

The Findings of the First Online Rural Opinion Panel.

A Report prepared for the RSN by the CCRI.

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Executive Summary

In the summer of 2017, the Rural Services Network invested in a novel approach to gathering information about the experience of people living in rural England. They conducted an online survey as part of a recruitment process to establish a Rural Opinion Panel, which will act as a representative voice for rural areas in England, by recruiting people to take part in an online rural opinion panel. Across six weeks, over 2500 people responded to the survey, which was promoted directly by RSN, supported by social media platforms, and further enhanced by some specific organisations for whom the issues the panel will seek to address particularly resonated. Determined efforts were made to recruit people from all demographic groups, especially younger people. The detail of this report presents the findings from this survey, and where possible draws comparisons with authoritative approaches such as the Census, to identify trends and patterns.

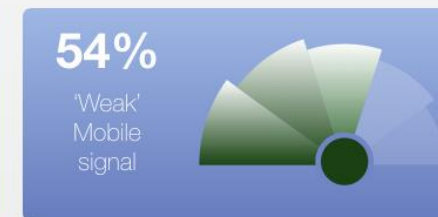
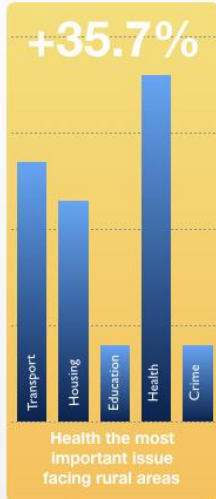
Those responding to the survey were more likely to be older, better educated, than the average rural for the population, and more women took part than men. At first glance, those who replied to the survey are the older, white, wealthy, home owning, socially comfortable people who might be seen as the stereotypical residents of many villages and market towns. But by conducting a more in-depth analysis, the results of this panel suggest that those taking part in the research are profoundly concerned about the future of rural England.

The respondents' primary concern is for healthcare provision, reflecting the age group and those who live at some distance from NHS provision. Dependent on private transport, questions of accessibility are pertinent in a way that urban-based and focused policy making might overlook. The second concern is that of housing, although most those taking part in the research own their homes, they are anxious about the future. Those facing building development are concerned about whether these new houses will change the character of their community, and if there are services to support the new residents. Other respondents observe the lack of housing and raise concerns about the implications that this has upon the viability of their community. For the latter group, development would be welcomed, as a necessity to maintain vibrant rural towns and villages. House prices considered prohibitive for younger people and families, as they can no longer afford to live in rural communities.

The respondents report that they live in communities that are marked by mutuality and co-operation, neighbours trust one another and trust is a common currency. Fear of crime is not widespread, and people feel safe not just in their own homes but the villages and towns in which they live. A careful consideration of the open answers to the questionnaire shows that respondents are united in their concern about what is missing in rural provision and areas, an anxiety focused on the word 'lack'. The rural communities might be thriving, but the residents are acutely aware of how services and policy are not supporting them.

Although the respondents of the panel are not statistically representative of the broader rural population, these results demonstrate that rural England now has sufficient connectivity via social media and rural community organisations to promote engagement with a sustained panel. Those who have participated have shown that even though they may be amongst the more privileged in rural communities, they see pressing threats and needs that are yet unmet.

Rural Opinion Panel - Results



2158 responses, June and July 2017

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The Rural Services Network

The Rural Services Network is the national champion for rural services, ensuring that people in rural areas have a strong voice. We are fighting for a fair deal for rural communities to maintain their social and economic viability for the benefit of the nation.

- Barriers to housing
- Barriers to access
- Public sector funding
- Health and wellbeing

The RSN works under a number of separate groupings and subject specific alliances. Each of these groupings works slightly differently. Overall the network comprises around 150 Local Authorities and over 100 non-Local Authority service providers in both the public and private sector.

The Purposes of the Opinion Panel

The English countryside is a unique area that is an intrinsic part of the culture and characteristic of the nation. The patchwork quilt appearance of fields, small villages, and farmhouses across differing landscapes of hills, plains and valleys implies gentility throughout such rural locations. However, many rural areas currently face problems such as loss of services, poor housing stock and fewer opportunities compared to those in urban areas. This situation in many areas of rural England has stemmed from decades of Government policy that has not necessarily had rural issues at the fore of policy development.

The result of the referendum, with the decision to leave the European Union, and more recently the May 2017 election, resulting in a hung parliament, are events that will undoubtedly result in significant policy developments within the UK. Consequently, RSN has decided that this as an opportune time to set a new agenda for rural areas in England.

For more than a decade market research companies have been using online surveys to gather information about the opinions and preferences of the British population, often offering small rewards for participation. They encourage people to repeatedly participate as this allows for the development of longitudinal profiles, as well as saving money on the costs of recruitment. To a degree this information has been displaced by data gathered through social media platforms but in the expression of opinion it remains an important resource. Early concerns about the representativeness of these panel, that they contained too many affluent people who had skills and access to the internet were quickly found to be misplaced, not least because of the adoption of smartphones in the past decade. These panels had little utility for studying rural areas as internet provision in the countryside until recently has been very poor, and the means of contacting people not available. The spread of broadband provision into rural areas and the advent of the diffusion of social media has made the creation of a such a panel feasible. It should be noted that the investment made by the RSN was not without risk.

Overview of Rural Area Classifications

The most recent UK Census conducted in 2011, [identified that there were 9.3 million people](#) living in rural areas in England, accounting for 17.6% of the population of just over 53 million. Of these, nearly 0.5 million were living in a sparse rural setting in 2014. Methods to classify areas within England and Wales as either 'urban' or 'rural' have changed since the 1980s however, there are three broad approaches that have typically been employed:

Land use approach

Functional area approach

Density approach

(ONS, 2006)

For the purposes of this research the figures produced from the 2011 Census will be used as the basis of analysis and comparison. In [2004 a new approach to 'Rural Definition'](#) was created by the Rural Evidence and Research Centre that classified Local Authority Output Areas into one of six groupings:

- major urban
- large urban
- other urban
- significant rural
- rural 50
- rural 80

These scale of 'rurality' were based upon the density of households and further aggregated into three categories: 'predominantly urban', 'significantly rural' and 'predominantly rural'. These classifications replaced the binary classification of 'urban' or 'rural' that had previously been employed for district levels areas. Although this approach was one that "many organisations could subscribe" its simplicity overlooked how diverse many areas are at this spatial level.

In 2014, these were developed further, by applying more accurate 2011 census data, to the 2004 rural definitions. Again, six groupings were defined for the classification of local authorities:

- Urban with major conurbation
- Urban with minor conurbation
- Urban with city and town
- Urban with significant rural
- Largely rural
- Mainly rural

These categories are aggregated into three categories: 'predominantly urban', 'urban with significant rural' and 'predominantly rural'.

Classifications were also defined for Census Output Areas, these are the smallest spatial area for which data are available for from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses. There are four urban categories, and six rural categories:

- Urban
 - Urban major conurbation
 - Urban minor conurbation
 - Urban city and town
 - Urban city and town in a sparse setting
- Rural
 - Rural town and fringe
 - Rural town and fringe in a sparse setting
 - Rural village
 - Rural village in a sparse setting
 - Rural hamlet and isolated dwelling
 - Rural hamlet and isolated dwelling in a sparse setting

More information and links regarding historical and current classification methods regarding whether land is 'urban' or 'rural' can be located on the [GOV.UK website](#). It should be noted though that according to the [OECD \(2011\), within their Policy Review of England](#) "[it] has no predominantly rural regions". This is due to the method by which the OECD define an area as 'rural', which is primarily based upon population density. As a densely-populated country, England, therefore is 33% urban, 67% intermediate and "in the same category as The Netherlands, New Zealand and Luxembourg".

Development of the Rural Survey

Through discussions with the RSN, general topics and themes were identified concerning the current and potential future issues facing rural areas. Questions were then developed around selected topics in a format that will allow for longitudinal study, as envisaged through the proposed rural panel. Broader ‘experience’ questions related to topics were also developed.

Question formats were varied, and included single answer, multiple choice, multiple answer multiple choice, ranking and open questions. Although most of the questions focussed upon ‘issues’ that face rural areas, a number also explored social capital and perception questions that have been conducted in previous national surveys with results being presented at both rural and urban levels. This would enable direct comparison between previous studies and results obtained from this study.

An online survey was subsequently developed, which was then circulated and promoted primarily through RSN’s network of contacts, with support from CCRI, through social media. The survey was made available for a period of approximately six weeks during June and July of 2017 and targeted at people living in rural areas within England. During this period, a total of 2603 responses were received, with a small number completed in paper format¹. This provided a substantial number of potential responses with which to conduct analysis.

Only respondents who met specific criteria were to be considered within the analysis; they had to be in England and within a rural location, as defined by their postcode and the classifications determined by Defra (see discussion above)². Using postcode data (where provided and accurate) it was possible to determine, via use of specialist GIS software the specific output area of the respondent. These are classified as mentioned above. Where it was not possible to determine via GIS, the respondent’s own classification (question three) was used.

In some instances, incomplete postcode information was provided, and in these cases manual determination of *location* was conducted to determine the County/Unitary Authority, Region and Country if possible. It should be noted that in a small number of cases partial postcode data covered administrative boundaries – both county and region, and in a smaller number of cases country boundaries. In these cases, the response was treated as ‘missing’ rather than being potentially incorrectly assigned. Once the responses had been examined and cleaned the eligible responses were identified. From the initial 2603 responses, a total of 2158 were available for analysis. These were the ‘English and Rural’ respondents, a total of 1901 responses were available.

It should be noted that 418 responses were received from people residing in urban areas. This accounts for just over 16% of all respondents, and the single most attribute of ineligibility. There were a negligible number of respondents not located in England.

¹ Unfortunately, some of these were incorrectly completed and therefore excluded.

² Some respondent’s answers had to be excluded because of an error in setting up the online questionnaire, which only became evident during the analysis period.

Demographic profile of sample

The average age of those living in rural areas is higher than that of those living in urban areas. Indeed, as an area becomes more increasingly 'rural' and dispersed, the average age of the population increases. Conversely, increasingly urban areas observe a decrease in mean population. Mean age for England in 2014, based upon mid-year population estimates was 39.6 years, for urban areas it was 38.7 and for rural areas it was 44.1 years. Figure 1 below also highlights that the average age for rural areas is increasing at a faster rate than that for urban areas.

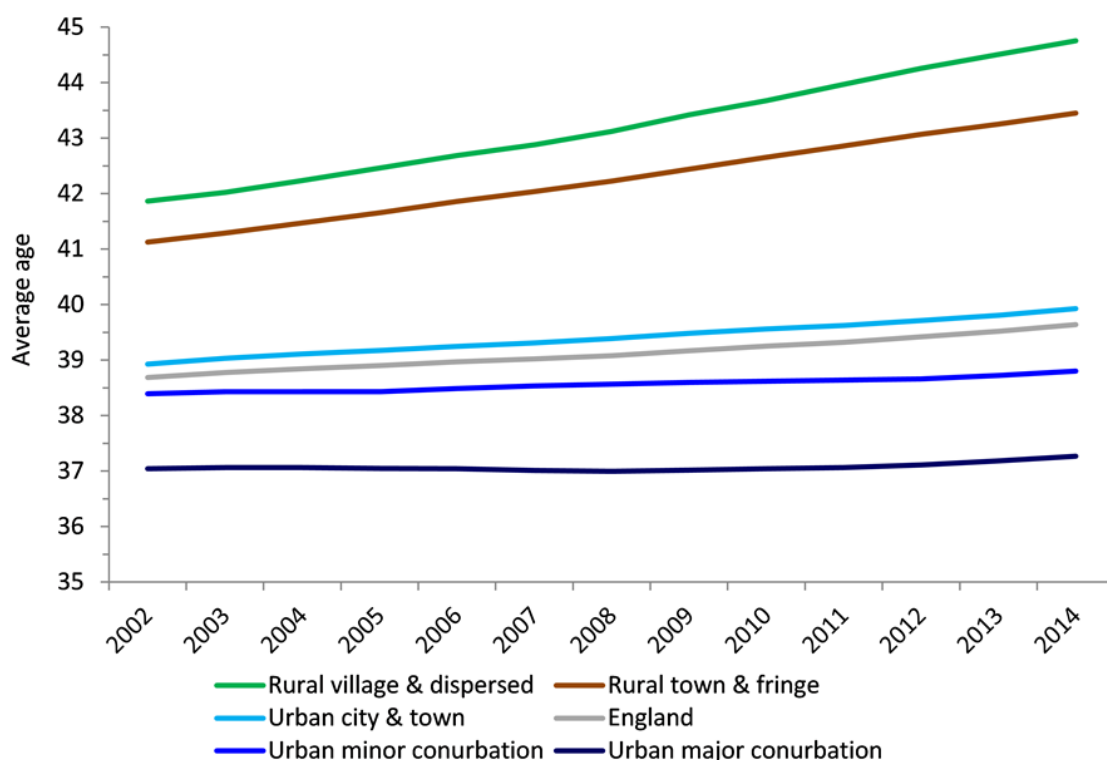


Figure 1 - Average age in rural and urban areas in England, 2002-2014 (Defra, 2016)

Within our eligible sample, the age profile of respondents can be viewed below (figure 2) and directly compared with that of the rural population for England in 2011. There is a clear lack of younger respondents (49 years or younger), and this is particularly pronounced for those aged 34 or below. Although there is also under-representation of older respondents, in terms of percentage points, the proportional difference is much less than that for younger people. There is significant over representation in ages from 50-74 and particularly so in ages 60-74. The broad profile of our sample we consider to be 'similar' to that of the population but would not be representative/valid from a statistical perspective due to the under representation in younger people and over representation in older people. Given that this was a self-selective survey, and circulated primarily through the RSN's existing networks, such as local councils and community groups, who would typically have an older demographic, this was to be expected. Active targeting of rural youth groups such as 'Young Farmers' was conducted, but yielded insufficient recruitment.

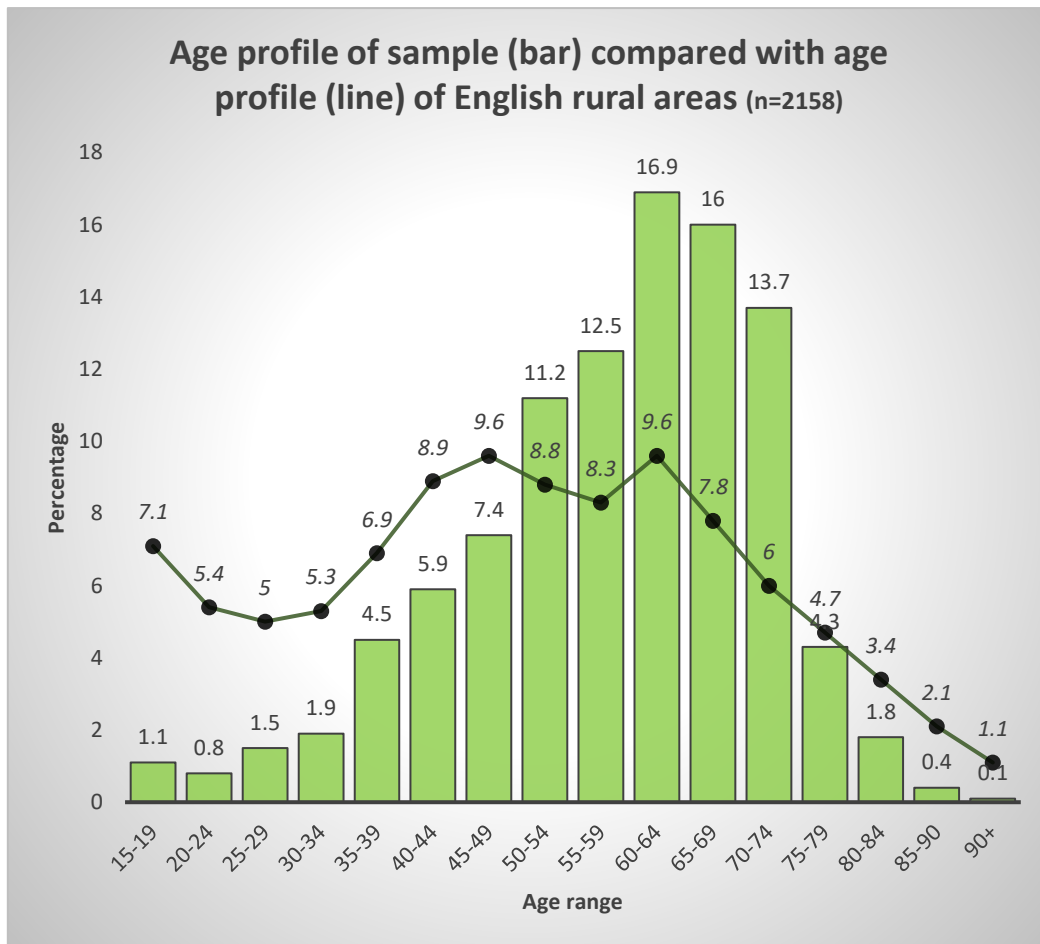


Figure 2 - Comparison of age profile of respondents with population of English rural areas

Within England and within rural areas in England, 51% of the population in 2011 were female. The gender composition of the eligible sample for this survey is notably different, with 57% female, 42% male and 1% responding as ‘other’ or ‘prefer not to say’.

Therefore, when considering the eligible sample for this survey, several important factors should be reflected upon:

- The sample contains insufficient younger people, particularly those aged 15-34, but also aged 35-49. There are also too few respondents aged 80 or over.
- People aged 60-74 are particularly over-represented, as are those aged 50-59, but to less of an extent.
- The proportion of women in the sample is greater than the proportion of women in rural England.

The ethnic composition of rural areas in [England in 2011](#) was predominantly white (97.4%) with the most common minority ethnic group being Asian (1.1%). A full breakdown of ethnic groupings for England (rural and urban areas) and the sample obtained within this study is provided in table 1. The sample obtained as part of the study has an underrepresentation of mixed, Asian and Black ethnic backgrounds compared to 2011 figures.

| Ethnicity | Percentage composition | | | |
|-----------|------------------------|------------|------------|--------|
| | England 2011 | Urban 2011 | Rural 2011 | Sample |
| White | 85.4% | 82.8% | 97.4% | 99.0% |
| Mixed | 2.3% | 2.5% | 0.9% | 0.5% |
| Asian | 7.8% | 9.3% | 1.1% | 0% |
| Black | 3.5% | 4.1% | 0.4% | 0.1% |
| Other | 1.0% | 1.2% | 0.2% | 0.4% |

Table 1 - Ethnic composition of English rural areas compared with the survey responses

Location and nationality of respondents

Ninety eight percent of respondents gave their nationality as being UK. The remaining nationalities each accounted for <1% each, with the most common responses being 'other' and 'other EU'.

[Figures from the 2011 Census state that 86.6%](#) of residents in England and Wales had been born in the United Kingdom. For rural areas however, this figure was 94.9%, a figure which had fallen since 2001, but was lower than that obtained within this study. It should be noted that Wales had the highest proportion of residents living in rural areas, and therefore if just England had been considered the figure would be lower. [More recent figures for England](#) (January – December 2016, but not specifying rural/urban) state that 8.3m people within England were of 'non-United Kingdom' nationality, from a population of 54.5m – making proportion of just over 15%.

Responses to the survey came from a range of areas, and the distribution largely reflects the location of the organisations which engaged directly with the study by promoting it. The West Midlands accounted for just over 26% of responses, with the South West being the next most popular region with 18.2%. The least popular region was Yorkshire and the Humber. Full breakdown of results can be found in table 2.

When analysed by Unitary Authority or County, those areas which directly engaged with the survey becomes much more evident. Over 300 (15%) responses were received in Shropshire due to the direct involvement of the Rural Community Council within the county. Derbyshire and Cumbria were also highly represented, accounting for 7.3% and 7% respectively. This uneven distribution also has implications for the validity and representativeness of the data and the authors wish to highlight this issue. In total, 63 different Unitary Authorities/Counties were represented, although response rates from counties which may be considered 'rural', such as Worcestershire, Cornwall or County Durham were all 1% or below due to the survey not being championed by an organisation.

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| West Midlands | 567 | 26.3 | 26.5 |
| South West | 392 | 18.2 | 18.3 |
| East Midlands | 294 | 13.6 | 13.8 |
| South East | 283 | 13.1 | 13.2 |
| East of England | 231 | 10.7 | 10.8 |
| North West | 181 | 8.4 | 8.5 |
| North East | 107 | 5 | 5 |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 82 | 3.8 | 3.8 |

Table 2 - Regional Location of Survey Respondents

Analysis: Question by question.

Ranking of Issues

Respondents were asked to rank five broad topics as to which of them concerns them most about the future of rural areas. A ranking exercise was specifically chosen rather than a rating exercise as it would force respondents to state a preference of one topic over another. Although this approach required more consideration from respondents, when performing ratings, it is feasible that people may simply rate all topics equally which offers much less insight. The topics that respondents were asked to rank were:

- Transport
- Housing
- Education
- Health
- Crime

Results are provided below in figure 3.

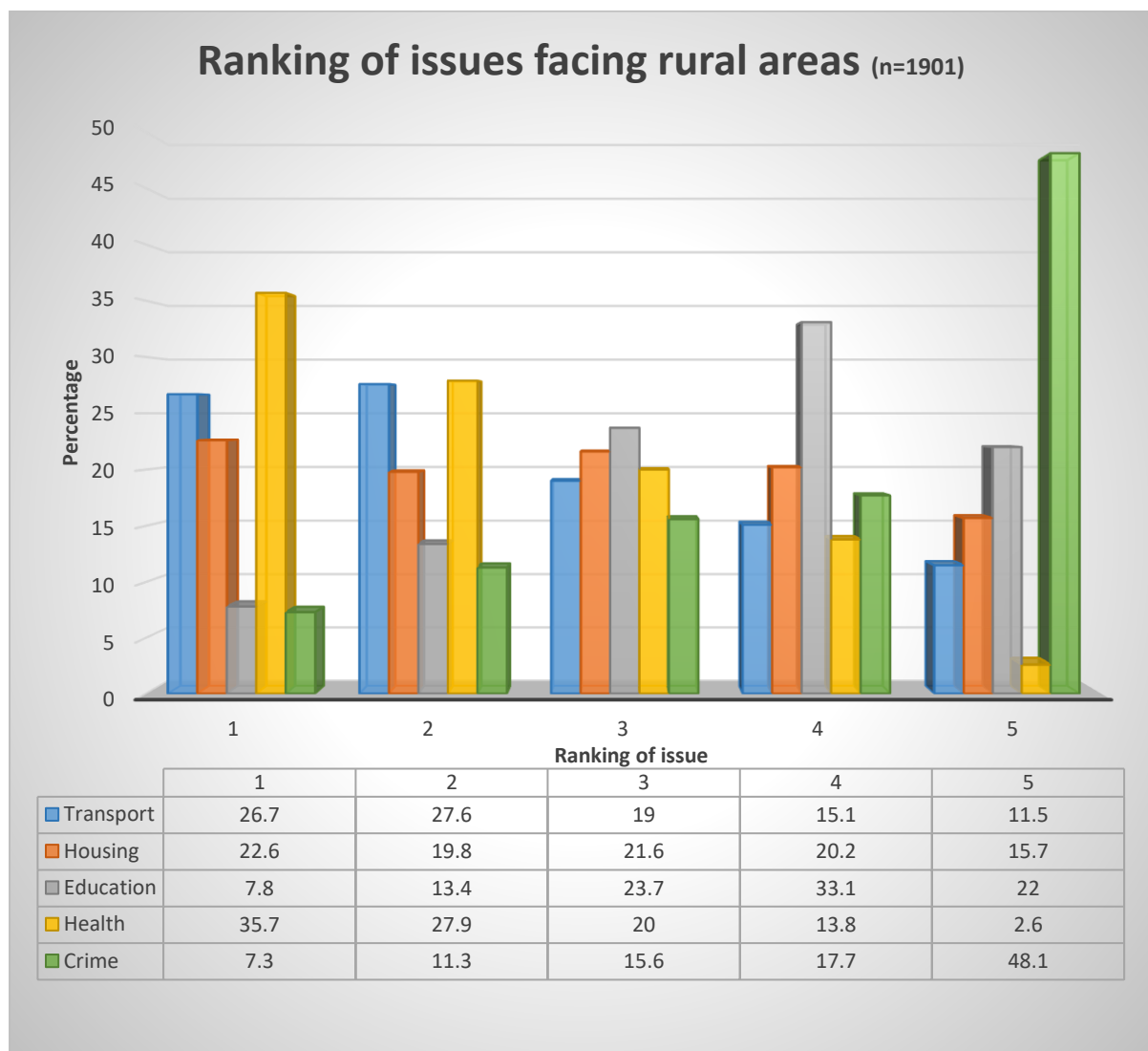


Figure 3- Ranking of Issues Facing Rural Areas in England

The topic of health was clearly considered as being that of most concern to respondents (35.7%). Indeed, it was also the most popular 2nd rank topic. Transport was considered the second most concerning amongst the 1st rank topics (26.7%), with housing third (22.6%). Aggregation of 1st and 2nd rankings further highlights the extent of importance of health and transport. Nearly 64% of respondents ranked health as either 1st or 2nd and 54% for transport. Aggregation of all topics for rankings one, two and three can be viewed in table 4.

The topic comprehensively considered least concerning was crime, with nearly 50% of respondents ranking it as of the lowest concern. Education was the second most popular topic of least concern with 22%. As would be expected health and transport were least popular 5th ranking topics.

| <i>Topic</i> | Ranks - Aggregated | |
|------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| | 1 & 2 | 1 & 2 & 3 |
| Transport | 54.3% | 73.3% |
| Housing | 42.4% | 64% |
| Education | 21.2% | 44.9% |
| Health | 63.6% | 83.6% |
| Crime | 18.6% | 34.2% |

Table 3- Combined Ranking of Rural Issues

Qualitative Analysis of issues facing rural areas

To conduct an analysis of this question, the text from the survey answers was extracted into the qualitative analytic software, Nvivo 11, to facilitate rigorous analysis. A representative sample³ was coded manually and then automated features were used determine which words most frequently appeared in the responses. We will proceed by taking each piece of analysis in turn and then focusing on a synthesis.

The manual coding produced 45 individual codes, topics suggested by the respondents, of these of these 13 were only mentioned by one respondent, leaving 32 that appeared at least twice. If we consider the four most frequently appearing, they were:

New Development (74)

This is a concern with developments mostly in villages, which is domestic housing and ties often to a concern about a lack of facilities to accompany these developments but also to the character of the village:

“Too much building in one or two locations instead of being gently spread throughout the villages.”

“Schools are all overflowing, they are proposing to build a lot more houses in the area but no more schools, doctors or infrastructure to support more people”

³ 305 responses, providing a confidence level of 95%, with a confidence interval of +/- 5%.

“Being forced to build extra houses in a small village which will change the character of the village.”

There is a split between those who see this as important to the future viability of the community:

“we need a few more houses at all levels and types to maintain the viability of the village and give opportunities to the young who need houses as more old stay in theirs”

Although for others this was about the social character of the community:

“too much development, causing problems with doctors and schools and road congestion and bringing crime and low classes into the area”

Affordable Housing (66)

The cost of housing, the lack of affordable housing or the unaffordability of housing in the village was a major topic of concern.

“Access to local affordable housing (of different tenures - social rent, shared-ownership and rent-to-buy) and community shop”

“Affordable housing - salary to house cost ratio is not affordable. Rental costs are also escalating and becoming unaffordable for families”

“Wrong type of housing, too many large houses for retired professionals, no tradesman virtually no children. Not a balanced community”

Often the problem was linked to others, such as local plans or potential solutions:

“Not providing enough affordable housing for the young couples and not putting care homes in villages that would also release homes for young couples”

Service Provision (38)

This category includes those services provided by various arms of the local state but also those such as shops, post offices and pubs that provide community services but are in the private sector.

“Fear that reduced funding will affect transport, healthcare and other local services. New housing seems to be mainly larger houses not affordable for young people. Villages need people if all ages and all the above affect whether young families can live in a rural area.”

“Breakdown of communities due to lack of housing / facilities and amenities resulting in social isolation”

“Lack of public services due to austerity”

This theme of the decline and diminishment of rural life is picked up later in the discussion.

Figure 2 is a section of a word tree which illustrates the role that the word plays in the sentences within which it was found. 'Lack' and 'Lacking' are the second most common words in all the answers provided by respondents. It is particularly revealing as it unites the various topics about which people are concerned and the themes they develop to explain the importance of those topics and the reasons for them being problematic.

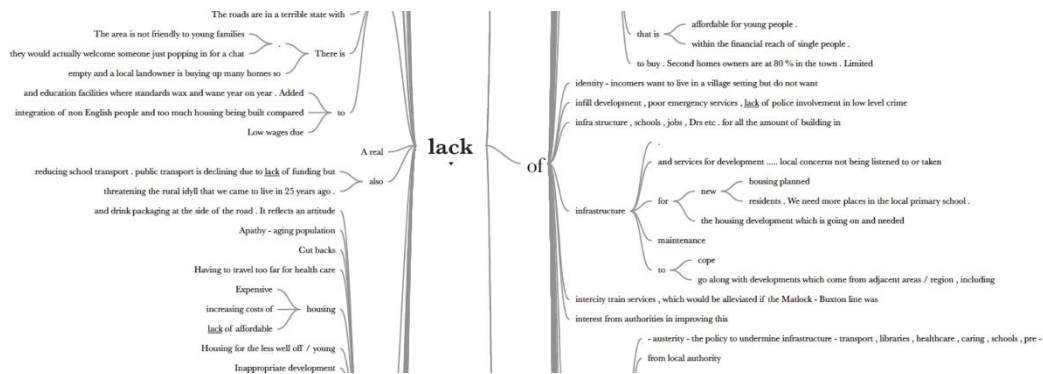


Figure 5 - Section of A Word Tree for The Word 'Lack'.

The frequency that this word appears suggests that the respondents experience of living in rural areas is that of inadequacy either in provision of services and infrastructure, access to housing or employment and agency in being able to determine matters for their own community. Figure 3 shows the way in which topics link to one another.

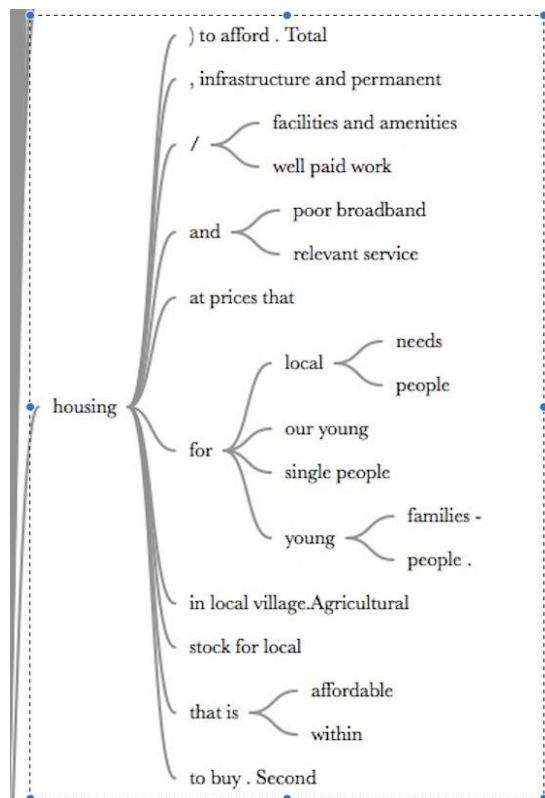


Figure 6 - Word Tree Extra Featuring 'Housing'.

The lack of housing is linked by respondents to questions of affordability, for groups i.e. young, single or local people, but also to wider questions of infrastructure such as broadband or economy such as well-paid employment.

Qualitative Analysis Synthesis

These two separate ways of considering the data suggest a consistent picture of the topics that concern respondents, new developments, housing, service provision and infrastructure but also the tenor of that concern. Whilst there is a spectrum of positions about the causes for these topics being problematic it is apparent that respondents are united as seeing the situation as that rural areas are 'lacking'; that the situation in rural areas is in decline.

Personal and public transport

Respondents were asked what their main form of personal/private transport was, and what their experience (if relevant) of public transport was. For nearly 95% of respondents 'car' was their main form of personal or private transport. The next most common response was walking with 1.7%. Full results are provided in table 5.

| <i>Main form of personal/private transport</i> | Percent |
|--|----------------|
| Car | 94.6% |
| Motorbike/scooter | 0.3% |
| Bicycle | 0.9% |
| Walking | 1.7% |
| Taxi | 0% |
| I rely on other people for lifts | 1.3% |
| Other | 1.2% |

Table 4- Main forms of Personal Transport

Vehicle ownership in rural areas is typically higher than that of urban areas as they are likely to be more of a necessity for residents to access services and employment opportunities. According to [Defra \(2014\) figures](#), in England in 2012, 25% of households did not have access to a car or van; in rural areas this figure was 11% and for urban areas the figure was 28%. Although household vehicle availability to one car/van is similar across England, rural and urban areas (44%; 42%; 45% respectively) rural residents are much more likely to have access to two or more vehicles. Results from the survey suggest that access to vehicles within our sample is greater than is typical for rural areas based upon the most current (2012) figures as 5.4% (i.e. 94.6 – 100) of respondents did not have access to a car.

[Between 2008/12 residents in England travelled on average 6,725 miles per year](#). This compares to 6,158 for urban residents, 8,763 for rural town and fringe and 10,057 miles for rural villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings. Having access to a private motor vehicle becomes increasingly important as the area in which you reside becomes increasingly 'rural' or isolated. For the most rural locations a

regular bus service was available for 49% of households in 2012, compared to 96% of urban households. Since 2002 this level of access to buses in urban areas has remained stable at either 96 or 97%. In all rural areas though the availability of buses has steadily increased over the same time, from 75% to 86% for 'rural town and fringe' and from 38% to 49% for 'rural villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings'.

Respondents were also asked to comment upon their experience of public transport. For some this question may not have been relevant and accordingly this option was made available for respondents. Just over 15% of respondents felt that this question was not relevant. Of those who did comment upon their experience (n=1833) 50% stated that bus or train services are 'very limited' see figure 7.

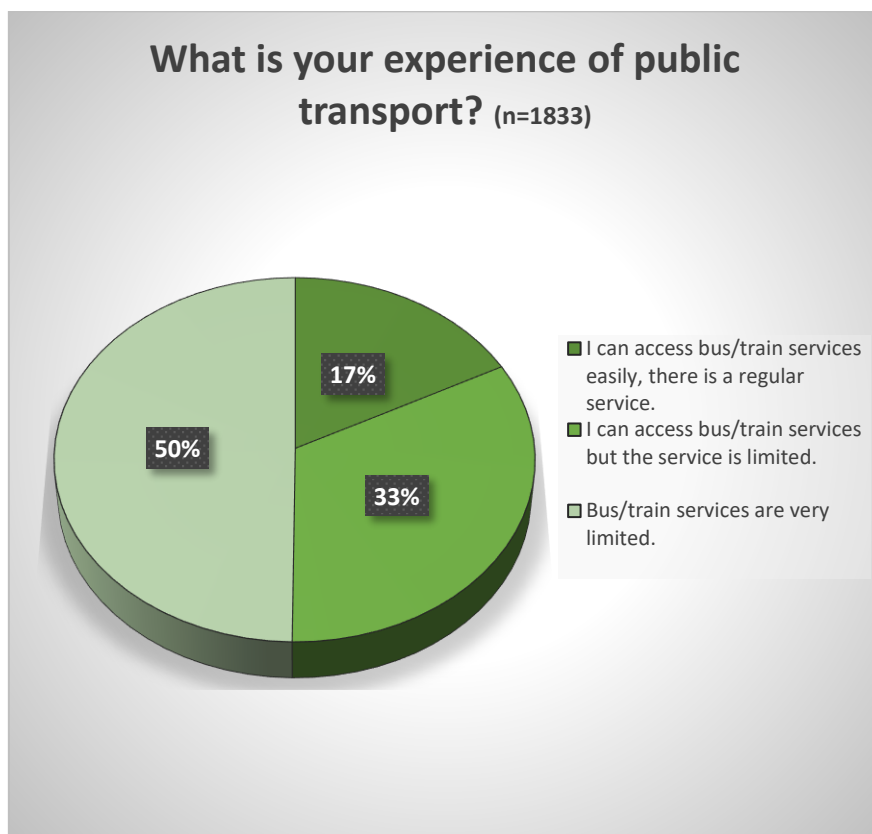


Figure 7 – What Is Your Experience of Public Transport

Clearly this is a subjective assessment of an individual's access to public transport services there is a certain degree of resemblance to the figures mentioned earlier (49% of households having access to a bus service). The level of service is often cited as being a key issue, with perhaps limited opportunities to travel during a week, so while a bus or train service may exist, it may not be a practical or realistic option. Furthermore, these figures do not cover the last 4-5 years, and there could feasibly be a change in this situation.

Availability of broadband and telecommunications

Broadband in rural areas is becoming increasingly important for many reasons such as establishing a business or accessing services and information. Indeed, increasingly facilities are made available only

online, access to a reliable and adequate internet connection is becoming an essential part of society and daily life. The UK Government committed to ensuring that [‘95% of UK premises can access superfast broadband by the end of 2017’](#). Details concerning the progress regarding this commitment can be found on the [Department for Culture Media and Sport website](#). Further to this, details were announced recently of six areas that are to pilot ‘full fibre’ broadband, although specific location details are not available at the time of writing. Many organisations have commented upon how having a poor broadband connection in rural areas is negatively affecting businesses in these areas, and that urban and sub-urban areas are all too often the focus for continued improvements whereas some rural areas are effectively excluded.

Respondents were asked to comment upon their experience of broadband, with responses ranging from ‘no broadband available’ to ‘excellent broadband service’. Nearly 50% stated that they had an ‘adequate’ service, with 14% stating they had an ‘excellent’ service. Just over one-third of respondents stated that they had a ‘basic’ service, with around 1% stating that it was either due to arrive soon, or was not offered. According to [2014 figures](#), typical rural areas had a broadband speed of 13Mbit/s whereas urban areas typically had a speed of 26Mbit/s. Figures varied significantly in rural areas, with ‘rural hamlets and isolated dwellings in a sparse setting’ experiencing 5Mbit/s and ‘rural town and fringe’ with 17Mbit/s.

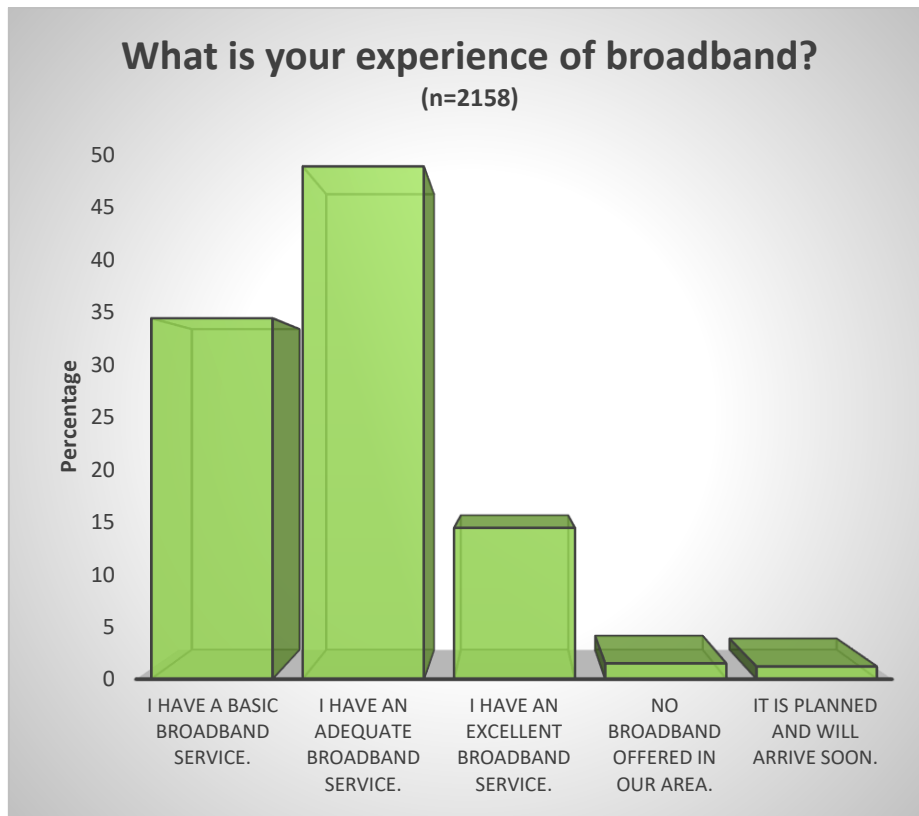


Figure 8 - What Is Your Experience of Broadband?

Respondents were also asked about their experience with mobile phone coverage where they live. Again, if this question was not relevant to them (as they do not use a mobile phone) these responses have been omitted. Over 54% of respondents stated that their coverage and signal was weak. Full results are presented in figure 8.

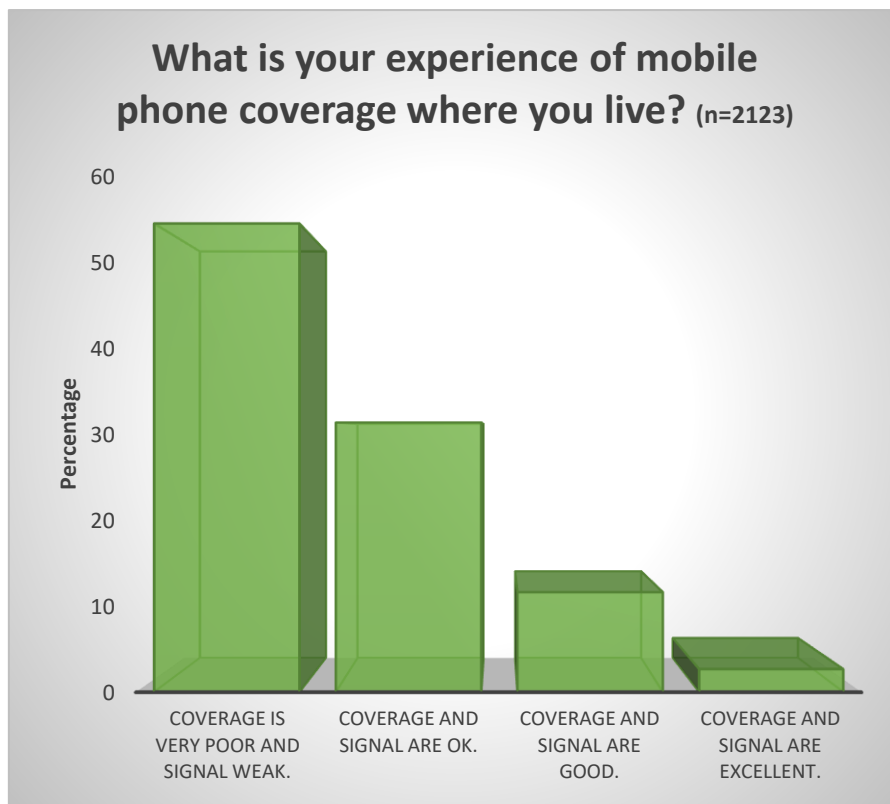


Figure 9 - What Is Your Experience of Mobile Phone Coverage Where You Live?

Accessing Education

Respondents were asked to comment upon what their experience of accessing education in their area is. As this question could again not have been relevant for individuals, a 'not relevant' option was available. Indeed, over one-third of responses were in this category and omitted from the results. One-third of respondents stated that there is easy access to outstanding and good schools and colleges. Over 50% however stated that although there were good schools and colleges, access to them due to transportation issues is a problem. Around 7% stated that schools and colleges in the area were not good and they had no other options.

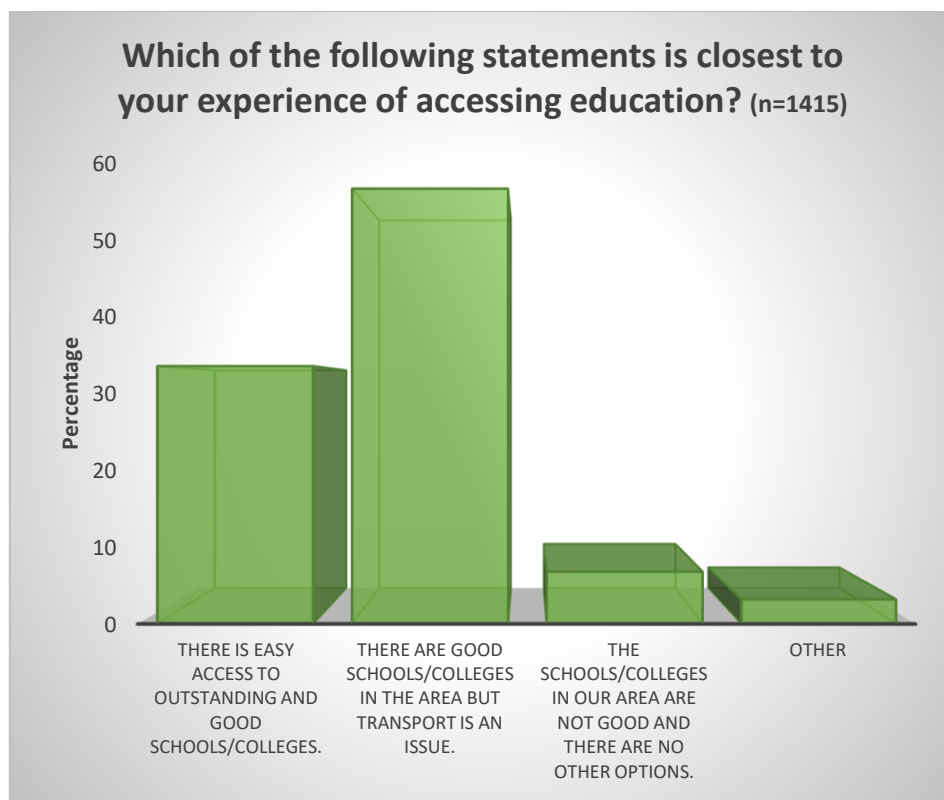


Figure 10 - Which of The Following Statements Is Closest to Your Experience of Accessing Education? (N=1415)

Housing developments

Rural housing developments can often be polarising and controversial affairs (see discussion above). In this question respondents were asked what their perspective was regarding housing developments. Over 35% of respondents felt as though the character of where they lived was under threat due to development. 12% felt that development was inevitable, seemingly resigned to this fact, and perhaps ambivalent on the matter. Nearly 30% felt that development was ‘needed’ and a further 8% felt that it would be ‘welcome’ and would bring benefits.

If these last two responses are combined, as being ‘in favour’ of housing developments, they are very similar (36.6%) to those who could be considered ‘against’ (35.4%). 16% of respondents were unaware of any developments in their area. Figures from [Defra’s statistical digest](#) indicate that within rural areas, “there is a higher rate of house-builds in predominantly rural⁴ areas than predominantly urban areas and compared with the national average”. This has consistently been the case since at least 2004/05 (earliest figures provided) and had been at consistent level until 2007/08 when figures dropped due to the financial downturn. They levelled out around 2010/11 but had not returned to pre-downturn levels.

⁴ 2001 boundary data used for figures

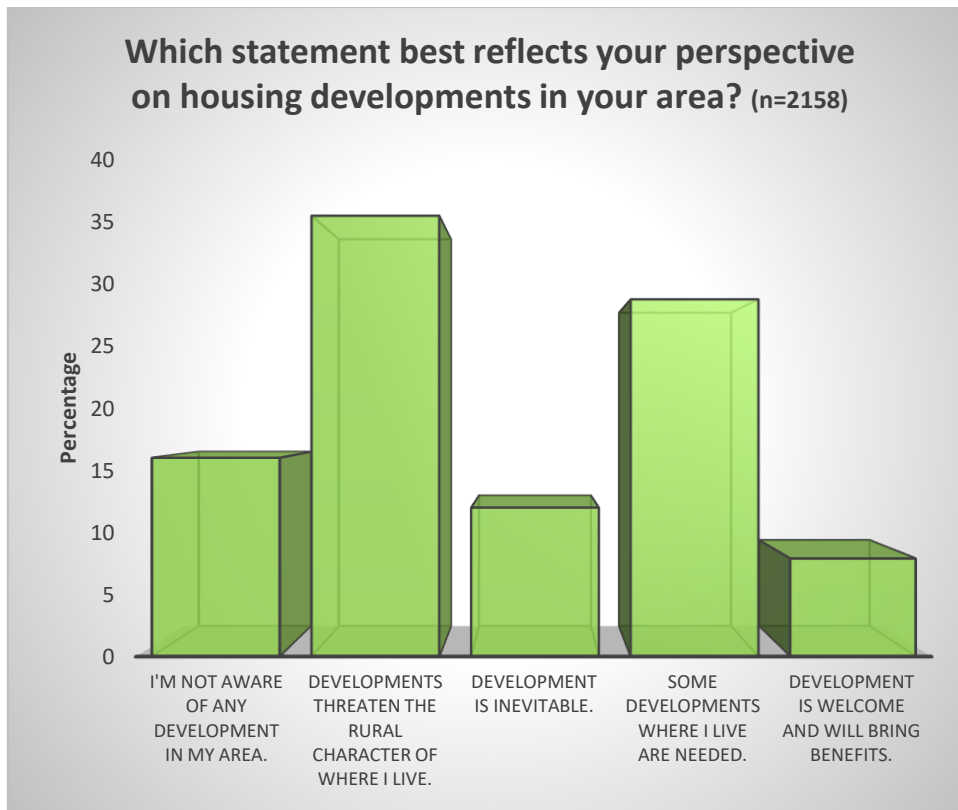


Figure 11 - Which Statement Best Reflects Your Perspective on Housing Developments in Your Area? (N=2158)

Housing situation and accommodation

A variety of statements were provided to encompass the anticipated broad range of housing situations respondents could be assigned to. Clearly with an attempt to engage with younger people who may still be living at home or with friends and are currently not home owners would overlook many fears such as affordability if 'rental' was one of a more restrictive number answer options. Therefore, we provided six options that covered a range of possible scenarios.

Within the 2011 census, respondents were asked about the tenure of where they lived. Rural areas reported a higher proportion of home ownership compared to that of urban areas, and that of England. Rental levels were lower in rural areas, with those living rent free being higher. Full results are in table 6.

| | Percentage of households | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | England | Urban | Rural |
| Owned: Total | 63.3% | 61.0% | 74.3% |
| Owned: Outright | 30.6% | 28.4% | 40.5% |
| Owned: Mortgage/Loan | 32.8% | 32.6% | 33.8% |
| Rented: Total | 34.5% | 37.0% | 23.3% |
| Social rented | 17.7% | 19.2% | 10.8% |
| Private rented | 16.8% | 17.8% | 12.4% |
| Shared ownership | 0.8% | 0.8% | 0.6% |
| Living rent free | 1.3% | 1.2% | 1.9% |

Table 5 – Census Data About Housing Tenure, Rural and Urban Compared

Within our sample there is a higher proportion of home ownership – with 87.5% of respondents being home owners compared to 75% for English rural areas in 2011 (see table 7). This difference is primarily due to there being a greater proportion of those who own their home outright (56% in sample, compared to 41% in 2011 Census) which in turn could be explained by the higher proportion of older respondents within our sample, who are more likely to be outright home owners rather than with a mortgage. There were similar figures within our sample for home owners with a loan or mortgage with that of the 2011 Census. Conversely rental figures are much lower as would be expected, however of the specific rental categories the most common response included the statement ‘...with little chance of that changing.’ This highlights for many how unaffordable properties have become, particularly those in rural areas.

| <i>Which of these statements best describes your housing situation? (n=2158)</i> | % |
|---|----------|
| I have paid off the mortgage. | 56.2% |
| I have a mortgage. | 31.3% |
| I'm renting, with little chance of that changing. | 8% |
| I'm living with friends or family as I can't afford a place of my own. | 2.9% |
| I'm renting and saving to pay the deposit on a mortgage. | 1% |
| I'm renting and will need help from the bank of Mum & Dad to get a mortgage. | 0.6% |

Table 6 - Housing Status of Survey Respondents

Figures from [Defra published in 2017](#) on the affordability of housing state that in 2016 in predominantly rural areas “the average lower quartile house price was 8.3 times the average lower quartile earnings”. For predominantly urban areas (excluding London) this ratio was 7.0. Although house prices in rural areas are less affordable than those in urban areas (excluding London), the gap between these areas “appears to be closing very slightly”.

Figures from [Defra’s Rural Economic Bulletin](#) in June 2017 state that the average rural house sale price from quarter 3 2016, to quarter 4 2016 was £308,900, a rise of 1.4% over the previous quarter. The average urban house price for the same period was £285,800. The bulletin states that “average house prices in rural areas have been consistently above the average found in urban areas”.

Financial situation

Figures from the [2011 Census](#) highlight that households in rural areas tend to be less deprived than those in urban areas see table 8. Additional and more current (2014/15) statistics ([Houses below Average Income](#)) which provide an insight to the standard of living of households indicate that the percentage of people in rural areas living in relative or absolute low income is lower than in urban areas. Despite this there are ‘many thousands of individuals...in households below average income’. The sector of society which has the largest proportion of people in relative and absolute poverty, for rural and urban areas are ‘children’ and has increased since 2012/13.

| | Percentage (Dimensions are: Employment, Education, Health & disability, Housing) | | | | |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Household not deprived | Household deprived in 1 dimension | Household deprived in 2 dimensions | Household deprived in 3 dimensions | Household deprived in 4 dimensions |
| Urban areas | 34.8% | 35.5% | 23.4% | 5.6% | 0.6% |
| Rural areas | 48.5% | 32.2% | 16.1% | 3.0% | 0.2% |
| England | 42.5% | 32.7% | 19.1% | 5.1% | 0.5% |

Table 7 - Dimensions of Deprivation - Urban and Rural Compared

More recent [figures from Defra](#) show that in 2014/15, show that “the percentage of people living in relative and absolute low income is lower in rural areas than in urban areas”. The report continues by stating that despite this there are “many thousands” of people living in rural areas are in households that are below average income. Indeed [other figures from Defra](#) available show that incomes for those in rural areas are below that for people living in urban areas see table 8. According to Defra [figures published in 2017](#), rural households spend a ‘greater proportion of their household income on transport and recreation than they do on housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels’. This contrasts with urban households for whom these latter categories account for the largest proportion of their disposable income. This in part maybe explained by the proportion of older people living in rural areas who have paid off their mortgage.

| | Workplace based median gross annual earnings, (£) | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| Predominantly Urban areas | 23100 | 23100 | 23000 | 23600 | 24000 | 24500 |
| Predominantly Rural areas | 18900 | 19400 | 19400 | 19400 | 19700 | 19900 |

Table 8 - Gross Median Incomes, Rural and Urban Areas Compared

As part of the survey respondents were asked to select a comment which would best describe their financial situation. Although this is a subjective opinion on an individual’s financial situation it does not required detailed financial information which can often be challenging to collate. Results are provided in figure 12.

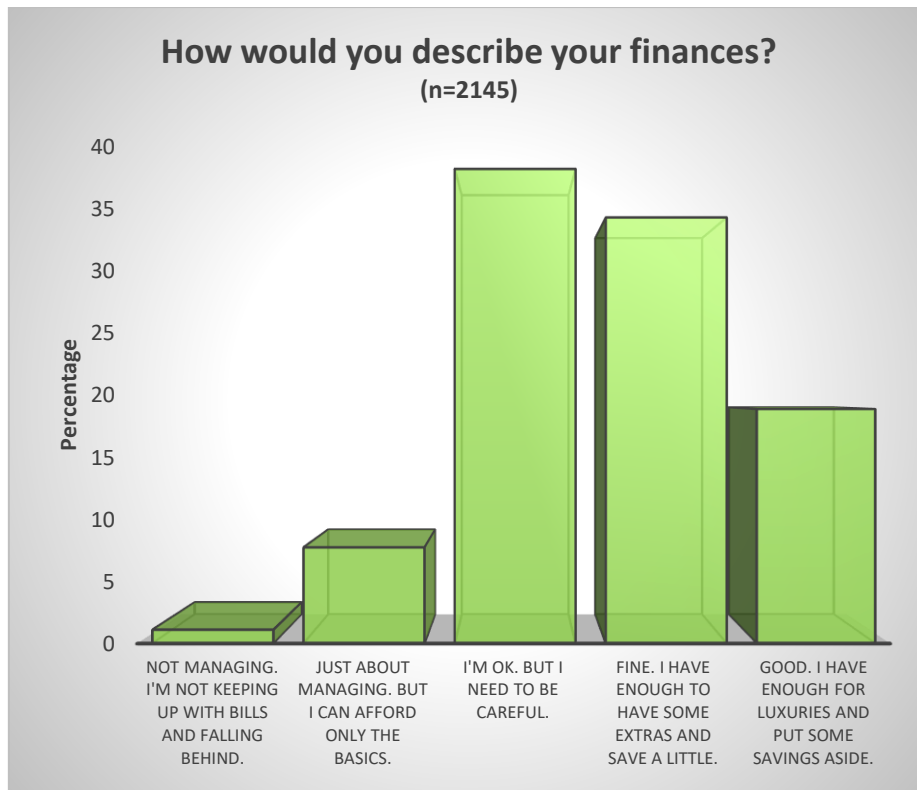


Figure 12 - How Would You Describe Your Finances? (N=2145)

For the majority respondent's their financial situation could be described as comfortable - combining those who stated 'fine' and 'good' accounts for 53% of respondents. A significant number of respondents (38%) stated that they were 'ok' but that they needed to be careful. 9% of respondents felt that they were 'just about managing' whereas 1% were 'not managing'. Whilst it is difficult to draw meaningful or accurate comparisons between our sample and official figures, the 53% of respondents that stated they were either 'fine' or 'good'; similar to Defra figures from 2011 of households that are not deprived (48.5%) as are those who reported themselves as 'ok' being like households deprived in one dimension (32.2%). Again, we would stress that this is merely an individual's subjective assessment, and not based upon any official figures, although the sample obtained as part of this survey would appear to be not overly dissimilar to that of the population according to 2011 Census figures.

Health and disabilities

Figures from the [2011 Census](#) show that people living in rural areas are more likely to describe their health as 'good' or 'very good' compared to those living in urban areas despite them typically being older.

Within the sample, those who reported their health as being either 'good' or 'very good' was 78.1% - just four percentage points below figures from 2011 which were 82.1%. Within this, the proportion who reported their health was 'very good' in the sample was 27.1% compared to 47.6% in the 2011 Census. Those who stated their health as 'fair' was higher in the sample at 18.9% compared to 13.2% in 2011. Lower percentages of those in 'bad' or 'very bad' health was obtained in the sample – see table 9.

| | Percentage composition | | | |
|------------------|------------------------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| | England 2011 | Urban 2011 | Rural 2011 | Sample (n=2158) |
| Very good health | 47.2% | 47.1% | 47.6% | 27.1% |
| Good health | 34.2% | 34.2% | 34.5% | 51.0% |
| Fair health | 13.1% | 13.1% | 13.2% | 18.9% |
| Bad health | 4.2% | 4.4% | 3.7% | 2.8% |
| Very bad health | 1.2% | 1.3% | 1.0% | 0.3% |

Table 9 - Reported Health Status

In 2011, 17.8% of rural residents stated that they had a long-term health problem or disability that affected their day to day activities. This comprised of activities being limited a lot (7.8%) and a little (10%). Those in rural areas were *more* likely to be limited a little, but *less* likely to be limited a lot. See table 10.

| | Percentage composition | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| | England 2011 | Urban 2011 | Rural 2011 | Sample (n=2158) |
| Activities not limited | 82.4% | 82.4% | 82.2% | 93% |
| Activities limited a little | 9.3% | 9.2% | 10.0% | 7% |
| Activities limited a lot | 8.3% | 8.2% | 7.8% | |

(Defra, 2013)

Table 10 - Limitations on Activities

Within the survey respondents were asked whether they had a disability that limits their mobility, with 93% stating that they did not. This is higher than the figure obtained within the 2011 Census, although the wording of the question and answer options were slightly different to that of the Census.

Crime

A series of questions were asked related to crime and social capital. These were all directly comparable with questions that have previously been asked in the Census or national longitudinal studies which also provided results for rural areas in England.

Crime levels in rural England are lower than those in urban areas, and has been decreasing for all types of crime between [2005/06 and 2012/13](#) (most current figures). Figures for specific crimes are presented below in table 11.

| | Offences per 1000 population | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| | England 2012/13 | Urban 2012/13 | Rural 2012/13 |
| Violence against the person | 10.6 | 12.3 | 7.2 |
| Sexual offences | 0.9 | 1.1 | 0.7 |
| Robbery offences | 1.2 | 1.8 | 0.2 |
| Domestic burglary | 10.0 | 12.8 | 4.8 |
| Vehicle offences | 6.9 | 8.4 | 4.2 |

Table 11 - Crime Levels, Rural and Urban Compared

Despite these falling levels of crime, figures in the [2015 ONS report](#) 'Crime Statistics, Focus on Public Perceptions of Crime and the Police, and the Personal Well-being of Victims: 2013 to 2014' state that 32% of adults [in England and Wales] believe crime has gone up 'a little' or 'a lot' in the past few years. For rural residents the figure was 26%, and for those in urban areas it was 34%.

Respondents were asked whether they thought the crime rate had changed in the area over the last two years. Although 66% of respondents felt that crime levels were about the same, nearly 30% felt that crime had increased (6% 'a lot'; 23% 'a little' – see figure 13). This perception of increased levels of crime is similar to that within the 2015 ONS report mentioned above. However, the report does also state that 61% of adults perceive crime in the country to have increased and that it is only that in their local area where the proportion becomes lower.

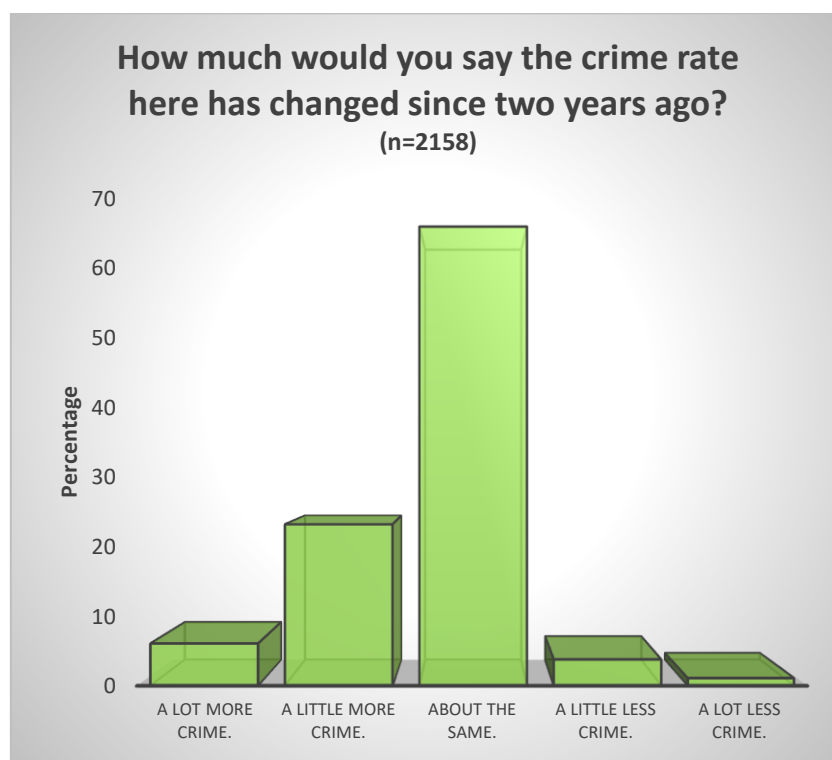


Figure 13 - How Much Would You Say the Crime Rate Here Has Changed for Two Years Ago? (N=2158)

Concern about being a victim of crime can affect different groups in society, some more than others. Typically, those living in urban areas are more likely to be worried about becoming a victim of crime (of all types). [ONS \(2015\)](#) figures state that between 4-8% of rural residents have high levels of worry over crime; this depends upon the nature of the crime. Table 12 below shows how this compares with urban residents within England and Wales. The report also states that 21% of adults in urban areas believe that they are 'very likely' or 'fairly likely' to being a victim of crime. The same figure for adults in rural areas is 14%.

| | Percentage with high levels of worry ('very' or 'fairly') | | |
|---------------|---|---------------|---------------|
| | England 2013/14 | Urban 2013/14 | Rural 2013/14 |
| Burglary | 11% | 12% | 8% |
| Car crime | 7% | 8% | 4% |
| Violent crime | 12% | 13% | 7% |

Table 12 - Concern About Crime, Rural and Urban Compared

Respondents were asked the extent to which they were worried of being a victim of crime in their area. No type of crime was specified, and the results are provided below in table 13.

| How worried are you about being a victim of crime in your area? | Percentage (n=2158) | |
|---|---------------------|-------|
| Very worried | 3.1% | 24.1% |
| Fairly worried | 21.1% | |
| Not very worried | 58% | |
| Not at all worried | 17.9% | |

Table 13 - How worried are you about being a victim of crime in your area? (n=2158)

With the sample, nearly one-quarter of respondents exhibit a high level of worry (24.1%) over being a victim of crime. This is significantly higher than that contained within the ONS report for both rural and urban areas. The only instance where some similar figures can be identified within the ONS study is within certain minority ethnic or religious groups – all of whom have much higher levels of worry. These figures can be explored further on appendix table 2.07, within '[Crime Statistics, Focus on Public Perceptions of Crime and the Police, and the Personal Well-being of Victims: 2013 to 2014](#)'.

As part of the UK Household Longitudinal Study and published within '[Social capital across the UK: 2011 to 2012](#)' (2016) by ONS, participants were asked whether they felt safe walking alone in their area after dark. For England, 73% of people felt safe (either 'very' or 'fairly') whereas in rural areas the proportion was 81%. In urban areas, the figure was 71%.

In the survey the same question was asked, and results are presented in table 14 below. The figure within the sample for those that feel safe is 87.2% - notably higher than that reported in the 2016 ONS report, and seemingly with a certain degree of contradiction to the responses to the fear of crime question.

| How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark? | Percentage (n=2158) | |
|---|---------------------|-------|
| Very safe | 48.5% | 87.2% |
| Fairly safe | 38.7% | |
| A bit unsafe | 7.9% | |
| Very unsafe | 1.3% | |
| I don't go out after dark | 3.7% | |

Table 14 - How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark? (n=2158)

Social Capital

How people feel about the areas in which they live can greatly affect the way in which they behave, which in turn can help to build and spread cooperation and tolerance between residents – and help to build social capital.

People living in rural areas are “more likely to think that people in their neighbourhood can be trusted than people living in urban areas (78% compared with 61%)” ([ONS, 2016](#)). A series of questions were asked of respondents concerning their local area, which had previously been used within the ONS report ‘Social capital across the UK: 2011 to 2012’, to allow direct comparison between results.

| Statement | Percentage | | | |
|--|------------|-------|-------|-----------------|
| | England | Urban | Rural | Sample (n=2158) |
| <i>People around here are willing to help their neighbours</i> | 69.5% | 66.8% | 79.6% | 90.9% |
| <i>People in this area can be trusted</i> | 63.8% | 60.3% | 77.7% | 87.1% |
| <i>I feel like I belong to this area</i> | 62.1% | 59.9% | 70.1% | 82.5% |
| <i>People in this area generally don't get along with each other</i> | 8.1% | 8.8% | 5.3% | 4.1% |

Table 15 - Neighbourhood Social Capital (n=2158)

Results obtained within the sample are comprehensively more positive than those obtained in the 2011/12 study and published in the 2016 report. This suggests that respondents are comfortable and confident in their communities, enjoying trustworthy neighbours who collaborate with one another.

Full results to the question asked in the survey are provided in table 16 below.

| Statement | Response and Percentage (n=2158) | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| <i>People around here are willing to help their neighbours</i> | 42.8% | 48.1% | 6.5% | 2.1% | 0.5% |
| <i>People in this area can be trusted</i> | 33.5% | 53.6% | 10.2% | 1.9% | 0.8% |
| <i>I feel like I belong to this area</i> | 39.6% | 42.9% | 13.1% | 3.8% | 0.6% |
| <i>People in this area generally don't get along with each other</i> | 0.6% | 3.5% | 9.9% | 49.4% | 36.6% |

Table 16 - People in this area can be trusted

Qualifications

Figures from the 2011 Census and those within the Statistical Digest of Rural England both indicate that the proportion of the population with levels of qualifications has typically been higher in rural areas than that of urban areas. The figures for the 2011 Census (see table 17) relate to persons aged 16 and over, whereas figures in the Statistical Digest only consider the 'working age population' therefore comparisons between these datasets is not feasible. However, as a descriptive characteristic of rural areas, the figures are informative and identify the subtleties within the variety of rural areas. Proportions of people with formal qualifications does vary within a 'rural' and 'urban' context. The details of more recent figures can be explored [within Defra's Statistical Digest of Rural England](#), and is beyond the remit of this study, although typically the settlements 'in a sparse setting' have lower proportions compared to their 'non sparse' counterparts.

| Highest level of qualification | Percentage composition | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|------------|------------|--------|
| | England 2011 | Urban 2011 | Rural 2011 | Sample |
| No qualifications | 22.5% | 22.8% | 21.0% | 1.3% |
| Level 1 | 13.3% | 13.4% | 12.9% | 5.5% |
| Level 2 | 15.2% | 15.0% | 16.2% | 8.0% |
| Apprenticeship | 3.6% | 3.4% | 4.2% | 1.3% |
| Level 3 | 12.4% | 12.4% | 11.9% | 11.9% |
| Level 4 and above | 27.4% | 26.9% | 29.7% | 70.0% |
| Other | 5.7% | 4.1% | 6.1% | 2.0% |

Table 17 - Qualifications Held, Rural and Urban Compared Plus Sample

As can be seen, level of qualifications within the sample of this study is differing significantly to that of the figures from the 2011 Census. Those with no qualifications is just 1.3% compared to 21% for the rural population. Those with levels one and two are both lower by over 50%. Although those with level three qualifications is identical, level four qualifications are over 100% higher, at 70%. The skewed nature of the figures at both the upper and lower levels of qualifications could perhaps partly be explained by the networks through which the survey was shared. Nonetheless, these further highlights that the sample of people who responded to the survey is not representative of the rural population, particularly regarding skills and qualifications.

Economic Activity

Respondents were asked how they would describe their current work situation and provided with a set of options. The majority of respondents (39.8%) stated that they were retired, and although the proportion of retirees in rural areas is higher than that in urban areas, this figure is around ten percentage points higher than the most recent figure within [Defra's Rural Economic Bulletin](#) of 28.4%. Conversely, the figure of employed people (40.7%) within this study was lower than the most recent figure within the bulletin of 78.7%, as was the figure of 1.0% for unemployed (compared to 2.7%). These widely differing figures can largely be explained by the age of respondents being notably older, and therefore much more likely to be retired. Full results from the question are presented below in table 18.

| Current work situation | Percentage |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Retired | 39.8 |
| Full-time employee | 23.1 |
| Self-employed | 17.6 |
| Part-time employee | 14.6 |
| Looking after home or family | 4.0 |
| Student | 1.3 |
| Unemployed | 1.0 |
| Long-term sick or disabled | 1.0 |

(totals >100% as multiple selections possible)

Table 18 - Current Work Situation

Within the 'retired' respondents, there were a small number of people (21 respondents) who also stated that they were working full-time (1), working part-time (9) or self-employed (11).

Of those who stated that they were self-employed, 58% worked over 30 hours per week, with the remaining 42% working under this number. The most current figures ([September 2017](#)) for self-employed persons in England gives the figure of 15.1% of all people in work. This figure is for the whole of England, however, [figures from the 2011 Census and published in 2013](#), state that they [rural residents] "were also much more likely to be self-employed" and provided a figure of 13.8% for economically active people aged 16-74 in rural areas.

The CCRI

The Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) is the largest specialist rural research centre in the UK, working at the interface of agriculture, society and the environment on issues relevant to rural and urban development, in the UK, Europe and further afield. Working with colleagues and partners in the physical as well as social sciences the CCRI has placed itself at the centre of a nexus of mutual exchange. These exchanges range from soil science, sustainable agriculture, through to the culture of food, and the limits of the food system.

Our principal research interests are manifested in a rigorous, dynamic and inclusive approach to deepening our shared understanding of rural life. As we prepare for the policy, technological and environmental challenges before us, we look to work with those engaged in agriculture, food and environmental management as well as rural communities.

In addition to extensive research in the agricultural sector, our recent research has also considered the role of cities in the future of agricultural food production and has highlighted changes in the conceptualisation of the rural-urban continuum. Emerging technologies such as renewable energies and ubiquitous broadband access are reshaping rural areas; our research is at the forefront of these topics. We have woven novel approaches to and management, notably through the commons and participatory approaches, into our on-going commitment to investigating our shared resources.

The CCRI has benefited from considerable research investments from the EU through the H2020 programme, UK national agencies and departments, as well as third sector bodies and other change agents. Through our dedicated team of researchers and professionals, we are always looking to further our insights into rural life and the changes these are bringing to all of us.

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