serious violence. £30 million has been made available for Grip this financial year (2022 to 2023).
- The government is also taking further measures to tackle crime more widely. The government has increased overall police funding by up to £833 million (6.1% in cash terms) for the financial year 2022 to 2023.
- The government is increasing the number of police officers by 20,000 by March 2023; the biggest increase in decades.
- The government is also taking action to address the crimes of most concern to rural communities:
  - The government has introduced new legislation to crack down on illegal hare coursing. The measures came into force on 1 August 2022.

- The Home Office and the NPCC are working with manufacturers and insurers to consider how to prevent theft of high value agricultural machinery.
- Defra has provided additional tools in the fight against waste crime.

## 12 Local leadership

### Mission

By 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.

### Rural position

- Sparsity can make it more costly to deliver some local government services.
- There are roughly 10,000 Parish and Town Councils active in England, mostly in rural areas. They form the most local tier of governance and frequently manage local services which contribute to rural wellbeing and the quality of life. such as open spaces, allotments and leisure facilities.
- Most devolution deals to date have had a metropolitan focus.

### Relevant policies

- County Deals will extend devolution in England to rural areas.
- The government will undertake a review of neighbourhood governance in England to bring local people together and set local priorities for their neighbourhoods, including looking at the role and functions of parish councils in England.
- The DLUHC led review of relative needs and resources will inform the future local government funding formula.

# Annex B: How rural proofing is done

Defra continues to engage in and promote rural proofing across government, through regular work at official and ministerial level. Some of this work includes, but is not limited to:

## Promoting rural proofing

### Training

Defra has developed a new training module for civil servants to help policy makers understand how to take the needs of rural businesses and rural communities into account when designing and implementing proposals. This is being made available on the Civil Service Learning website.

### Workshops

Over the past year, Defra has hosted a series of workshops for staff across government to highlight rural challenges, refresh the understanding of rural proofing and underline the importance of rural proofing policies.

### Research

Defra has funded various pieces of research to improve the evidence base to support rural proofing. The recently published Rural Wellbeing Framework<sup>22</sup> provides guidance to policymakers and evaluators on the most effective approaches to support and improve wellbeing in rural communities. A Statement of Rural Research Priorities will be updated shortly.

### Statistics

Defra publishes the Statistical Digest of Rural England, a compendium of socio-economic statistics, monthly.

The Rural Economic Bulletin is a quarterly 'dashboard' of indicators designed to provide evidence on the rural economy.

### Regular meetings with departments

Officials in Defra meet regularly with teams across government to draw a rural focus on policy work at various stages of development.

## Rural proofing at ministerial level

### Committees

Defra is represented on a number of cabinet committees. Lord Benyon, the Minister for Rural Affairs, regularly attends the Domestic and Economic – Levelling Up cabinet sub-committee which looks at implementation of the government's levelling up agenda and where he can offer a rural perspective. He is also a member of interministerial groups on the visitor economy and loneliness.

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22. [Defining and Measuring Rural Wellbeing - Guidance for Defra policymakers and evaluators'](#) 2021



## Bilateral ministerial meetings and correspondence

As Minister for Rural Affairs, Lord Benyon regularly engages with his colleagues on rural issues. Recently, for example, he has held meetings with the Housing Minister to discuss the provision of affordable housing in rural areas and with the Digital Infrastructure Minister to consider how to improve rural connectivity.

## Ministerial visits

Lord Benyon attends numerous events run by rural stakeholders. He visits many rural areas of the country to meet and learn from those who live and work in rural areas and to see policy in action. In the past year, Lord Benyon has attended meetings and conferences of the Rural Insight Forum, the Rural Coalition, the Rural Services Network and Action with Communities in Rural England and attended Roundtables with Rural Bishops and Rural Mayors and two Roundtables on housing.

Some of the highlights this year have seen Lord Benyon visiting rural housing developments, local businesses and nature recovery projects and meeting local residents, volunteers and park rangers in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Destinations have included Dartmoor National Park, the Surrey Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Lake District National Park and the North York Moors National Park. Lord Benyon also attended Bucklebury village hall during Village Halls Week and witnessed drone technology in action on a visit to Avon and Somerset Police in Taunton.



Lord Benyon meets volunteers at Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



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