



# Rural Services Network Older Peoples Sounding Board

Kerry Booth, Chief Executive  
Rural Services Network




8<sup>th</sup> July 2025

**Membership body of around  
500 organisations**

# **Rural Services Network**

**Special Interest Group of  
the Local Government  
Association**

**National Champion for rural  
services ensuring that rural have  
a strong voice**

Examples of our member organisations

# **We are the national champion for rural services**



**We provide a network  
for rural areas to come  
together and share  
best practice**



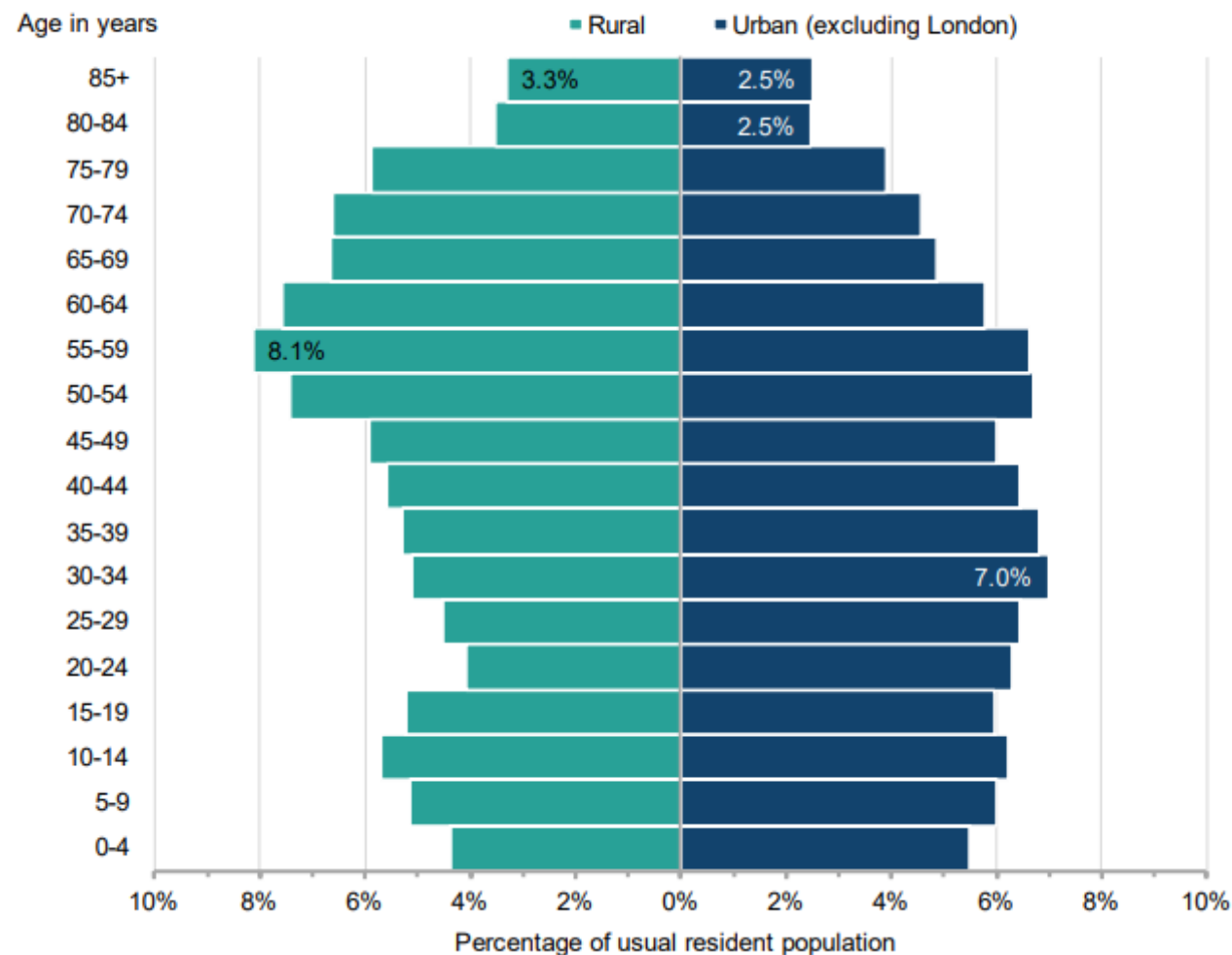
**We represent a range  
of organisations in  
rural areas across  
England**



**We provide a voice for  
rural areas in  
Parliament**

# Ageing Rural Population

**Figure B-1: Population pyramid showing the percentage of population within five-year age bands, by 2021 rural-urban classification, based on 2022 mid-year estimates of LSOAs**  
The legend is presented in the same order and orientation as the stacks in the bars. Only the highest and lowest proportions have been labelled on the chart. Proportions shown on the chart have been rounded to the nearest 0.1%.

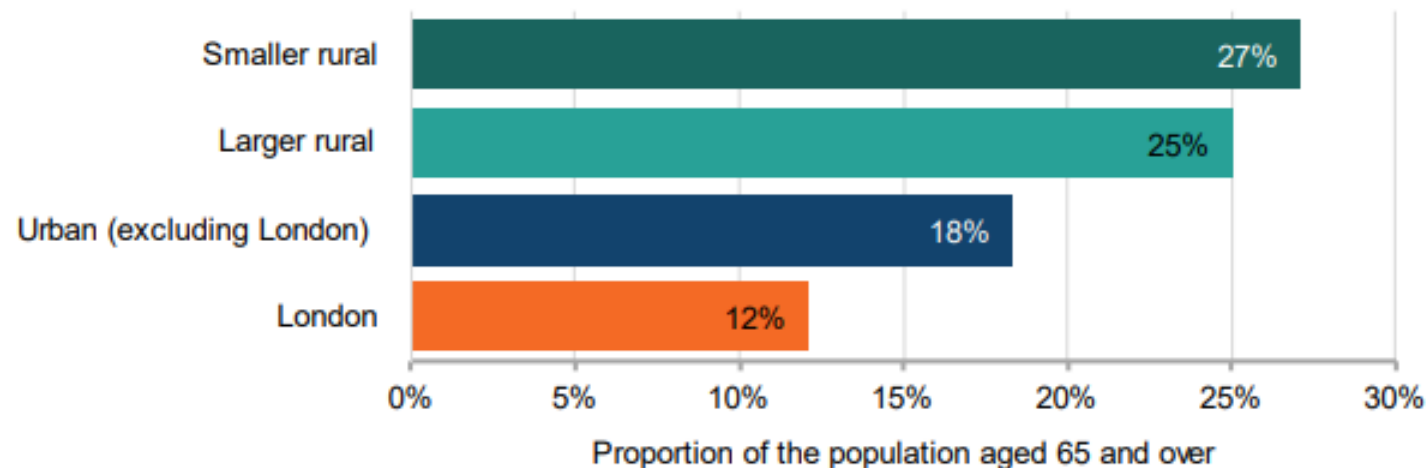


[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68125a990a8696a367e727a8/1\\_-\\_Population\\_01\\_05\\_2025.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68125a990a8696a367e727a8/1_-_Population_01_05_2025.pdf)

# Population aged 65 and older

**Figure B-3: Bar chart showing the proportion of the population in each settlement type aged 65 and over, by 2021 rural-urban classification, based on 2022 mid-year estimates of LSOAs in England**

Proportions shown on the chart have been rounded to the nearest 1%.



[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68125a990a8696a367e727a8/1\\_-\\_Population\\_01\\_05\\_2025.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68125a990a8696a367e727a8/1_-_Population_01_05_2025.pdf)

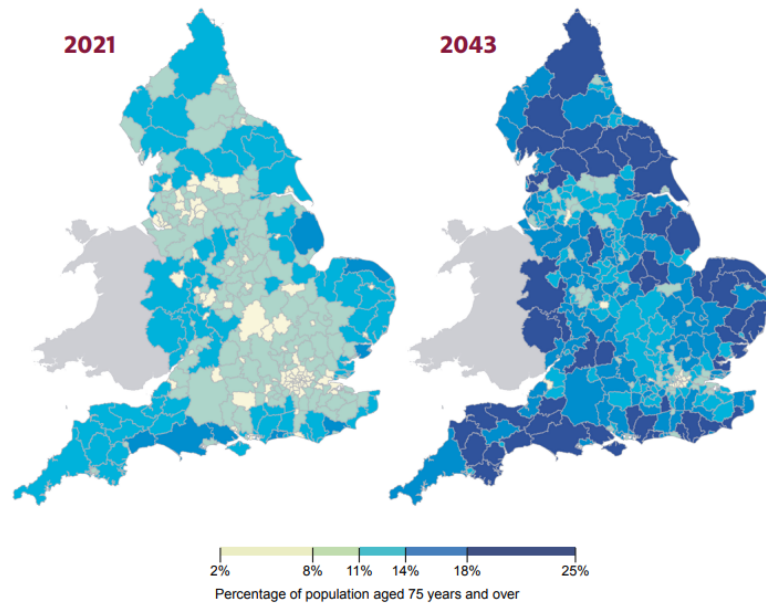
# Community Life Survey 2023-2024

- Adults aged 65 to 74 (23%) were more likely to have participated in formal volunteering at least once a month than adults from all other age groups (11% to 21%), whilst adults aged 75 and over (21%) were more likely to have participated than adults aged 16 to 64 (11% to 16%).
- Adults from rural areas were more likely to have formally volunteered at least once a month (21%) compared with adults from urban areas (15%).
- Adults living in rural areas were more likely to feel a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood (69%) than adults living in urban areas (59%).

# Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report 2023

## Health in an Ageing Society

Executive summary and recommendations



The health and care challenges facing those living in rural and coastal areas are well documented.

- People living in peripheral areas experience issues relating to accessing primary and secondary healthcare, domiciliary care, medicines, shopping and transport.
- The response times of health care professionals are often longer because of the distances involved, which is particularly important for emergency presentations such as stroke and heart attacks.
- Access to leisure services, cultural events and suitable physical activity can also be limited, which provides additional challenge in accessing activities that prevent and delay onset of poor health.
- These issues can be compounded by the effect of loneliness which may come from living in a sparsely populated area.
- Technological infrastructure and limited access to broadband can also impact on health and care provision in remote areas



## Homes



Our homes play a significant role in our health. Homes that are damp, cold and hazardous (known as non-decent homes) can cause asthma, strokes, heart attacks and broken bones. There are a total of 1.7 million homes headed by someone aged 55 and over that are classified as non-decent and 1.3 million of them are owner-occupied. But the total number of older people living in these homes is even higher, at 2.3 million<sup>9</sup>.

The number of non-decent homes varies regionally with the highest number (212,000) in the North West<sup>10</sup>. The rate of non-decency is highest in the private rented sector but the absolute number of non-decent homes is highest in the owner-occupied sector<sup>11</sup>. The proportion of non-decent homes that are owner-occupied and headed by someone aged 55 and over ranges from one in ten in London to twice that (21%) in the East Midlands<sup>9</sup>.

**2.3 million people aged 55 and over are living in non-decent homes**

# Ageing in place

We asked people to describe what they would like to see in their areas to help them age well. This is what they told us:



## Employment:

- Good work and job opportunities (for people of all ages)
- Apprenticeships, training and education provision (for people of all ages)
- Support for carers to help them return to work when caring ends
- Options for manual workers as they age, especially given the increases to the State Pension age



## Housing:

- Houses appropriate for people to grow older in
- Support for maintenance costs for homeowners (who may be asset rich but cash poor)
- More appropriate accommodation and community-based services for people who need additional support (eg because of mental health needs or substance misuse)
- More agency and control for older people living in supported housing (eg support for adaptations to meet individual needs in shared spaces)
- Reinstatement of decommissioned support in specialist older people's housing (eg wardens)
- More extra-care housing



## Health and care:

- Increased capacity in primary care, including dentists and GPs
- More face-to-face (technology-free) access to health services, and more straightforward technology (eg easy-to-use telephone systems)
- A consistent family doctor
- More funding for mental health
- Better communication about who you are seeing (eg nurse, doctor, pharmacist)



## Green spaces:

- Well-maintained and attractive green spaces near people's homes
- Volunteer groups to help care for local green spaces

**"It's how we make Knowsley as a whole more equal, because we've got health inequalities showing. You've a greater risk of dying if you live in that area of Knowsley than, you know, if you live in [another area], and it just feels absolutely mad that, doesn't it?"**

Woman in her seventies, Knowsley



## Community cohesion and participation:

- A variety of things for older people to do, which meet a wide range of interests
- More informal contact with neighbours, and formal programmes like Good Neighbours schemes
- People taking care of where they live (eg picking up litter)
- Regeneration that takes account of the need for people to stay connected in their communities as they age
- Opportunities to bring people of all ages together
- Accessible, timely and offline information about community events
- Feeling safe and confident to move around your neighbourhood at all times of day
- A visible and responsive police presence in the local community
- Youth clubs and activities for younger people
- Being listened to – at a national and local level – and feeling like you have a stake in where you live
- Better political representation



## Transport:

- Good public transport to places where services are located and local nature spots
- Improved links for older people's housing schemes
- Timetable coordination between different public transport services
- Easier-to-read timetables at bus stops
- Training for bus drivers to improve their support of Disabled passengers
- Measures to help people feel safe while travelling (eg technology and training for bus drivers)



## Shops and facilities:

- A good range of shops in the town centre, accessible by public transport
- Bringing different facilities under one roof, such as Post Offices as community hubs, supermarkets as one-stop shops and community banks (a range of commercial banks using the same facility on different days)

We also heard people talk about the stigma associated with words like deprivation and poverty, and how it feels to live in a place referred to as 'deprived' in official statistics. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has described poverty stigma as 'acts of harm that intersect with and amplify existing inequalities in class, disability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and citizenship status'. We explain our use of the terms in the technical report.



## A ROADMAP FOR RURAL PROSPERITY

*Every person, in every place, deserves the chance to thrive,  
including everyone in our rural communities.*



*“Delivering for All is the roadmap to unlocking rural prosperity and harnessing the potential of every community to build a stronger, fairer, and more sustainable future.*

*Our villages, market towns, coastal communities, and rural areas are vibrant hubs of enterprise, innovation, and leadership that can drive national renewal.*

*By investing in these communities, we strengthen local economies and secure a future where every resident can contribute and thrive. Let’s move beyond old divides and harness the energy of every corner of our country—villages, market towns and rural communities alike.”*

Councillor Roger Phillips,  
Chair of the Rural Services  
Network

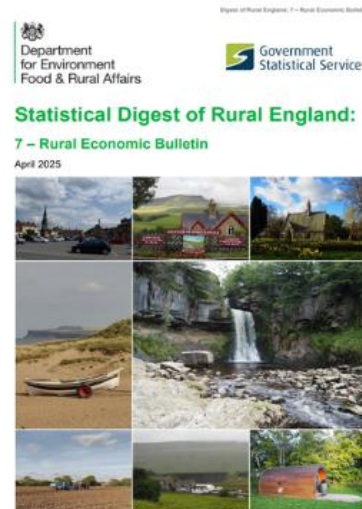


# Three Foundations for Unlocking Rural Prosperity

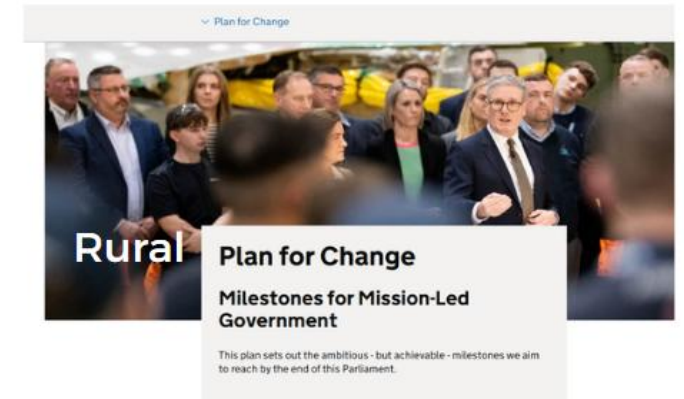
**Fairly Fund  
Rural Public Services**



**Use right measures and  
metrics to understand  
rural challenges**

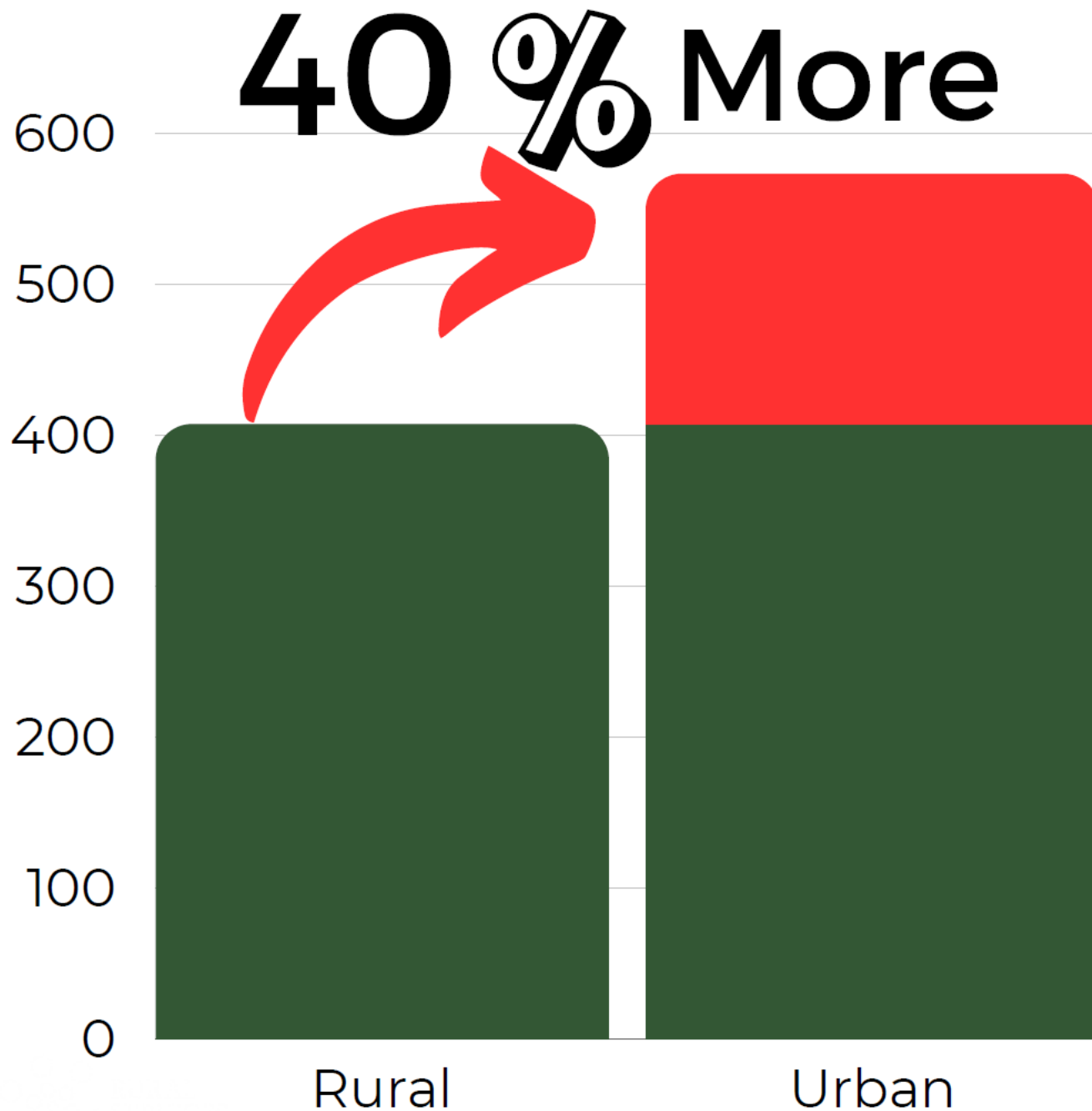


**Rural specific plan**



The background of the slide features several tall stacks of gold coins, likely 10 Euro coins, arranged in a row. The coins are stacked high, with some stacks reaching over 10 coins. The lighting is soft, highlighting the metallic texture and the ridged edges of the coins. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the stacks in the foreground.

**The Rural Services Network is fighting for a fair deal for rural communities, in all public sector funding**



**Government Funded  
Spending Power in urban  
Councils is **40% MORE**  
per head than in  
predominantly Rural  
Councils for 25-26**



Rural Residents  
pay **20% more**  
in Council tax  
per head  
compared to  
Urban Residents



Urban authorities in 2023/2024 budgeted to spend almost **double** that of rural authorities on discretionary services



# Rural Fair Funding

## Key Asks



### 1. Fair Funding

Create Public funding formulae which ensure the unique service needs, delivery constraints and the whole range of extra costs of delivering services in rural areas (and not just travel costs) are properly reflected.

Ensure funding for the Social Care Reform proposals uses a formula which recognises the whole range of costs faced by rural councils and care providers. This includes financially addressing the current backlog in assessments etc.

### 2. Metrics and Measures

The Government should monitor the impact of funding formulae on all areas across the country, including those in rural and urban areas to ensure that residents in our market towns and villages are not paying more for their services compared to those in more urban areas.

### 3. Rural Policy

Protect rural council taxpayers by fairly funding public services to ensure they are not asked to pay more to fund local services than their urban counterparts.

Public sector bodies should have the resources they require to meet the needs of their community and deliver services effectively. Residents should not be disadvantaged due to living in a more rural community.



Every Council should have the resources it requires to meet the different needs of their community. This includes Councils serving our market towns and villages as well as those in our cities.

Houses in rural areas are **less affordable** to purchase for those in the bottom 25% of earners compared to urban areas.



Source: Statistical Digest of Rural England, November 2023

# Rural Affordable Housing

Holiday homes are 'hollowing out' coastal areas, says MP

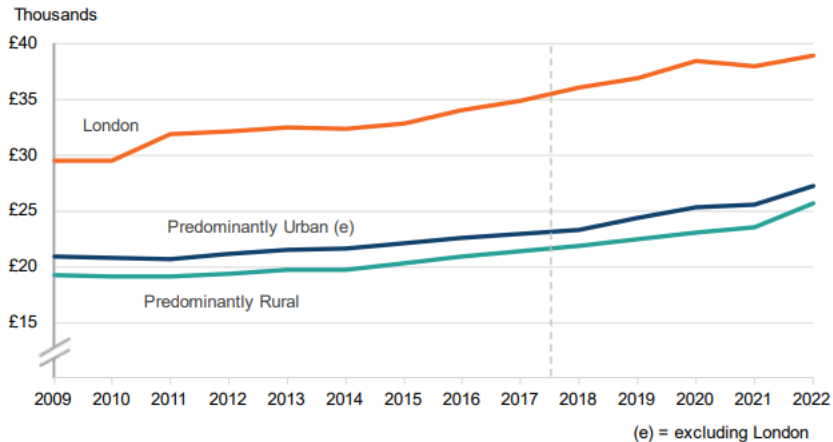
Labour MP Luke Pollard says Covid-19 has 'turbo-charged' housing crisis in rural and coastal towns



Whitby residents have voted overwhelmingly for curbs on second homes. Photograph: Edwin Remsburg/Getty Images  
Coastal communities are being "hollowed out irretrievably" by a surge in holiday homes, an MP has warned, as new figures showed more than 17,000 properties in England have been "flipped" into short-term lets since Covid-19.

Annual price paid for terrace or semi-detached house in rural areas is higher in rural areas compared to urban (outside of London)

**Figure B-1: Workplace based median gross annual earnings (current prices), 2009 to 2022**  
(Note B-5)



Wages earned in rural areas are lower than in urban areas, and the cost of living in rural areas is higher.

Proportionally more homeless Rural households in 2022/23 than in 2018/19

# Rural Affordable Housing

## Key Asks



### 1. Fair Funding

Introduce and fund an ambitious annual target for genuinely affordable quality rural homes and deliver this through a dedicated rural affordable housing funding programme to reflect local needs and policies.

### 2. Metrics and Measures

Ensure that the definition of 'affordable housing' is sensitive to local market conditions and wages and takes into account local circumstances.

### 3. Rural Policy

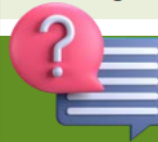
Deliver a rural housing strategy stating how new housing will be delivered to meet rural communities needs.

Protect rural tenants by ensuring that local authorities can register and manage the short and long term rental market to meet local need, thus avoiding oversupply of holiday lets. In addition, Government should ensure that policies on Energy Performance Certificates do not result in a reduction of long term rental properties.

Ensure that a national homelessness strategy includes investing in solutions in rural areas, taking into account the distinct challenges of rural communities.

Address the lack of affordable homes in the countryside by Rural Proofing any planning policy changes which may be introduced. This will ensure that all planning policies have an aim of increasing the proportion of affordable quality homes built and that no policies have an unintended consequence negatively impacting on opportunities for affordable housing in rural areas.

Develop a policy to exclude rural areas from any proposals to extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association properties. Create a programme of at least 5 years of support for a national network of Rural Housing Enablers covering each rural housing authority.

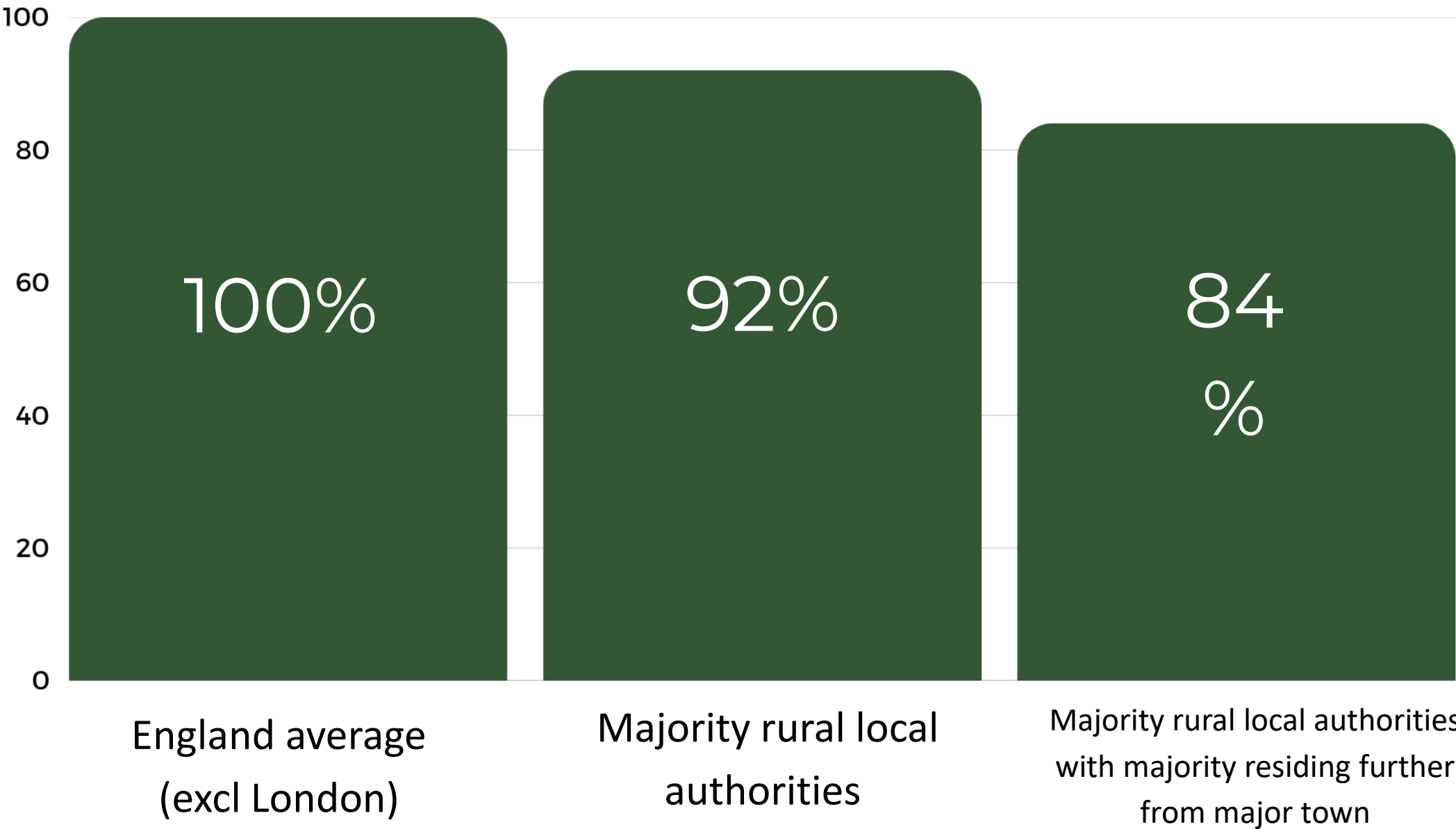


Everyone deserves access to a warm, safe, affordable home. Rural areas face a critical shortage of genuinely affordable homes and targeted solutions are vital to ensure the sustainability of rural communities.

# Challenges for the rural economy

Challenges for the Workforce	Challenges for the employers / businesses
Lack of affordable housing options	Lack of broadband / mobile signal for businesses to increase productivity/markets
Lack of Public Transport to access skills/training/education/employment	Suitably qualified workforce
Lack of Broadband / mobile connectivity to access skills/training/education	Lack of Infrastructure
Seasonal nature of tourist industry	Less ability to work within economies of scale

# Productivity Levels measured by GVA



# RURAL ECONOMY: A SLEEPING GIANT WORTH £19 BILLION



**The report** shows that with the right policy framework, the rural economy could increase productivity significantly, leading to an additional £9 billion to £19 billion per year in tax revenues.

This growth would not only support rural communities but also have far-reaching benefits for the national economy, helping to fund essential public services and drive broader economic initiatives.

# Rural Economy

## Key Asks



### 1. Fair Funding

Ensure that rural areas receive their fair share of support to grow the economy and create a system where decision making and resources are devolved to local areas as far as possible, creating the flexibility for tailored solutions to prioritise and meet local needs and opportunities.

### 2. Metrics and Measures

Protect rural communities by ensuring that the metrics used to devise strategies or programmes for growth (including skills) are not based on 'one-size-fits-all' thinking but reflect the disadvantage in rural economies within regions.

### 3. Rural Policy

Deliver a support programme for SMEs and community entrepreneurs in rural areas, especially start-ups and those seeking to grow.

Ensure policy and strategy is Rural Proofed in a way that is meaningful and demonstrable and also includes outcome monitoring. There is now a real case for placing Rural Proofing on a stronger legal footing, in the way that it has been in Northern Ireland.

Provide opportunities for the growth of the green economy and supporting infrastructure, namely the national grid and digital and mobile connectivity.



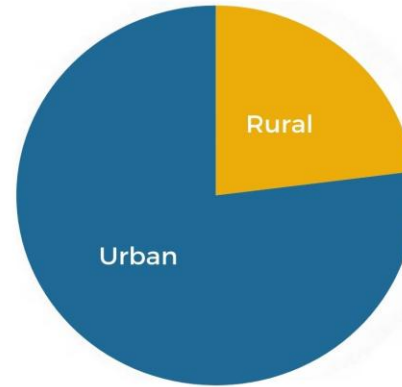
Everyone deserves the right to contribute to a thriving economy which is critical for national growth. SMEs, community enterprises, and green industries must be supported to unlock rural potential and drive innovation and employment.

# Rural Transport



Research suggests that about **1 in 4** bus routes have **ceased** in county and rural areas over the eleven years from 2010/11 to 2021/22.

Source: <https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk>



Urban councils budget to spend **3.4 times more** than rural on public transport.

Source: RSN analysis of Revenue Account Budget, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities 2024/25

Over the decade from 2013 to 2023, bus vehicle mileage in predominantly rural areas **declined**.

Local authority-subsidised services

↓ % **19**

Commercial services

↓ % **47**



Source: DfT Public Service Vehicle Survey - Bus Statistics, Annual bus statistics, year ending: March 2023 data tables

Urban areas (excluding London) have **double** the number of taxis and private hire vehicles as a proportion of population than rural areas.



Rural - 2.6 per thousand people



Urban - 5.5 per thousand people

Source: RSN analysis of Taxi and PHV Licensing Authorities, DfT July 2024

# Rural Transport

## Key Asks



### 1. Fair Funding

Ensure that rural transport receives its fair share of funding to enable rural residents to access employment, services and access to health and care services, including funding for councils to provide socially necessary rural buses.

Ensure local authorities are fairly funded to maintain vital rural road infrastructure.

Protect Community transport by creating a larger funding pot which is sustained over a longer period. It should promote the use of community transport schemes which serve outlying settlements and feed into bus or rail routes.

### 2. Metrics and Measures

Ensure that rural communities are not disadvantaged by measures which only focus on passenger levels, and don't recognise the inherent social value of transport options to enable providers to have the evidence to make the case for investment into rural transport.

### 3. Rural Policy

Recognise the key role that transport plays in enabling a community to access employment, training and services and ensure that the Integrated National Transport Strategy sets out an effective approach for rural mobility and transport solutions.

Create a greener future by undertaking a comprehensive review of the electric grid and, where appropriate, hydrogen supply, to address the risk that the high costs of introducing electric or hydrogen buses and their fuelling facilities could prove problematic in rural areas.

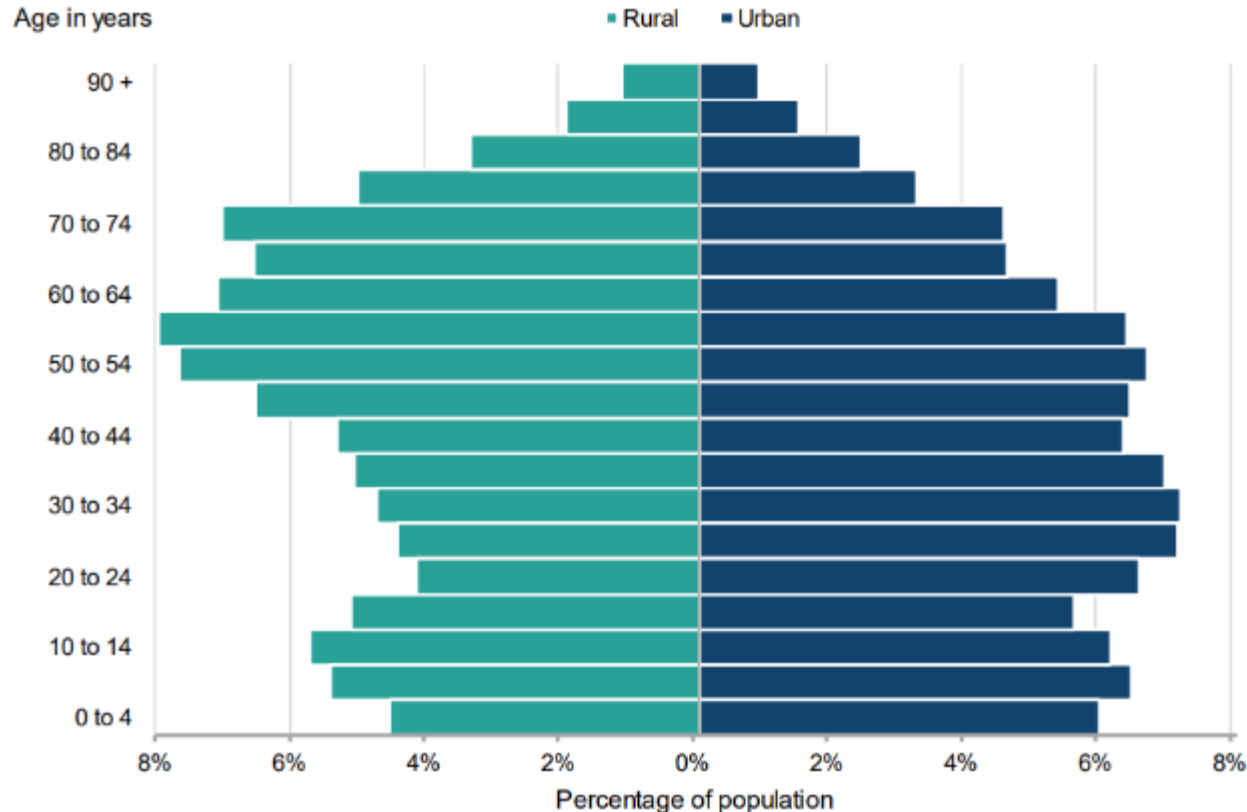


Everyone deserves access to a transport system that meets their needs and enables them to access employment, training, public services, and social interaction.

# Access to Rural Health and Care Services

**Figure B-1: Percentage of population within age bands of 5-year intervals from 0 to 90+, by Rural-Urban Classification in England based on LSOA level data, 2020**

The legend is presented in the same order and orientation as the stacks in the bars



Rural areas have an ageing population which places additional demands on services

Isolation and lack of public transport - leading to mental health concerns; distance from services; the nature and quality of the housing stock.

Urban areas receive 16% MORE in social care grant than rural areas

# Rural Access to Health and Care Services

## Key Asks



### 1. Fair Funding

Ensure strategy is Rural Proofed, especially proposals designed to tackle the core drivers of disparities in health outcomes including quality of housing, and access to good quality jobs and training.

This must also take into account the whole range of extra costs of delivering services in rural areas and ensure that they are accurately reflected in funding formulae.

### 2. Metrics and Measures

Address the lack of understanding of the distinctive health and care needs of rural areas by ensuring measures are collected at the right level to deliver services that are suited to the specific needs of rural places. Develop integrated services that provide holistic person-centred care.

### 3. Rural Policy

Deliver a rural work force strategy to aid training and recruitment across all health and care services including dentistry.

Protect rural communities by ensuring that they have access to mental health services that meet their needs.

Create a culture which ensures the Third Sector is included as a partner in the integrated planning system and resourced accordingly, where it is cost effective to do so and in the community's interests.

The contribution of community and voluntary organisations must not be underestimated, not least with respect to prevention and wellbeing.



Everyone deserves the right to access quality health and care services. Rural residents can face unique challenges—from workforce shortages to geographic isolation—that demand tailored policies to ensure their wellbeing.

# Rural Net Zero

The rural fuel poverty gap is nearly **double** the national average.



Source: Department for Energy Security & Net Zero, Fuel Poverty Supplementary Tables 2023



In 2023 there were 10 times **fewer** electric buses/coaches in rural areas per head of population than in urban areas.

Source: RSN analysis of Western Power Distribution, 2023



In January 2025, the number of public charging devices available per 10,000 households with access to a car/van



Almost 70% more public charging devices available in urban areas

DEFRA Rural Digest 2025

Rural households emissions are higher than urban households.



Source: Rural Net Zero, The role of Rural Local Authorities in reaching Net Zero Researched and produced by Quantum Strategy & Technology Ltd for UK100's Countryside Climate Network 2021/22

**25%** of rural homes are not connected to the gas network



## The Rural Reality

# Rural Net Zero

## Key Asks



### 1. Fair Funding

Ensure that all economic growth programmes include explicit objectives to support low carbon and Net Zero growth.

Specialist advice and related grant funding should be made available for existing rural businesses to help them reduce their carbon footprint and the UK meet its 2050 targets.

### 2. Metrics and Measures

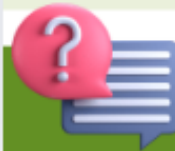
Recognise the unique challenges and opportunities that exist in rural areas by collecting measures and targets at a granular level to ensure that rural communities can support the journey to net zero.

### 3. Rural Policy

Deliver a 'fabric first' Energy Strategy which address rural needs. This means, ensuring rural is ready to embrace the move to a technology neutral approach to Net Zero so that individuals can choose the most appropriate solutions to heat their homes.

Address the gaps in the network of public charging points across rural Britain. As many rural areas are tourist hotspots, increasing this network will boost the economy in rural areas.

Create a Net Zero Rural Britain by working with the energy industry to ensure that the electricity distribution network is resilient, reliable and fit-for-purpose across all rural Britain before additional demands are put upon it.



Everyone deserves to be part of the decarbonisation journey, those in rural areas need tailored support to ensure they can play their part, as Rural Britain has immense potential to lead the transition to Net Zero.

There remains 3% of indoor premises in rural areas that have no coverage from **any** operator of 4G services.



Source: Ofcom Connected Nations December 2024

Only **54%** of rural premises (commercial and residential) have Gigabit capability.



Source: Ofcom Connected Nations December 2024

**10%** of rural premises in England still cannot access a superfast broadband connection.



Source: Ofcom Connected Nations December 2024

A greater proportion of the working population work from home in rural areas of England than in urban. And for many, digital connectivity will be an essential element of their work.



Source: Statistical Digest of Rural England, Connectivity and Accessibility, 2021 & June 2024 analysis of ONS, Labour Force Survey

# Residential Superfast Coverage

	Total	Urban	Rural
England	98%	99%	90%

# Residential Gigabit Capable Coverage

*“The coverage of gigabit-capable broadband networks – which includes hybrid fibre coaxial (HFC) cable in addition to full fibre – has grown to reach 83% or 25 million residential premises in the UK by July 2024. This suggests the Government’s target of 85% coverage by 2025 is likely to be reached. “ Connected Nations 2024*

	Total	Urban	Rural
England	84%	88%	54%

# Rural Connectivity

## Key Asks



### 1. Fair Funding

Deliver improved rural connectivity through the effective delivery of Project Gigabit; and creating a clear road map and government funding for connecting very hard to reach premises as soon as possible.

Protect rural residents from digital exclusion by delivering the Shared Rural Network; ensuring 5G regional innovation funding is focussed on rural areas and use cases.

### 2. Metrics and Measures

Digital Connectivity related measures and targets should disaggregate data by rural and urban levels to ensure an accurate representation of coverage disparities.

### 3. Rural Policy

Ensure high quality coverage and delivery of TV and radio, supporting the viewing requirements of rural consumers.

Ensure that the Digital Inclusion Action Plan includes specific actions for rural areas to ensure that it can create a digitally savvy innovative rural workforce and community, by providing accessible training, appropriately funded.



Everyone deserves access to Digital and Mobile connectivity. This may mean targeted solutions to ensure that rural communities are not left behind and to ensure access to education, business, healthcare, and social interaction.

# Rural Planning

Key to ensuring we get the right homes in the right places with the right access to infrastructure



# Rural Planning

## Key Asks



### 1. Fair Funding

Ensure that rural councils have the funding and resources to effectively manage their planning departments to ensure that they can deliver the support required to enable the increase in both planning responsibilities and applications to meet the new homes target of the Government.

### 2. Metrics and Measures

Housing need and deprivation can be hidden when statistics are collected at a large geographical area therefore measures should be collected at the most appropriate geographical level.

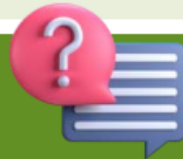
### 3. Rural Policy

Deliver an effective approach to Neighbourhood Plans into which rural communities have spent a huge amount of time and effort so that they can influence the future of their local area.

Protect rural voices in community engagement around planning. Whilst digital might always be the preferred choice, poor connectivity in rural areas means many voices are being lost.

Develop Rural Proofed planning policy which gives autonomy to Local Authorities and the communities they serve and ensure that the needs of rural communities are not overlooked in future changes to national planning policy guidance.

Create thriving rural areas by building the right homes, in the right places offering a range of tenures for all stages of life from the working young to retirees.



Everyone deserves to live in a community that has effective infrastructure and appropriate access to services. Effective planning ensures rural communities can shape their future to avoid inappropriate development, and missed opportunities for sustainable growth.

# What are the issues facing older people within your communities?