



The
Rural
Coalition



**Illustrative Case Studies to Support
‘A Better Future for Rural England: An
Opportunity for Change’**



For a Living, Working Countryside

Case Studies

A Better Future for Rural England: An Opportunity for Change

This supporting document has been designed to accompany the Rural Coalition publication on *A Better Future for Rural England: An Opportunity for Change*. It contains a set of short case studies which are linked to the policy principles outlined within that publication. Those case studies have been provided by many of the organisations which are members of the Rural Coalition.

Whilst the case studies are intended to be seen as illustrative exemplars, and are far from a comprehensive list of good rural practice, they help to demonstrate the potential if the Rural Coalition's policy principles were to be widely implemented and its vision for rural England were to be achieved.

The Rural Coalition is thirteen national organisations who subscribe to a living and working countryside in England. Those organisations and their logos are shown on the back page.





Case Studies

A Better Future for Rural England: An Opportunity for Change

- Saving local facilities as community-owned assets – Trawden in Lancashire
- Building affordable and sustainable homes with the local community – Seend in Wiltshire
- Enabling the delivery of affordable housing for rural needs – Bicknacre and Woodham Ferrers in Essex
- Improving rural health care with the Campus for Future Living – Mablethorpe in Lincolnshire
- Improving service delivery with the Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit
- Delivering community transport – Hartley Wintney Parish Council in Hampshire
- Transitioning towards net zero with a local heat network – Swaffham Prior in Cambridgeshire
- Reducing a local authority's carbon footprint – North Norfolk District Council
- Unlocking the delivery of affordable housing – Sedbergh in the Yorkshire Dales
- Sustaining village life through community action – Dunsfold in Surrey
- Addressing the cost of living crisis – Coxhoe Parish Council in county Durham
- Supporting solutions to the crisis in social care

Saving local facilities as community-owned assets – Trawden in Lancashire



Case study illustrating the policy principle on: support the key contribution of the voluntary and community sector

In 2021 The Trawden Arms reopened as a community-owned and run pub. When residents of Trawden learnt that the village pub was to close, with the building sold off, they urgently started fundraising. To the astonishment of some they successfully raised the necessary half a million pounds, a good portion of that coming from shares bought by 400 local people.

Its reopening proved hugely popular and was credited by the chair of trustees with bringing back the community spirit. It was yet further evidence of the determination of Trawden residents who, over the past decade, have taken over running of the village shop, library, community centre and now pub.

Many rural communities wishing to take on or save local assets, such as village pubs, find the odds stacked against them. One change that would raise their chances of success would be the introduction of a Community Right to Buy policy. This would give communities the first right of refusal when such assets become available for sale. Equally, more funding to support this type of community enterprise, or social investment more generally, could be found if the Dormant Assets Fund were utilised to create a new community wealth fund for rural communities.

Case study from the Plunkett Foundation

Building affordable and sustainable homes with the local community – Seend in Wiltshire



Case study illustrating the policy principles on: adapt and mitigate for climate change; and support the key contribution of the voluntary and community sector

Ten affordable and sustainable 'passivhaus' homes have been planned and developed by residents of Seend in Wiltshire through a community-led Community Land & Asset Trust. Due for completion in September 2023, this scheme on the village edge shows how local communities can themselves deliver low energy homes for local people, ensuring they will also have affordable heating, lighting, hot water and cooking at a time when the rising cost of living is impacting so many. Planned in partnership with Wiltshire Community Land Trust, Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Community First, Hook Hollow has been developed by White Horse Housing Association and PH Homes (using their PH15 Passivhaus certified system).

Community Land Trusts are excellent vehicles for delivering affordable and sustainable homes for local people. There are over 350 CLTs across England and Wales, with another 200 in the pipeline, delivering 1,711 homes and a further 5,413 on the way. But CLTs need sound advice, strong support and reliable funding. Bringing in a replacement for the former Community Led Housing Fund would achieve this. With the right policies and support it is calculated that CLTs could build 30,000 more homes on rural exception sites alone.

Case study from the Town & Country Planning Association

Enabling the delivery of affordable housing for rural needs – Bicknacre and Woodham Ferrers in Essex

Case study illustrating the policy principles on: design services so they meet rural needs; and support the key contribution of the voluntary and community sector



Many members of the ACRE network either employ or work with Rural Housing Enablers whose role is to support communities, by identifying people in need of housing locally and liaising with landowners, planners and housing associations (amongst others) to deliver small scale developments that typically include affordable homes. The surveys of housing need produced by such endeavours provide useful insight into the scale of the challenge facing some rural communities.

For example, in Essex, the parish of Bicknacre and Woodham Ferrers conducted a housing needs

survey in January 2023 which was completed by 259 households, equivalent to 23% of the population. Thirty-three households (13%) self-identified as being in need of alternative accommodation within the next few years whilst also expressing a desire to stay in the parish. More than half of these households also met the criteria for affordable tenures, such as affordable rent, shared ownership and discounted market sale homes.

Case study from ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England)

Improving rural health care with the Campus for Future Living – Mablethorpe in Lincolnshire

Case study illustrating the policy principles on: design services so they meet rural needs; and create the conditions for a prosperous rural economy



£8.6 million is being invested in a new centre, at Mablethorpe, a rural and coastal location with a town population of 14,000. The centre will work in conjunction with the Medical Technology Innovation Facility at Nottingham Trent University and a new Medical School at the University of Lincoln to run population scale clinical trials.

The facility will have accommodation for remote fieldworkers and sessions will be bookable by tech or pharma companies. It will also provide clinical placement opportunities and continuing professional development space for existing health services on the Lincolnshire coast. It is currently under construction and is due to open March 2024. The project will host an initiative

designed by Community Catalysts to create care based micro-businesses.

This project aims to be a national exemplar for extending clinical trials, to reduce health inequalities through innovative treatments and to create a new hub that supports health and care recruitment in a remote rural area. Furthermore, it has potential to generate new, higher value jobs in an area characterised by seasonal and low wage jobs. The centre is now exploring the possibility of acting as a network member in the new Centre for Research Equity which is being developed by the University of Oxford.

Case study from the National Centre for Rural Health & Care

Improving service delivery with the Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit

Case study illustrating the policy principles on: design services so they meet rural needs; and deliver services as locally as possible



This [toolkit](#) was developed through a partnership between the National Centre for Rural Health & Care and Rural England CIC, to facilitate the proofing of policies and activities to ensure that rural communities and their needs are properly and fairly addressed in terms of public policy and service delivery.

Five members of the ACRE Network from Lincolnshire, Devon, Northamptonshire, Shropshire and Gloucestershire were recruited to support and test implementation of the toolkit. Devon has completed phase one of its application in respect of the Deep End initiative, which focusses on networking and best practice in primary care delivery in remote settings. Northamptonshire is beginning its application around mental health in rural settings and Gloucestershire expects to focus on social prescribing.

The Deep End concept was developed by Professor Graham Watt to explore how uneven resource allocation for primary care services can be addressed. Rural areas, such as those in Devon, are amongst the most challenged in this context.

It is a concept initiated in Scotland and since tried in areas such as Yorkshire and Humber, Lincolnshire, Plymouth and Greater Manchester. Networks

involving GPs, other primary care staff, educators and researchers seek to address themes such as workforce recruitment and retention, staff training needs, service planning and health care advocacy by communities.

In Devon the toolkit has been embraced by a significant part of the primary care network to help plan how to address these challenges. It is being used to consider the scope to:

- Increase clinical capacity, using GP fellows and locums
- Hold extended consultations, mainly to coordinate care
- Create more time for GP leadership and service development
- Make use of link workers and learn from attached workers
- Hold multidisciplinary team meetings
- Advocate on behalf of the ‘unworried unwell’
- Practice working together in non-geographical clusters
- Improve leadership, coordination and support
- Share learning and disseminate knowledge.

Case study from the National Centre for Rural Health & Care

Delivering community transport – Hartley Wintney Parish Council in Hampshire

Case study illustrating the policy principles on: invest in rural infrastructure that is fit for the future; and devolve decision-making powers closer to communities



In 2011 the County Council subsidy for a regular bus service was withdrawn, leaving residents in Hartley Wintney without any service to Winchfield rail station or direct to services and jobs in

Basingstoke and Odiham. It became critical to re-instate some sort of service for the local community, as many residents felt stranded by this cutback.

Hampshire County Council was keen to listen to a proposal from Hartley Wintney Parish Council for a community bus. The Parish Council had to produce a firm business plan, indicative timetabling and costings, and it then had to become a Hampshire County Council approved transport provider. The cost of the scheme over five years was estimated at £325,000 of which £246,000 would come from S106 agreement (development) income and the rest from fare income.

Two and a half years after the idea was conceived the contract for the community bus service was finally approved by relevant Hampshire County Councillors. Most community bus services are run by volunteers and specialise in door-to-door

or call-and-go style services for those unable to access regular transport. That is not the model adopted in this instance, which has paid staff and which includes a timetabled route around the town, also serving other nearby settlements.

Such innovative projects could be implemented more widely and provide much needed transport connections in rural areas if parish councils were to have access to dedicated government funding, rather than having to rely on principal transport authorities.

Case study from National Association of Local Councils

Transitioning towards net zero with a local heat network – Swaffham Prior in Cambridgeshire

Case study illustrating the policy principles on: invest in rural infrastructure that is fit for the future; and adapt and mitigate for climate change



The roughly 300 homes in the village of Swaffham Prior lie off the mains gas grid, with many using fuel oil as their main means of heating. A chance conversation in 2017 led to plans by the village's Community Land Trust for a pioneering attempt to create a heat network as a way to phase out fossil fuel use. An initial £20,000 grant to explore options was awarded by the Government's Rural Community Energy Fund.

This led to a decision to run the heat network by extracting heat from a hot water source, using a heat exchanger, with the heat then distributed to homes. Cambridgeshire County Council agreed to let a field that it owned at the village edge as the location for a ground source energy centre.

This technology was seen as appropriate, since it has little visual impact on the village's listed buildings, has low take-up costs for households with limited financial means and can operate with existing central heating systems.

The heat network has been designed and built – with some modifications – by a framework contractor of the County Council. It has required access to development grants and a £2.9 million capital grant. All the assets of this heat network now belong to the County Council, which will act as the billing authority.

Around 160 participating homes are being connected up to the heat network and there is a five-year plan which anticipates more being connected in due course. Energy bills for households will be index-linked, but set below oil fuel prices for five years.

Case study from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (based on a longer version by Emma Fletcher MRICS and previously published in the Land Journal)

Reducing a local authority's carbon footprint – North Norfolk District Council



Case study illustrating the policy principles on: adapt and mitigate for climate change

North Norfolk District Council has made a net zero pledge for its own operations by 2030 – 20 years ahead of the Government's UK target. This is addressed in its [Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan](#). This focusses on improving building energy efficiency, decarbonising its vehicle fleet, generating renewable energy, supporting staff to work in energy efficient ways and reducing work related travel.

The Council achieved an impressive reduction of over 57% in its carbon footprint between 2018/19 and 2021/22. However, it accepts that it initially picked the low hanging fruit.

Among the actions it has taken are re-organising waste collection rounds to maximise efficiency and save fuel, as well as introducing lower emissions waste collection vehicles. The Council also changed its energy supply to be 100% from renewable sources. It will be introducing its own fleet of EV vehicles

as current leases expire and it has been encouraging its contractors to switch to electric vehicles.

The District Council has placed expectations on its major contractors to publish their own carbon footprints and to show annual improvement in that regard. It now considers the carbon footprint of all new projects and initiatives.

Although not counted as part of its footprint, the Council is planting trees and has already surpassed its four-year target of 110,000 trees, with 115,820 trees planted to date.

North Norfolk has over 40 miles of coastline, much of which is low lying and under threat from rising sea levels. The Council wants to set an example to its residents and businesses by taking positive action and demonstrating outcomes.

Case study from Rural Services Network

Unlocking the delivery of affordable housing – Sedbergh in the Yorkshire Dales



Case study illustrating the policy principle on: create the conditions for a prosperous rural economy

Part of this development site was allocated in the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's Local Plan, with a requirement that 50% of homes should be affordable. However, for viability reasons it had not been delivered.

The National Park Authority approached Broadacres Housing Association to consider also developing a Rural Exception Site (RES) adjacent to the allocated site. This could overcome viability problems by creating a larger development site and because the Housing

Association would accept a below-market rate of return on its investment.

To meet the Park Authority's objective of addressing local needs, the allocated part of the site must still deliver the 50% affordable housing requirement and all dwellings on the RES part of the site will be affordable. Overall, the development will have 69% affordable housing and 31% open market housing, thereby gaining huge local support.

The definition of what constitutes ‘a local connection’, which must be met for residents in the Housing Association owned properties, has been extended to cover the catchment area of Sedbergh’s state schools.

When complete the freehold for the affordable properties will be split between Broadacres Housing Association and South Lakes Housing Association. As the latter already owns properties in Sedbergh, they are likely to manage and maintain all these properties under a Service Level Agreement.

Underpinning this example has been the strong partnership work facilitated by Broadacres Housing Association and including South Lakes Housing Association, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, the former South Lakeland District Council and Sedbergh Parish Council, as well as the landowner, contractor and wider community.

Case study from the National Housing Federation

Sustaining village life through community action – Dunsfold in Surrey

Case study illustrating the policy principles on: devolve decision-making powers closer to communities; and create the conditions for a prosperous rural economy



In Dunsfold, a rural village in the Surrey Hills, the community has taken control of its future by focusing on affordable housing and championing community ownership. The village’s proactive approach is exemplified by their commitment to providing affordable homes to meet local needs, fostering a diverse and vibrant community.

Collaborating with the Parish Council, Waverley Borough Council and English Rural housing association, the village helped bring about the development of eight energy efficient, affordable homes on a Rural Exception Site, which are a mix of flats and houses for rent or local sale. Completed in 2021, planning restrictions adopted ensure that these homes will always remain affordable and will prioritise people with connections to Dunsfold. The initiative addresses the common challenge in rural areas of high house prices and below average wages, making it difficult for many to remain within their community.

The spirit of community ownership in Dunsfold is also evidenced by the Community Shop Association. Formed in 2011 to save the local shop from closure, the Association raised funds through community shares, grants and loans. That shop now serves as a cornerstone of village life, providing employment, training and essential goods.

Dunsfold’s success story highlights the value of community-led initiatives in sustaining rural villages, particularly when addressing the key issue of affordable housing. Policy and funding changes that prioritise community-based projects supporting affordable rural housing and local businesses would encourage similar good practice elsewhere. This would help more rural villages to secure their future, maintaining their unique character and thriving as inclusive and sustainable communities.

Case study from the National Housing Federation

Addressing the cost of living crisis – Coxhoe Parish Council in county Durham



Case study illustrating the policy principle on: devolve decision-making powers closer to communities

High energy bills are clearly part of the cost of living crisis, but so too are rising prices for household goods and services, with wages typically failing to keep pace. Many rural households, especially low income households, have had to take tough decisions about how much to heat their homes or how to feed their families.

Parish councils across rural England have stepped up to provide their communities with various forms of support.

Coxhoe Parish Council near Durham opened its own community pantry in March 2021, aiming to tackle the issue of food waste and providing residents with extra help simultaneously. Working alongside retailers like the Co-op, Fareshare and Sainsbury's, the pantry collects any food that is still fresh but may be going to waste. Customers can then choose from available food to create a tailored package of groceries.

Other Parish Councils, like Salfords and Sidlow in Surrey or Plaistow and Ifold in West Sussex, have transformed community halls into food banks to help ease the situation of residents. Meanwhile, other village halls, like that in Northwood Parish Council on the Isle of Wight, have been used as 'warm hubs', providing a venue where people can stay warm during colder weather and socialise with their community.

More councils, particularly in smaller rural parishes, could provide additional help and support to vulnerable people if they had access to government funding opportunities and were given a general power of competence. That power is currently limited just to those councils which meet certain government-defined criteria.

Case study from National Association of Local Councils

Supporting solutions to the crisis in social care

Case study illustrating the policy principles on: deliver services as locally as possible; and support the key contribution of the voluntary and community sector



Community Catalysts is a member of the Rural Services Network, and is a social enterprise, which works across the UK to ensure that people can get the help and care they need in ways, times and places that suit them. They are trying to find solutions to the crisis in maintaining a care workforce. They do this by supporting local people to use their energies and talents

to establish their own small enterprises that deliver sustainable health and care services for other local people. Additionally, this approach creates new jobs and leads to new volunteering opportunities.

One enterprise that they have supported is Social Support Suffolk, where a lady wanted to set up her own community enterprise to help

care for people close to her. The assistance provided by Community Catalysts enabled the Sudbury-based Social Support Suffolk, and the care worker/community enterprise leader Helen, to access one to one support with critical areas,

such as the policies and procedures required for care provision and getting everything in place ready to deliver a quality offer.

Case study from Rural Services Network



Members of The Rural Coalition



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Country Land and Business Association
CPRE – The Countryside Charity
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National Centre for Rural Health and Care
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