

**Rural Conference 2017**  
**The Infrastructure of Success – New Routes to Economic Growth**

Tuesday 5 September

**Panel Discussion**

Some introductory remarks made by panel members:

- In thinking about the future we need to look at where we've come from and been - what is the countryside and who is it for?
- Rural is not one homogenous entity but needs to be differentiated - and rural towns are an important part of the rural economy.
- How do we get more people volunteering in rural areas? How do we encourage communities to take on more responsibility for running services?
- How can we bridge the gap between farming and rural?

The discussion between the panel and audience covered the following areas:

**How important are rural issues in shaping the future of communities in England?**

***Demography***

- A view that there are two main issues: firstly an ageing rural population (is rural turning into a glorified older people's home?) and secondly the number of rural dwellers in or at the margins of poverty (a plague on houses).
- The Government is skewed to the grey demographic.
- The trend of retiring early is connected to poverty - there used to be part time work on farms and local businesses so the recently retired could carry on working.
- So many people are/want to retire to rural areas – how can we think about their contribution to sustaining rural communities and places?
- The importance of intergenerational work in bringing younger and older people together in social action.
- How many people do you need living in a rural place to make a community sustainable? For example, some planning settlement hierarchies do not allow development in places with fewer than 3,000 people.
- We have a DIY way of running rural communities - because of the way austerity has affected statutory services we need to continue to build the capacity of rural communities to do more on their own account in ways that lead to community cohesion and sustainability.

***Data***

- We need to understand more about rural communities - much rural policy in the past has focused on particular places, particular issues and in tune with the idea of rurality being in a small number of places. What is missing is an overall quantitative understanding of what rural communities are like in all their social, economic and environmental guises. We have been small minded in how we have focused on rural. The urban rural definition is not an us and them binary, we need to understand rural and then extend policies to groups of rural settlements.
- Is a rural statistics users group needed within Defra and ONS? We need the ability to jointly collect, process and analyse data about rural. There is no single body gathering rural data.
- Sources of data are being moved onto the Gov platform and are difficult to find.
- Rural is a distribution of scale not small scale (settlements work together to achieve their functionality).

***Planning***

- We need a formula for rural areas - planning policies have prevented organic growth in rural places. We need sensible rural planning where each small village is able to take some development.
- The National Planning Policy Framework has led to a rash of development but not necessarily sustainable development. Communities are rushing Neighbourhood Plans to try to prevent speculative development.
- Neighbourhood plans are built on volunteerism and social capital. This can lead to inequality rather than addressing inequality – what happens in rural places without people with time, passion, skills and knowledge to participate in the planning process?
- Do we need a hub, spoke and satellite approach to rural planning?
- Current planning and development laws depend on neighbourhood plans not rural development plans. We should be lobbying Government for rural development zones.
- Are rural communities struggling because of second homes? There is a widening gap between wages/income and housing affordability in rural areas.
- We need to interconnect funding, policy and services and think about local distinctiveness in rural communities when helping them to access resources.

### ***Economy and Enterprise***

- We need to understand the role of social enterprise in rural places - is there such a thing as an enterprising place and what leads some places to be more entrepreneurial than others?
- If you get the formula right how do you cope with success (e.g. Growth in market towns?)
- Smart Cities – what is the role of technology in rural areas? In twenty years' time will the private motor car be the chosen method of transport?
- The potential for small business parks in rural areas.
- We need to address the broadband service divide between urban and rural (and within rural). We need to do the difficult places in rural first and wait until parts of rural are the last and most difficult 5% to connect.
- Technology should enhance the quality of life among rural dwellers and not lead to the isolation of older people.
- Investment in technology will help people live independently and in their own homes for longer.

### **Who are the key players that need to shape the future of rural communities?**

- Community leaders - local government has an important role to play in encouraging and supporting communities to do this and then lobbying Government on their behalf.
- But in rural communities there is already a reliance on volunteers to do things – it's the sample group of residents running the library, schools, on the parish council, and they do this because the services are no longer being provided and they know it's what their community needs.
- Rural lobbying needs to be improved – how can we get politicians to recognise rural issues?
- What are the spatial and sectoral impact of Brexit on rural?
- Going forward, there is unlikely to be large scale funding streams available for rural areas - so communities have to find other communities with a similar problem, see how they solved it and learn from them ('community to community learning').
- Parish and Town Councils need to precept and take their community responsibilities seriously.
- The electorate is an impatient patient and we don't spend enough time sticking with things that work, we have to constantly reinvent ourselves (the tyranny of novelty).
- We need to invest in local distinctiveness - history, culture, tourism of rural communities.

### **Measuring the impact of Rural Economic Development**

- What can rural learn from the What works centres and Office for Budget Responsibility in measuring the value of the activities we undertake?

- How can social value be taken up and applied in protected landscapes?
- Variations in the economic performance of rural regions across the UK (e.g. wage levels).
- We need to focus more on outcomes and measuring these, and should not be confined to outputs and targets.
- The importance of comparing delivery among similar types of projects – understanding what is being delivered, how, why and the impact it is having.

### Local Government Finance

- ✓ The disparities between paying more Council tax in rural areas and having lower average wages compared to urban areas.
- ✓ How some Local Authorities have responded to austerity by making non-statutory services commercial – and expecting them to generate a surplus.
- ✓ How to make sure the resources to meet rural needs are there.
- ✓ How sparsity is currently measured (e.g. access to services and population density in an output area) and how this might be redefined (e.g. the additional costs of delivering services in rural areas).
- ✓ Government is making attempts to understand the relationship between sparsity and cost.
- ✓ The damping mechanism in formula grant was heavily criticised (this delayed funding being shifted to rural areas) whereas the pace of change for funding in public health is much quicker (you get to your target funding in a much shorter period of time).
- ✓ In 2013/2014 £175 million of funding for rural areas to account for their sparsity became £130 million after being damped and then frozen away. Yet urban areas gained from dampening. You have to have some levelling mechanism so there are not immediate and large shifts in funding between urban and rural areas but it needs to be done in a fair and transparent way.
- ✓ There was a desire to 'level everybody up' at the Local Government Association conference - what was the amount of scaling in the system bringing people down?

### Business Rates Pilot (sharing Cornwall Council's experience)

- ✓ Business Rate Retention - should this be increased to 99.9%?
- ✓ The prospectus has been announced for 2018/2019 pilots.
- ✓ The Government believes much can be achieved through secondary rather than primary legislation.
- ✓ The collection rate – this may drop in times of recession. Has the Government underwritten physical collection of rate in Cornwall pilot? In Cornwall the collection rate has been 99.4% since 2010 and is not underwritten by Government but there is a 'no detriment' clause in the pilot. In the roll out of the scheme this could be a risk although Government will provide a safety net.
- ✓ What do you do with the additional rates retained – in Cornwall this is being invested in economic growth. The Council needs £20 million extra a year from 2020 so they are trying to support a growth programme to meet this shortfall.

### Reflections from day 1 (Ivan Annibal & Cecilia Motley)

- ✚ The relationship between Government and Local Authorities – Local Government has received the biggest financial cut backs compared to central Government and yet we're all still here, positive and wanting to do innovative things in the rural areas we support.
- ✚ **Drivers – the things that are having an impact in rural communities:** austerity is still with us, ageing and the affordability of housing is affecting the sustainability of rural: the 3As.
- ✚ **Analysis - how we understanding rurality:** our mission as rural stakeholders is to understand the subtly and provide complex solutions to complex problems; we need to join economic, social and environmental together, and we need to measure how successful we are.

- ✚ **Perspective – the bias on urban:** most people who set national policy think from an urban perspective (e.g. settlement hierarchies, damping). Often rural is in a triple or quadruple lock where no matter what we do money ends up being taken away from us.
- ✚ **Opportunities - how do we respond to these rural issues:** the pace of technological innovation is increasing and rural can be early adopters to address the pressures we face? We are already used to being innovative and working creatively in rural areas.
- ✚ 4 years ago the conference focus was on austerity; in 2016 the focus was Brexit and this year we're getting used to uncertainty.
- ✚ We need to think more about the role of the private, voluntary and community sectors and not just the public sector in ensuring the sustainability of rural places (particularly around exploring new market models and a distributed rural scale).

### Wednesday 6 September

The following reflections were offered around the **People, Place and Economy** presentations delivered in the first plenary:

- When the ‘anywheres’ try to change the countryside remotely how can those of us living in the countryside resist it?
- The importance of establishing local coalitions, alliances and networks in rural areas.
- The right of rootedness – including how the criteria for qualifying for social housing has shifted from social inheritance to one based on need. On the one hand you could argue this approach is fair because it targets those in need of housing. On the other hand, you could argue this is unfair as it prioritises certain groups of people such as migrants with families who then go to the top of the housing list.
- The importance of community organisers and showing a more emotional politics. We all have to be more emotionally intelligent about the countryside.
- How can we listen to the ‘legitimate views’ of rural residents?
- The growing divide between the haves and have nots in rural communities.
- Rural communities need to be able to draw in local and extra-local resources - and also look outside of their locality (e.g. the European LEADER network).
- The blurring off administrative boundaries when working at a landscape scale.
- If we want to have a more sustainable positive rural future, empathy and respect are important qualities.
- The people regarded as successful are the ones that leave rural areas (out migration of young people).
- A reliance of migrant workers in horticulture - we don't respect jobs that involve using our hands versus the knowledge economy which is highly rated. Can we ascribe the same value to technical skills as academic skills?
- The importance of helping people progress in rural areas.
- Government proposals for a Shared Prosperity Fund.
- The dominance of city regions and where the devolution agenda fits in rural areas. Is an asymmetrical regional approach needed?
- How can people who feel marginalised within the economy can be listened to by policy and decision makers (are new governance models needed?). Policy makers often listen to the most powerful voices and/or the urban areas.
- How do we overcome political apathy?

- We need to start from the grassroots and be collaborative in bringing public, private and voluntary and community sectors together in rural places. We need to develop services for the local area and not always according to our administrative boundaries.
- People tend to come together when a service is closed or under threat.

The following views were offered in the **Roads and Regeneration** workshop:

- The consistency of road standards (can be politically driven with Local Authorities having to take something now rather than a strategic route that will be future proofed to accommodate more vehicles in the future).
- Are we willing to think far enough ahead?
- We need to find ways of moderating what highways, planning, economic development, businesses and communities want.
- Most public spending is about rationing - by giving to one and not the other (prioritisation) or you can have something but not what you originally asked for.
- On a pounds per head basis rural roads have higher expenditure than urban but not pound per kilometre.
- People are passing through and don't pay their taxes in the area with the roads they are travelling on.
- We are the place where people from cities come to visit. We pick up the cost for this on our roads and this needs to be addressed in national taxation.
- Very few new roads are now built now without making an economic case. But should the metrics be different? Roads are lifelines for many rural communities so we need to be much better at making the social community case for investment – e.g. distance to hospital and poor health outcomes if the roads are poor; difficulty getting carers to travel into rural places to support older and vulnerable people.
- We've got lots of data and information in lots of places and this isn't joined up or shared between organisations to make the case for investing in rural roads.
- We also compartmentalise public sectors - how can we use the concept of social value to see the savings from investing in roads? What are the consequences of our actions if we don't?
- Roads are nodes to so many different policy areas and funding streams. People don't always understand the responsibilities and different funding streams between Government, Highways Agency (strategic roads) and Local Authorities (local roads) - how can this be a complementary offer rather than a silo based approach?
- The concept of prosperity - how can we encourage people to walk, cycle and be less dependent on the car?
- We need to look at the design of roads differently - we tend to be thinking one transport mode at a time, and a road isn't just for the private motor vehicle. We don't think of a system we think of sub elements (e.g. a bypass).
- We need to think about travel networks, particularly around the non-car road user (e.g. connected bridle ways).
- The cuts in highways funding in Local Government – and how this is leading some Authorities to specialise. In practice, this means the role of highways within the Council is about looking after the road itself (engineering) and seeing roads as a means of people getting about and living/working in rural areas.
- The different types of vehicles and users on rural roads. How the number of vehicles and size of vehicles on rural roads is increasing - how can we plan for a different future?
- The road planning systems are reactive rather than proactive.
- Many rural roads were built for horse and cart and haven't been made any wider.
- How to segregate users (e.g. cycle lanes).

The following key messages for Government and Local Authorities were developed during the session:

To ensure we are more proactive rather than reactive in highways, we need to consider:

- ✚ What will vehicles look like in 25 years' time?
- ✚ What sort of infrastructure will we need in 2040 if all cars are electric? Or if rural areas are served by a pool of driverless cars?
- ✚ The length of time taken to build roads - we need to start generating a discussion about planning so we can get roads built when and where they are needed in good time.
- ✚ The road connection dictates how rural communities evolve - those that can grow and those that can't = we need to consider how the road systems serve small rural communities.
- ✚ The costs of building and maintaining roads.
- ✚ Local Authorities need to offer the solution and not rely on or wait for Government to do so.

The following reflections were offered around the **sustainability and flood risk** presentations delivered in the second plenary:

- The importance of natural capital projects (the connectivity between downstream and upstream measures) in preventing flooding and/or storing flood water.
- The role of business in mitigating flood risk – and who should pay for flood protection measures.
- How Government funding models are predicated on outcomes (people, homes) that leads to a gap in funding allocated to rural areas.
- The interconnectivity of economic and social processes and a need for new institutions and approaches to rural development.
- Is there a need for an intermediate agency with rural expertise that sits between Government and Local Councils and how could we demonstrate and measure the return it delivers for the funding it receives from them?
- The importance of evidence based policy making – we need independent economic analysis.
- You need to be rooted and owned by the community and serve them – then they would rather have you than not have you.
- The links between lead flood authorities, ADEPT (The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport) and internal drainage boards - partnership working and joint projects.

### **Summing up (Cecilia Motley)**

- ✓ Infrastructure is an enormously broad term and there is no such thing as 'one size fits all.' We need local solutions for local communities.
- ✓ There is a diversity of opportunities in rural areas and we now have to make a strong case for realising these.
- ✓ Rural has shown considerable resilience so far and will continue to be resilient in coming years.
- ✓ We have to make a clear and compelling case for rural: we should not be treated as a poor relation. Rural should not be regarded as an appendage to towns and cities – rural is not a theme park for urban and metropolitan areas but we are our own engines. We need to continue to think innovatively as we've always done.
- ✓ We need to grow and make rural communities flourish – and work with Government not fight it.
- ✓ There is a growing realisation from Government that funding inequalities are real - and there has to be some rebalancing of the pot.

## Roads and Regeneration

### General discussion

- 2/3 employees employed by microbusinesses; the road network needs to support the transport network into rural areas for commuters; should there be more investment in wider highways and by-ways to enable walking and cycling
- Difficulty for investment in transport networks is that people choose home locality for schools and willing to travel up to one hour for work. Improve the transport network then people will travel further for work to ensure home locality of choice
- Should be supporting the set-up of microbusiness in place of home to reduce the need to travel to work; or support the infrastructure, that is broadband, to enable reliable other ways of working
- Wheels to work could ease the pressure on the roads as motorbikes do not place so much pressure on the roads; but further distances can be travelled within the one hour radius

### Barriers

- Roadworks can cause pressure on economic prosperity in the immediate term.
- Isle of Wight Council have prioritised to improve their road network; supports tourism economy. Not all local authorities will prioritise road improvements to the same level as Isle of Wight Council. Road investment on a large scale takes significant percentage of council budget.
- Roadworks and other transport network improvements are not coordinated; need more coordination between Highways Agency, local authority highways departments and Network Rail
- The relevance of roads on regeneration will depend on locality. Not the same dependence across the UK.
- Broadband coverage!

### Electric and autonomous cars

- Infrastructure is required now in preparation for increase in electric and autonomous cars, such as charging through induction in the road; the idealistic conversations needs to commence sooner rather than later. Investment costs will be significantly higher in rural areas
- Within 40 years it is unlikely that personal transport will be as extensive as it is in 2017
- **Barrier.** not thinking about the changes

### Personal vs commercial transport / services delivery

- Conversation on personal transport; need to think of freight and services transport

## From Drone Deliveries to Driverless Cars

### Daniel introduction

- Electric cars range by 2020 – 200 miles costing £20k
- Autonomous vehicles – for example pods; exist in Milton Keynes; potential for rural areas for young people who cannot drive / afford a car or elderly not wanting to drive
- 5G connectivity: small cells over shorter area of range. In rural areas, a challenge because more are required to give coverage. Chichester is a pilot area for government 5G area. 5G will need high speed so will need fibres to deliver connectivity

### General Discussion

- Higher costs as need more delivery *must* boxes and investment will have to come from private investment which mean that companies may not invest as will invest in areas of highest return
- Invest in rural first; the more difficult
- Market forces invest in urban areas – but higher costs in rural areas so will lead to market failure, which should have government intervention to meet David Cameron's commitment that broadband is part of essential infrastructure
- Council services can be delivered at 10 gigabit a second but if to be used by private and business use need wider fibre
- Should public funds be funding private and business use rather than hubs for community use / pay-as-you-go or rented.
- Need to look at the social-cultural issues and not just economic with wider use of broadband for services for example taking blood pressure down the internet; although not currently embraced by the NHS
  - Case study Physiodom: of a box linked to TV and internet to elderly monitor pedometer, weight, fruit and veg bargains, local walks and other bespoke information
- Government building a stronger economy but not supporting education and skills in rural areas due to lack of broadband
- Rural home workers working at 3am to be able to access broadband when others have gone to bed so are becoming nocturnal
- Perhaps need to look at other solutions, such as community assets rather than BT and public-sector partnership
- *Constant change is here to stay.* As well as technology is hindered by on-going administrative changes for example NHS
- Technology will not be full proof – for example drones or autonomous cars can be infiltrated by for example terrorists

### Drones

- Drones could deliver shopping to the home
- Drone delivery needs to consider security of goods; could input a drone receiving platform
- Drone / technology assumes knowledge and capacity to use devices. For example, dementia sufferers will not remember how to switch on devices and/or passwords
- Use of drones and technology must remember the socio-cultural dimension of inclusion and social contact
- Drones may become more competitive with time as will displace unknown delivery person in a van
- Increase in drones will increase pressure on the small village shop as well as the larger supermarket



- Drones and internet will continually decrease the need to shop and therefore the social aspect is lost
- Village shops need to think of diversifying to sustain their survival
- South Norfolk have an initiative Connect People to support people living on their own

### **Electric Vehicles / autonomous cars**

- Some areas have pressures on local grid when high number of electric cars being charged at the same time
- Autonomous cars could support rural pubs and address the drink / driving issue
- Likely to start in urban areas but risk of market failure in rural areas could occur as companies such as Uber do not see profit in rural areas
- Autonomous vehicles are the next stage to dial a ride and community car schemes
- Will the autonomous cars be effective in inclement weather?
- Design not yet considering use of autonomous cars on single track roads

Implantation of technology will come and there will be luddites but more importantly the increase cost for delivery in rural areas; plus, lower rural wages will lead to inaccessibility and lead to exclusion

Concerns on the lack of driver with travelling with stranger – safety issues