



**RMTG Meeting**  
**Online via Zoom**  
**16:30pm-18pm, Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

## Agenda

- 1. Matters Arising from the last RMTG meeting.** (Attachment 1)  
Notes from RMTG meeting which took place on Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020.
- 2. Current Membership.** (Attachment 2)  
RMTG from a regional perspective.  
[Please click here to view the RMTG page](#)
- 3. RMTG Officer Steering Group.**  
We have recently established a group of several Officers to act as an Officer Steering Group to enable us to be more productive as a group. In establishing this Group, we have taken in consideration both geographical spread and the size of respective market town.

Contact with members of the RMTG Officer Steering Group will be more frequent than with Clerks (with Clerks it will mainly be through our RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel meeting). However, if you have issues you wish to bring forward between meetings, feel free to get in contact with us at [admin@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:admin@sparse.gov.uk).

For your information, please see the list of officers who are part of our RMTG Officer Steering Group:

Town/Parish	Area	RMTG Officer Steering Group	Role in Respective Council
Bicester Town Council	South East	Samantha Shippen	Chief Officer
Bridport Town Council	South West	Will Austin	Town Clerk
Buckingham Town Council	South East	Paul Hodson	Town Clerk
Caistor Town Council	East Midlands	Helen Pitman	Town Clerk
Earby Town Council	North West	Katie Jeffreys	Town Clerk
Faringdon Town Council	South East	Sally Thurston	Town Clerk
Halstead Town Council	South East	Sarah Greateorex	Town Clerk
Ledbury Town Council	South East	Angela Price	Town Clerk
Penrith Town Council	North West	Carol Grey	Economic Development Officer
Saxmundham Town Council	South East	Rosalind Barnett	Town Clerk
St Austell Town Council	South West	David Pooley	Town Clerk
Westerham Town Council	South East	Angela Howells	Town Clerk
Wisbech Town Council	South East	Terry Jordan	Clerk (& Responsible Financial Officer)

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#### **4. Extra Expenditure & Lost Income Faces by Local Councils due to Covid-19 and Sheltering of Vulnerable People. (Attachment 3)**

Attachment outlines St Austell's correspondence with the Ministry.

We briefly touched on this at the last RMTG meeting, and RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel meetings have discussed this in greater detail. David Pooley, Town Clerk at St Austell Town Council provided details of their position in relation to extra expenditure/lost income in their town. It appears that rural areas (including both local councils and principal council) have experience additional expenditure and loss of income. Clearly it would appear there is additional expenditure and loss of income. Our preliminary view is that we do not feel MHCLG have taken full account of the local council position at this time. However clearly, we need more evidence from our membership to shape the case in an approach the Minister. We are planning to consult our members by sending a survey on this matter.

#### **5. Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision.**

Our Revitalising Rural campaign launch took place this past Monday, 1st March 2021.

[Click here to read the Revitalising Rural chapters](#)<sup>1</sup>

We would like to advise you to look at two specific chapters most relevant to this group:

- [Parish Councils and Rural Community Action](#)<sup>2</sup>
- [Rural Town Centres and High Streets](#)<sup>3</sup>

#### **6. A Short Live Poll and Discussion with RMTG Members.**

#### **7. Rural Perspective – Government's Place Based Funds. (Attachment 4)**

Attached is a report undertaken by RSN staff and Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.

#### **8. Rural Market Town Group Survey – Rural Transport Outcomes. (Attachment 5)**

At the first RMTG meeting of Councillor Representatives the group asked to be surveyed on rural transport, see if there were immediate discernible trends across the group in relation to transport cutbacks and the impact on rural towns. In an exercise of this nature, it is inevitable there will be variation of outcomes because we are dealing with differing communities. Although this has been an exercise that required Councillors in many ways to give a best guess, as opposed to statistical information, the overall picture.

#### **9. [The National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise](#)<sup>4</sup> (NICRE).**

The NICRE initiative which will be spun over a 3-year period. It will involve three universities: Newcastle (where a physical centre will be established), Warwick and Gloucestershire, all working together to foster and assist Rural Enterprise across England. This is an important initiative and having been one of the supporters of the funding bid that allowed it to proceed, RSN will be looking to work with the initiative

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/revitalising-rural>

<sup>2</sup> <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/parish-councils-rural-community.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/rural-town-centres.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ncl.ac.uk/nicre/about/>

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wherever possible. We hope that some of this work will relate to Rural Market Towns and to the RMTG.

#### **10. A RMTG Rural Information Exchange.**

At the first RMTG meeting of councillor representatives, we were asked to look at ways the RMTG could facilitate exchange of information and best practice between group members across the RMTG. This is a matter RSN officers wish to take forward as soon we are able, and it is something we wish to give a future high priority to. As with all networks there is a need for people to work consistently with them acting as facilitators. We have had discussion with the RMTG Officer Steering Group members about this and we feel the creation of an efficient way to exchange information and good practice will considerably assist this initiative.

#### **11. Planning Gain.**

One of the items discussed in the recent meeting of the RMTG Officer Steering Group, was the lack of correlation between infrastructure and other community benefits promised on the back of outlined planning applications and the resultant outcomes from a series of smaller and incremental planning applications made by developers on the original outline planning consent. It was felt that there may be merit in a survey across the group on this topic to establish whether this pattern was widespread.

We would like to kindly request views from the group.

#### **12. Any Other Business.**

The next RMTG meeting will take place in Autumn 2021, date/time to be confirmed.

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# **RURAL MARKET TOWN GROUP**



**RMTG Meeting  
Online via Zoom  
16:30pm-18pm, Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020  
Meeting Notes**

## **Attendance**

Cllr Chris Allen	Burnham-On-Sea & Highbridge Town Council
Brian Angell	Clun Town Council with Chapel Lawn
Christian Barnes	Kirkby Stephen Town Council
Cllr Jenny Bartlett	Leominster Town Council
Graham Biggs MBE	Rural Services Network
Cllr Stephen Bunney	Market Rasen Town Council
Cllr Colin Carmichael	East Horsley Parish Council
Cllr Jonathan Davies	Penrith Town Council
Cllr Jo Durden-Moore	Wendover Parish Council
Cllr Richard Elvin	Hetton Town Council
Cllr Kim Fletcher	Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council
Cllr Margaret Gateley	Buckingham Town Council
Sarah Greatorex	Halstead Town Council
Cllr Dan Hallet	Bicester Town Council
Clare Harris	Marlborough Town Council
Cllr Anthony Hirons	Lutterworth Town Council
Julie Holden	East Grinstead Town Council
Angela Howells	Westerham Town Council
Cllr Robert Hull	Hexham Town Council
Cllr Andy Hutton	Tavistock Town Council
David Inman	Rural Services Network
Katie Jeffreys	Earby Town Council
Cllr Conrad Lynch	Kirkby Stephen Town Council
Keli Nolan-Lyons	Tenterden Town Council
Cllr Lisa O'Donoghue	Buckingham Town Council
Penny O'Hagan	Wem Town Council
Cllr Liz Parker	Oxted Parish Council
Cllr Clive Parkinson	Thornbury Town Council
Cllr Garry Pethurst	Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council
Cllr Chris Plowright	Rothwell Town Council
Cllr Lynda Robertson	Midsomer Norton Town Council
Cllr Richard Robertson	Midsomer Norton Town Council
Frances Simpson	New Alresford Town Council

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Angela	Standing	Arundel Town Council
Cllr John	Stockwood	Bingham Town Council
Cllr Mike	Thompson	St Austell Town Council
Sally	Thurston	Faringdon Town Council
Cllr Alison	Trenery	Uttoxeter Town Council
Cllr Steve	Trottet	Lechlade on Thames Town Council
Cllr Martin	Tucker	Wotton-under-Edge Town Council
Andrea	Vincent	Olney Town Council
Cllr Diane	Ward	Uckfield Town Council
Mark	Wells	Bovey Tracey Town Council
Cllr Philip	Wicks	Richmond Town Council
Cllr Linda	Wild	Whitby Town Council
Cllr Sarah	Williams	Bridport Town Council
Cllr Judith	Wright	Biddenden Parish Council

### **Apologies**

Will	Austin	Bridport Town Council
Tara	Ball	Penistone Town Council
Cllr Keeley	Allin	Great Torrington Town Council
Cllr Jennifer	Ballantine	Wendover Parish Council
Debra	Barlow	Warsop Parish Council
Carolyn	Baynes	Arundel Town Council
Cllr Vaughan	Blake	Alcester Town Council
Karen	Chapman	Great Torrington Town Council
Cllr Doreen	Collins	Diss Town Council
Cllr Steve	Critten	Caistor Town Council
Claire	Dornan	Downham Market Town Council
Chris	Drake	Launceston Town Council
Sarah	Fox	Daventry Town Council
David	Gordon	Launceston Town Council
Roger	Gwatkin	East Grinstead Town Council
Cllr Robert	Heseltine	Skipton Town Council
Ginette	James	Lechlade on Thames Town Council
Jonathan	Pallant	St Ives Town Council
Angela	Price	Ledbury Town Council
Sarah	Richards	Diss Town Council
Cllr Chris	Ryley	Burscough Town Council
Vanessa	Saunders	Holsworthy Town Council
Keith	Shelley	Wendover Parish Council
Cllr Andy	Stuart	Rye Town Council
Sue	Templeman	Ackworth Parish Council
Sharon	Thomas	Corsham Town Council
Cllr Mark	Thorpe	Verwood Town Council
Lynda	Walker	Keswick Town Council
David	Wright	Market Harborough Town

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**1. Welcome and introduction to Rural Services Network from Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive and David Inman, Director**

**David Inman** and **Graham Biggs MBE** introduced themselves and the Rural Services Network (RSN) and formally welcomed RMTG representatives.

**David** outlined that we as an organisation focus on rural economy and services and seek to help rural areas across England to facilitate discussions, find consensus, share best practice and network. RSN is a representational group that seeks to advocate on behalf of rural areas be it in discussions with organisations and businesses that serve rural areas, lobbying the Government through our All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) and advocating for fair funding for rural areas through the Rural Fair Share Group. We also produce the weekly Rural Bulletin and a monthly RSN Rural Funding Digest publication seeking to inform our members on our work, events and on all relevant rural matters. Both publications go out to our 23,000 subscribers across England.

**Graham** emphasised that we are non-politically and entirely non-party organisation. He also mentioned that while RSN works with Principal local authorities, our partner organisation Rural Services Partnership (RSP) deals with non-local authority service providers and other organisations with a rural interest. The RMTG sits within the RSP part of the RSN.

**2. Discussion on the intended brief of the RMTG**

As a country England is more urban than the other home countries and most initiatives and policies have urban roots. The RSN's prime concern are rural services and we believe that rural matters must be thoroughly considered when building a strong national economy. We are forming this group because we believe that Rural Market Towns are a crucial part of the rural economy and of the way rural areas operate because they are its service hubs, hence why we seek to establish a national Rural Market Town network.

In addition to the above, we would also like to encourage members to share their best practice. We are currently running and have already requested input from all members by sending a link to the RMTG Good Practice Survey. We will seek to consult all members on these matters on a periodic basis and share this information within the group.

[Please click here to access the RMTG Good Practice Survey](#)

**David** outlined that about 20 years ago a similar market town group, which involved larger towns was created and was lottery funded. Due to the nature of their source of funding, and lack thereof the group eventually dissolved. We believe that forming a Rural/Market Town Group has a strong benefit to members as well as England's national economy. That is why we seek to form this group and to share best practice, network and facilitate group discussions while seeking joint consensus on matters that matter most to

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RMTG as a group. We wish to do this with the overarching purpose of amplifying the RMTG voice on the national stage.

**Graham** mentioned that since founding RSN 20 years ago and campaigning on behalf of rural areas over those years our experience has shown us two things:

1. While we always consider different regionally based nuances, we often find that issues facing our members are likely the same issues facing communities in other rural areas across England.
2. Based on these common issues facing rural areas, we seek to find common ground upon which we can stand when representing views and concerns to the Government and policy makers, amplifying the RSN joint voice on a national level.

We seek to harness and collect these common views as they are more popular and powerful with MPs, Government, opinion, and policy formers, than the individual voice of individual areas. And particularly now, the role of market towns, rather than general rural areas, in respect of employment and service centre we think it is sufficiently different, than the generality of rural to deserve a distinct voice within the RSN. We are not trying to compete with National Association of Local Councils (NALC) or with ACRE representing rural communities. It is worth mentioning that we all occasionally do come together and are all part of The Rural Coalition with other organisations. We also work with NALC, ACRE, and Plunkett but we all have our own areas of expertise when it comes to rural matters. The RSN area of expertise and wider agenda focuses on services, employment and rural economy and related issues. Through these matters we seek to represent and support the varied needs of people, businesses and communities who rely on and live in and around rural market towns. We are seeking to capture the collective voice of the group and the people who heavily rely on rural market towns, to successfully advocate and make representations to Government on RMTG issues. Therefore, going forward we would like to emphasise that all future RMTG meetings and their respective agendas will be dictated by RMTG members and their needs.

**David** also brought up that part of the work we do with local authorities is arguing the rural financial case. It is hard work because Government is trying to juggle with the financial situation of the nation as a whole and therefore it is important that the rural voice is presented and considered. We do not think that the playing field is level when it comes to urban vs rural settings, as well as between how Government treats different areas of the country. That difficulty can manifest itself in issues with who takes up responsibilities for certain services to the public, especially when there is not sufficient funding. It is important to highlight this difficulty and highlight it in the context of a comparison between funding allocated per urban resident vs per rural resident. We raise these issues on behalf of our members across England to the Government.

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**Graham** also added that rural areas get significantly less Government allocated grant per head of population than their urban counterparts. Since that is still a real problem, we will continue arguing with Government until it is corrected. Graham highlighted that members have the evidence to enable us to make a national case. We can always work with national statistics, but we also wish to work to ensure that we can present that picture with hard evidence with the impact on businesses, communities, and people on the ground. Graham highlighted that our members, including RMTG, have the evidence to enable us to make a national case.

### **Comments**

#### **Brian Angell, Clun Town Council with Chapel Lawn:**

On the issue of transport there is some disconnect with planning so although Highways are consultates, they only look at immediate access not the wider impact of traffic and public transport needs. Would be interested in any survey to know if that is something others find and how best we can get better integration.

#### **Cllr Richard Robertson, Midsomer Norton Town Council:**

Our principal council, Bath and North East Somerset District Council. When the area was divided to go under different local authority responsibility, we got allocated a few green spaces, which so far, we have successfully been able to manage. 82% of Bath and North East Somerset Councils community council tax is spent on social and adult care, which does not leave them much to spend on other things that should be attended to. We are finding that we are having to budget for some youth activities because our principal council simply does not have enough funds to do this. Regarding a Transport survey, this past September I took part in a national transport survey called "The Future of Transport" (organised by the Government's transport department) and matters such as rural transport came up as there was wide response from areas all over the UK. The results of that survey might be worth looking at.

#### **Graham Biggs in response to Brian Angell's and Cllr Richard Robertson's queries:**

In response to the issue raised by **Brian Angell**, in my experience issues regarding transport are different everywhere and there is no uniform pattern, but transport is a major issue in all rural areas. With regard to service 'devolution' generally, sometimes the principal council simply states that they will stop providing that service and asks town or parish councils if they wish to take it up. Sometimes principal councils offer some temporary financial support to start this service or sometimes establishes a long running financial partnership in running shared services. Graham highlighted that as a national organisation RSN seeks to gather evidence, information and issues and take them into the national plain and cannot get involved in disputes or debates between members, in this case RMTG members and Principal Local Authority members. Be it transport or other discretionary services, all related issues

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stem from the point that has just been raised by **Cllr Richard Robertson**. It is the case broadly (especially in unitary councils and county councils) that statutory duty for adult and children social care, quite often inhibits the provision of other services. And this issue is part of the financial rural case that we are trying to highlight. Especially since we know that the Government is providing less funding per head in rural areas, while the actual costs of adult and children social care is higher (compared to urban) for a lot of different reasons, exacerbating funding issues for other discretionary services. We need the evidence to support the service consequences of those financial decisions.

**David Inman in response to all rural transport related queries:**

David concluded that considering queries and comments on rural transport and related matters, the member RMTG group has showed support for being surveyed on rural transport.

**From Cllr Tony Hiron, Lutterworth Town Council:**

As well as being a councillor in a Market Town in Leicestershire, I am also NALC Rep for Leicestershire & Rutland. One of NALC's most successful initiatives is a Parliamentary lobbying day - do you intend to do anything similar?

**Graham Biggs response:**

We are not the same as NALC, but we are the Secretariat for the All-party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on rural services. We also have a group in the House of Lords. Through these groups we have 3 to 5 significant lobbying opportunities throughout the year. The last NALC Parliamentary Day was held on the same day as our sister organisations (Rural England Community Interest Company) Rural Vulnerability Day event, which allowed a lot of synergy between both organisations, tying rural issues together and engaging attendees at both events.

**From Kim Fletcher, Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council:**

A major issue is the inability for local people to afford to buy homes. Developers build for incomers (from London) and then there is more pressure on 'affordable rented homes', so nonlocals with lots of 'points' get foisted into a rural location, where they do not want to be. As a result, our 'artisans' and children are priced out of the market. Parliament does not understand this issue as we are losing our future population to wealthy incomers and social housing.

**Graham Biggs in response to Kim Fletcher's comment:**

We are in complete agreement with affordable rural housing being a major issue in all rural areas across England and we seek to influence Government and policy makers to address this issue.

**If you missed the first RMTG Newsletter (published in Autumn 2020), please follow the link below to access it.**

[RMTG Newsletter – Autumn 2020](#)

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### **3. Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision campaign**

Brief on the RSN campaign and its relation to RMTG.

**Graham** provided a brief overview of our previous and current campaigns. In March 2018, we launched a campaign “It’s Time for a Rural Strategy”. Since it has been over 20 years since the Government looked at developing a rural strategy and since the last Rural White Paper was published, we decided to call on Government to develop a rural strategy. Our campaign involved giving evidence on 3 separate occasions to a House of Lords (HoL) Select Committee on rural economy. This committee looked at the same issues we already highlighted in our rural strategy document, and they came to the exact same conclusion that it was “time for a rural strategy”. According to the parliamentary process, the Government is required to respond to HoL Select Committee’s report. Graham mentioned that the Government responded to this report by dismissing the need for a rural strategy but agreed that they need to refresh its vision for rural areas and acknowledged that they need work across departments to improve the situation in rural areas across England. Since then, eighteen months have passed, and we are yet to see the Government’s refreshed vision. We acknowledge that both Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic has stood in the way of these issues, but our latest campaign “Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision” seeks to refresh our previous call and sets out practical ask from Government to solve rural issues. This campaign seeks to demonstrate how rural areas can assist the Government to achieve the national policy objectives they have already set out for themselves but this time with full consideration of rural areas. This campaign has 16 chapters and covers a broad range of rural issues.

**You can access individual chapters and full document by following the link below:**

[Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision campaign](#)

What this campaign and document demonstrate very well is that Government needs to support and act across all those areas currently facing rural areas across England. And most importantly, that responding to challenges facing rural areas with half-hearted measures and urban based policies will not help the Government to reach their national goals, especially when it comes to the national economy and national wellbeing of the whole nation.

In preparing the document we consulted extensively with our members and to keep this document live we will continue to consult our members in the future, seeking to gather evidence to support our findings. Therefore, if having read through our Revitalising Rural document, RMTG members find that we are missing a crucial piece of evidence or you believe we should change our approach, please let us know as with this document we are seeking to set out practical policies and solutions for rural areas for the next 3 to 4 years. Please note that soon we will be informing you about the

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national launch of this campaign and how we will promote this document into Government for consideration. For now, please note that we have plans to segment these chapters and distribute them to all relevant governmental departments. And to build a wide cross agency voice when addressing parliamentarians, we will also seek to discuss and consult all our members and partner organisations on this campaign. We will engage with MPs from Rural Constituencies through the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services for which the RSN provides the Secretariat. Additionally, we will seek to facilitate a rural group comprised of members of the House of Lords (predominantly involving those who previously sat on the HoL Select Committee on rural economy), who will enable us to press this case into Government, putting questions to ministers and utilising all available parliamentary processes to ensure that the Government is aware of rural issues. We believe that if the Government is genuinely interested in the levelling up agenda that they must address and engage with the rural economy and rural communities.

We would like to have the rural market town voice reflected in this campaign; therefore, we will review the chat to see if what was just discussed reflects what we already are saying in our campaign. Please note that this campaign will also consider the new challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as all other matters as we seek to keep this document and campaign live.

#### **4. The RMTG Initial Recruitment Process** **Areas approached to join RMTG, seeking to establish the group across rural England.**

**David** informed members that currently the group has over 140 members from across England and encouraged members to invite other rural market towns to contact us if they wish to join the group. We strongly believe that the more rural towns join, participate, and contribute to our joint discussions the stronger will be our position and voice when we engage and put pressure on the Government on behalf of the group.

#### **5. RMTG Services**

Member representatives took a short interactive poll exercise to assist in identifying and taking forward the service priorities.

##### **Poll and Results:**

##### **1. How would you describe the situation in relation the commercial health of your Town Centre?** (Single Choice)

- a) Generally doing quite well (6%)
- b) The situation overall is just about satisfactory (8%)
- c) The situation is not as strong as in previous years (33%)
- d) It is worrying in terms of future years (50%)
- e) It is very difficult currently with little hope in sight (1%)

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**2. Is your council currently participating or running any schemes listed below:** (Multiple Choice)

- a) Market based Proposals/Aspirations Schemes (19%)
- b) A Leisure based Proposals/Aspirations Schemes (14%)
- c) An Environmental Proposals/Aspirations Schemes (22%)
- d) A Socially based Schemes Proposals/Aspirations Schemes (8%)
- e) None of the above (31%)
- f) Not aware of any (33%)

**3. Has your council or area previously benefitted from any European Union Funding schemes?** (Single Choice)

Answer 1: Yes (33%)

Answer 2: No (47%)

Answer 3: Don't know (19%)

**4. Is your area benefitting from any LEP Funding schemes?** (Single Choice)

Answer 1: Yes (11%)

Answer 2: No (56%)

Answer 3: Don't know (33%)

**5. Has the easing of lockdown during Summer 2020 brought any additional commercial benefit to your town or parish beyond the norm?** (Single Choice)

Answer 1: Yes (25%)

Answer 2: No (61%)

Answer 3: Don't know (14%)

**6. From an employment viewpoint, how much do you think the Covid-19 related measures taken by the Government have impacted on local residents and businesses?** (Single Choice)

Answer 1: No significant impact in my area (3%)

Answer 2: Some significant impact in my area (69%)

Answer 3: Seriously affected my area (14%)

Answer 4: Very seriously affected my area (14%)

From the above results **Graham** commented on the outcome of question 1 as about 83% of members show real overwhelming concern about future commercial health of their respective town centres. Second question had mixed results, but the overriding conclusion is that there is probably not much scope for new schemes in your areas due to the current pandemic. Unless councils had built up balances or reserves or attracted some external funding for projects. Third question about areas previously receiving EU funding showed some mixed results as well, with more 'no's' than 'yes'. While about question four, on LEP Funding Schemes, only 4 had benefitted from them with a larger majority who have not, which is quite worrying. We do acknowledge that for a rural area to benefit from a LEP Funding Scheme, the initiative that they look at must have a rural dimension considered in the first place. We can also see that in answering question five, only 25% stated that lockdown easing this summer has brought commercial benefit to your area, while 61% have not seen any benefit. We recognise that this question might be most relevant to those areas that rely heavily on seasonal tourism. The final question shows that majority of you believe that in terms of

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employment, your area has been significantly impacted by the measures taken by the Government during Covid-19.

**David** thanked all for participating in the poll.

### **Comments**

#### **Cllr Diane Ward, Uckfield Town Council:**

Raised the point that during this lockdown large companies like The Range, Poundland, B&M etc are allowed to stay open due to selling some food items, unlike the small local independent shops, which rural areas rely on most. How can this be tackled?

#### **Graham Biggs in response Cllr Diane Ward's question:**

Graham thanked Cllr Ward for her query and noted that he will bring this point up on behalf of the group during the next fortnightly meeting of the Rural Impacts Stakeholder Forum with Defra.

## **6. Proposed RMTG online meeting schedule**

9<sup>th</sup> November is our first RMTG meeting and the first RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel meeting will take place on Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> November.

We would like to consult members on the current schedule.

We propose having the following meetings a year:

- **RMTG meeting** – would take place **twice a year** and to which all nominated RMTG representatives would be invited.
- **RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel meeting** – a meeting that would include those clerks from each member council who are prepared to be involved in this group.

Most attendees agreed to the schedule outlined in this agenda. It was suggested that Clerks Advisory Panel meeting could be held after 7pm due to members work schedules. Graham emphasised again that before the next meeting we will be asking RMTG members for agenda items.

## **7. Currently Active Town Council Local Networks**

We are seeking to identify other currently operating local (County) level networks across England, to see how we can work together. Therefore, we would like to consult our current members on the questions below.

- Are there an independent local grouping where market towns in your area periodically come together of their own volition? If so, how frequently does these groupings meet?
- Are there a County Council (or District Council) or other convened meeting where Towns meet independently of parishes? If that is the case how frequently does these meetings occur?

### **Comments**

Apart from NALC meetings, majority of the members attending have indicated that they are not currently part of any such groups. While **Cllr**

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**Linda Robertson** (Midsomer Norton Town Council) mentioned that Bath and North East Somerset Council has setup a group of forums within their area (around 8 of them). Their town council is covered by the Summer Valley Forum, of which they are the biggest town. The group involves towns and parishes, where the agenda is set by the towns/parishes and not by our unitary council.

**Graham and David** asked if having a group of just towns in their district or unitary area (or towns as service centres, excluding small villages) be helpful or of use? Members mostly agreed that such a group would be of use.

**Cllr Jonathan Davies, Penrith Town Council asked:**

Could an online collaboration forum be established out of this group to continue the conversations between meetings? Graham agreed that the RSN would consider this.

## **8. RMTG on our website**

We welcome any suggested changes and input from members.

[Please click here to view the RMTG page](#)

The group was informed how to use our RSN website, where to find further information on RMTG and its current members, and where to find more information on our future events.

## **9. RSN's Parliamentary Activities and work with the Rural Coalition**

**Graham** informed the group on the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on rural services (APPG) of which we are the secretariat. We often contact MPs from rural constituencies, irrespective of party or if they have formally joined this APPG. We also have a separate group called the Rural Fair Share Group, which seeks to work with a group of MPs trying to address the disparities in local government finance between urban vs rural areas and other related financial matters. We also have contacts in the House of Lords, as we seek to establish a Lords group to help with our current Revitalising Rural campaign.

**Graham** mentioned the Rural Coalition before but expanded on its structure further. It is a group of 13 national organisations, all coming to the table and representing their particular interest. The CLA are members of the Rural Coalition, and they are party to the fortnightly discussions with Defra. We have a close relationship with the CLA. Every organisation that is part of the Rural Coalition has their own set of priorities and concerns and through the coalition we come together trying to find the common ground on rural issues and seeking solutions. In the last three weeks Rural Coalition has got quite a lot of publicity when it was indicating the first thoughts about the impacts of COVID-19 which was published prior the second national lockdown.

## **10. Any Other Business**

An opportunity for members to offer their views on the group and discussed proposals.

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**Comments****Cllr Anthony Hirons, Lutterworth Town Council:**

Requested that in the next meeting the current changes made to planning legislation and planning system be discussed, as these changes will affect us all.

**Graham Biggs in response Cllr Anthony Hirons question:**

Graham agreed to raise this at the next meeting. He also highlighted that RSN has already made representations in relation to both the Planning White Paper and changes to the current planning system: this autumn the Rural Services APPG wrote to the secretary of state asking for a meeting to raise rural concerns directly with the minister. We will update members on the outcome of these discussions. Graham also mentioned that three weeks ago a ministerial round table on the Planning White Paper took place, where the housing minister from the Communities Department started the conversation by saying that this was the start of the discussion not the end. Which raised the question of why it was presented as a White Paper with intentions to legislate in the first place, rather than a green paper for further discussions. At that meeting Graham suggested that since discussions were just starting that they ought to stop the new changes to the planning system, which currently dramatically undermines the affordable rural housing provision as it allocates huge numbers of new housing to be built in rural areas, which did not get much of an answer. Nevertheless, it seems that they are open to genuine discussions. If you have any rural town issues that you think are important to consider, especially in relation to the planning system, please email us at [admin@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:admin@sparse.gov.uk). If members already made representations to Government or their council in response to the new Planning White Paper, then please feel free to send us a copy.

**Graham** thanked all in attendance and commented on the encouraging attendance and lively discussion in the chat.

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## RURAL MARKET TOWN GROUP



#	Town/Parish Council	Local Authority Area	Local Authority Area 2	Region
1	Ashby de la Zouch Town Council	Leicestershire County Council	North West Leicestershire District Council	East Midlands
2	Bakewell Town Council	Derbyshire County Council	Derbyshire Dales District Council	East Midlands
3	Belper Town Council	Derbyshire County Council	Amber Valley Borough Council	East Midlands
4	Bingham Town Council	Nottinghamshire County Council	Rushcliffe Borough Council	East Midlands
5	Bourne Town Council	Lincolnshire County Council	South Kesteven District Council	East Midlands
6	Caistor Town Council	Lincolnshire County Council	West Lindsey District Council	East Midlands
7	Chapel en le Frith Parish Council	Derbyshire County Council	High Peak Borough Council	East Midlands
8	Clowne Town Council	Derbyshire County Council	Bolsover District Council	East Midlands
9	Crowland Parish Council	Lincolnshire County Council	South Holland District Council	East Midlands
10	Daventry Town Council	Northamptonshire County Council	Daventry District Council	East Midlands
11	Earl Shilton Town Council	Leicestershire County Council	Hinkley & Bosworth Borough Council	East Midlands
12	Finedon Town Council	Northamptonshire County Council	East Northamptonshire Council	East Midlands
13	Harworth and Bircotes Town Council	Nottinghamshire County Council	Bassetlaw District Council	East Midlands
14	Lutterworth Town Council	Leicestershire County Council	Harborough District Council	East Midlands
15	Mablethorpe and Sutton Town Council	Lincolnshire County Council	East Lindsey District Council	East Midlands
16	Market Harborough Town	Leicestershire County Council	Harborough District Council	East Midlands
17	Market Rasen Town Council	Lincolnshire County Council	West Lindsey District	East Midlands
18	Oakham Town Council	Rutland County Council		East Midlands
19	Ollerton and Boughton Town Council	Nottinghamshire County Council	Newark and Sherwood District Council	East Midlands

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21	Ripley Town Council	Derbyshire County Council	Amber Valley Borough Council	East Midlands
22	Rothwell Town Council	Northamptonshire County Council	Kettering Borough Council	East Midlands
23	Shepshed Town Council	Leicestershire County Council	Charnwood Borough Council	East Midlands
24	Sleaford Town Council	Lincolnshire County Council	North Kesteven District Council	East Midlands
25	Swineshead Parish Council	Lincolnshire County Council	Boston Borough Council	East Midlands
26	Uppingham Town Council	Rutland County Council		East Midlands
27	Wirksworth Town Council	Derbyshire County Council	Derbyshire Dales District Council	East Midlands
28	Alnwick Town Council	Northumberland County Council		North East
29	Hetton Town Council		Sunderland City Council	North East
30	Hexham Town Council	Northumberland County Council		North East
31	Middleton-in-Teesdale and Newbiggin Parish Council	Durham County Council		North East
32	Sedgefield Town Council	Durham County Council		North East
33	Sildon Town Council	Durham County Council		North East
34	Billinge Chapel End Parish Council	St Helens Council		North West
35	Birtley Town Green		Gateshead Council	North West
36	Brampton Parish Council	Cumbria County Council	Carlisle City Council	North West
37	Burscough Parish Council	Lancashire County Council	West Lancashire Borough Council	North West
38	Carnforth Town Council	Lancashire County Council	Lancaster City Council	North West
39	Charnock Richard Parish Council		Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council	North West
40	Cleator Moor Town Council	Cumbria County Council	Copeland Borough Council	North West
41	Clitheroe Town Council	Lancashire County Council	Ribble Valley Borough Council	North West
42	Dalton with Newton Town Council	Cumbria County Council	Borough of Barrow-in-Furness	North West
43	Earby Town Council	Lancashire County Council	Pendle Borough Council	North West

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45	Garstang Town Council	Lancashire County Council	Wyre Council	North West
46	Kendal Town Council	Cumbria County Council	South Lakeland District Council	North West
47	Keswick Town Council	Cumbria County Council	Allerdale Borough Council	North West
48	Kirkby Stephen Town Council	Cumbria County Council	Eden District Council	North West
49	Knutsford Town Council	Cheshire East Council		North West
50	Longridge Town Council	Lancashire County Council	Ribble Valley Borough Council	North West
51	Lymm Parish Council		Warrington Borough Council	North West
52	Penrith Town Council	Cumbria County Council	Eden District Council	North West
53	Alton Town Council	Hampshire County Council		South East
54	Amphill Town Council	Central Bedfordshire Council		South East
55	Arundel Town Council	West Sussex County Council	Arun District Council	South East
56	Barkham Parish Council		Wokingham Borough Council	South East
57	Bicester Town Council	Oxfordshire County Council	Cherwell District Council	South East
58	Biddenden Parish Council	Kent County Council	Ashford Borough Council	South East
59	Borden Parish Council	Kent County Council	Swale Borough Council	South East
60	Bovingdon Parish Council	Hertfordshire County Council	Dacorum Borough Council	South East
61	Buckingham Town Council	Buckinghamshire Council	Aylesbury Vale District Council	South East
62	Chalfont St Giles Parish Council	Buckinghamshire Council		South East
63	Chobham Parish Council	Surrey County Council	Surrey Heath Borough Council	South East
64	Clare Town Council	Suffolk County Council	West Suffolk District Council	South East
65	Coggeshall Parish Council	Essex County Council	Braintree District Council	South East
66	Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council	Kent County Council	Tunbridge Wells District Council	South East
67	Cranleigh Parish Council	Surrey County Council	Waverley Borough Council	South East

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69	Downham Market Town Council	Norfolk County Council	King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council	South East
70	East Grinstead Town Council	Mid Sussex District Council	West Sussex County Council	South East
71	East Horsley Parish Council	Surrey County Council	Guildford Borough Council	South East
72	Edenbridge Town Council	Kent County Council	Sevenoaks District Council	South East
73	Faringdon Town Council	Oxfordshire County Council	Vale of White Horse District Council	South East
74	Faversham Town Council	Kent County Council	Swale Borough Council	South East
75	Flitwick Town Council	Central Bedfordshire Council		South East
76	Fordingbridge Town Council	Hampshire County Council	New Forest District Council	South East
77	Great Dunmow Town Council	Essex County Council	Uttlesford District Council	South East
78	Hadleigh Town Council	Suffolk County Council	Babergh District Council	South East
79	Halstead Town Council	Essex County Council	Braintree District Council	South East
80	Hartley Witney Parish Council	Hampshire County Council	Hart District Council	South East
81	Hedge End Town Council	Hampshire County Council	Eastleigh Borough Council	South East
82	Holt Town Council	Norfolk County Council	North Norfolk District Council	South East
83	Hullbridge Parish Council	Essex County Council	Rochford District Council	South East
84	Hunstanton Town Council	Norfolk County Council	Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	South East
85	Hythe Town Council	Kent County Council	Shepway District Council	South East
86	Ledbury Town Council	Herefordshire Council		South East
87	Leominster Town Council	Herefordshire Council		South East
88	Luddesdown Parish Council	Kent County Council	Sevenoaks District Council	South East
89	Maldon Town Council	Essex County Council	Maldon District Council	South East
90	Minster Parish Council	Kent County Council	Thanet District Council	South East
91	New Alresford Town Council	Hampshire County Council	Winchester City Council	South East

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93	Olney Town Council	Milton Keynes Council		South East
94	Ongar Town Council	Essex County Council	Epping Forest District Council	South East
95	Overton Parish Council	Hampshire County Council	Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council	South East
96	Oxted Parish Council	Surrey County Council	Tandridge District Council	South East
97	Peacehaven Town Council	East Sussex County Council	Lewes District Council	South East
98	Petersfield Town Council	Hampshire County Council	East Hampshire District Council	South East
99	Redenhall with Harleston Town Council	Norfolk County Council	South Norfolk District Council	South East
100	Rye Town Council	East Sussex County Council	Rother District Council	South East
101	Saffron Walden Town Council	Essex County Council	Uttlesford District Council	South East
102	Sandy Town Council	Central Bedfordshire Council		South East
103	Saxmundham Town Council	Suffolk County Council	East Suffolk District Council	South East
104	Soham Town Council	Cambridgeshire County Council	East Cambridgeshire District Council	South East
105	St Ives Town Council	Cambridgeshire County Council	Huntingdonshire District Council	South East
106	Stowmarket Town Council	Suffolk County Council	Mid Suffolk District Council	South East
107	Sutton Valence Parish Council	Kent County Council	Maidstone Borough Council	South East
108	Swanley Town Council	Kent County Council	Sevenoaks District Council	South East
109	Tenterden Town Council	Kent County Council	Ashford Borough Council	South East
110	The Gorge Parish Council	Telford & Wrekin Council		South East
111	Theale Parish Council	West Berkshire Council		South East
112	Thetford Town Council	Norfolk County Council	Breckland Council	South East
113	Uckfield Town Council	East Sussex County Council	Wealden District Council	South East
114	Wallingford Town Council	Oxfordshire County Council	South Oxfordshire District Council	South East
115	Wendover Parish Council	Buckinghamshire Council	Aylesbury Vale District Council	South East

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117	Westerham Town Council	Kent County Council	Sevenoaks District Council	South East
118	Wheathampstead Parish Council	Hertfordshire County Council	St Albans City and District Council	South East
119	Wisbech Town Council	Cambridgeshire County Council	Fenland District Council	South East
120	Witney Town Council	Oxfordshire County Council	West Oxfordshire District Council	South East
121	Axminster Town Council	Devon County Council	East Devon District Council	South West
122	Barnstaple Town Council	Devon County Council	North Devon Council	South West
123	Bideford Town Council	Devon County Council	Torridge District Council	South West
124	Bovey Tracey Town Council	Devon County Council	Teignbridge District Council	South West
125	Bridport Town Council	Dorset Council		South West
126	Burnham on Sea and Highbridge Town Council	Somerset County Council	Sedgemoor District Council	South West
127	Camelford Town Council	Cornwall Council		South West
128	Chard Town Council	Somerset County Council	South Somerset District Council	South West
129	Cirencester Town Council	Gloucestershire County Council	Cotswold District Council	South West
130	Clevedon Town Council	North Somerset Council		South West
131	Corsham Town Council	Wiltshire Council		South West
132	Crediton Town Council	Devon County Council	Mid Devon District Council	South West
133	Great Torrington Town Council	Devon County Council	Torridge District Council	South West
134	Holsworthy Town Council	Devon County Council	Torridge District Council	South West
135	Launceston Town Council	Cornwall Council		South West
136	Lechlade on Thames Town Council	Gloucestershire County Council	Cotswold District Council	South West
137	Lyme Regis Town Council	Dorset Council		South West
138	Marlborough Town Council	Wiltshire Council		South West
139	Midsomer Norton Town Council	Bath and North East Somerset Council		South West

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141	Moretonhampstead Parish Council	Devon County Council	Teignbridge District Council	South West
142	Okehampton Town Council	Devon County Council	West Devon Borough Council	South West
143	Penzance Town Council	Cornwall Council		South West
144	Seaton Town Council	Devon County Council	East Devon District Council	South West
145	Shaftesbury Town Council	Dorset Council		South West
146	Sherborne Town Council	Dorset Council		South West
147	Sodbury Town Council	South Gloucestershire Council		South West
148	Somerton Town Council	Somerset County Council	South Somerset District Council	South West
149	South Molton Town Council	Devon County Council	North Devon Council	South West
150	St Austell Town Council	Cornwall Council		South West
151	Stroud Town Council	Gloucestershire County Council	Stroud District Council	South West
152	Swanage Town Council	Dorset Council		South West
153	Tavistock Town Council	Devon County Council	West Devon Borough Council	South West
154	Thornbury Town Council	South Gloucestershire Council		South West
155	Totnes Town Council	Devon County Council	South Hams District Council	South West
156	Verwood Town Council	Dorset Council		South West
157	Wadebridge Town Council	Cornwall Council		South West
158	Wells City Council	Somerset County Council	Mendip District Council	South West
159	Westbury Town Council	Wiltshire Council		South West
160	Wotton-under-Edge Town Council	Gloucestershire County Council	Stroud District Council	South West
161	Alcester Town Council	Warwickshire County Council	Stratford-on-Avon District Council	West Midlands
162	Alvechurch Parish Council	Worcestershire County Council	Bromsgrove District Council	West Midlands
163	Atherstone Town Council	Warwickshire County Council	North Warwickshire Borough Council	West Midlands

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164	Balsall Parish Council		Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	West Midlands
165	Barlaston Parish Council	Staffordshire County Council	Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	West Midlands
166	Biddulph Town Council	Staffordshire County Council	Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	West Midlands
167	Bishops Castle Town Council	Shropshire Council		West Midlands
168	Brewood and Coven Parish Council		South Staffordshire District Council	West Midlands
169	Cheadle Town Council	Staffordshire County Council	Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	West Midlands
170	Church Stretton Town Council	Shropshire Council		West Midlands
171	Clun Town Council with Chapel Lawn	Shropshire Council		West Midlands
172	Newport Town Council	Telford & Wrekin Council		West Midlands
173	Tenbury Town Council	Worcestershire County Council	Malvern Hills District Council	West Midlands
174	Uttoxeter Town Council	Staffordshire County Council	East Staffordshire Borough Council	West Midlands
175	Wem Town Council	Shropshire Council		West Midlands
176	Ackworth Parish Council		Wakefield Metropolitan District Council	Yorkshire & Humber
177	Addingham Parish Council		City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council	Yorkshire & Humber
178	Baildon Town Council		City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council	Yorkshire & Humber
179	Cottingham Parish Council	East Riding of Yorkshire Council		Yorkshire & Humber
180	Easingwold Town Council	North Yorkshire County Council	Hambleton District Council	Yorkshire & Humber
181	Epworth Town Council	North Lincolnshire Council		Yorkshire & Humber
182	Guisborough Town Council		Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council	Yorkshire & Humber
183	Knaresborough Town Council	North Yorkshire County Council	Harrogate Borough Council	Yorkshire & Humber
184	Malton Town Council	North Yorkshire County Council	Ryedale District Council	Yorkshire & Humber
185	Otley Town Council		Leeds City Council	Yorkshire & Humber
186	Penistone Town Council		Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	Yorkshire & Humber
187	Pickering Town Council	North Yorkshire County Council	Ryedale District Council	Yorkshire & Humber

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188	Richmond Town Council	North Yorkshire County Council	Richmondshire District Council	Yorkshire & Humber
189	Ripon City Council	North Yorkshire County Council	Harrogate Borough Council	Yorkshire & Humber
190	Ripponden Parish Council		Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council	Yorkshire & Humber
191	Skipton Town Council	North Yorkshire County Council	Craven District Council	Yorkshire & Humber
192	Snaith and Cowick Town Council	East Riding of Yorkshire Council		Yorkshire & Humber
193	Tadcaster Town Council	North Yorkshire County Council	Selby District Council	Yorkshire & Humber
194	Wetherby Town Council		Leeds City Council	Yorkshire & Humber
195	Whitby Town Council	North Yorkshire County Council	Scarborough Borough Council	Yorkshire & Humber

\*Last revised on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

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**Rural Services Network  
Note on funding for Parish Councils**

The Government is committed to the creation of unitary authorities and to the devolution/localism agenda. The combination of these policies has meant that in recent years Parish and Town Councils have taken on a much broader role in service delivery and have become an increasingly important part of local government.

Traditionally, Central Government has identified a number of priorities and projects and offered funding to only principal authorities. There has been a tendency with a number of funding streams to use the definition of local authority included in Section 23 of the Local Government Act 2003 which excludes Town and Parish Councils.

This practice has been repeated with the compensation payments provided in connection with the Coronavirus pandemic. Central Government has provided a number of specific funding streams relating to functions of principal authorities and in addition has compensated principal authorities for losses of income experienced as a direct result of the pandemic. This compensation scheme is explained in a guidance document published on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2020 entitled "Local Government Income Compensation Scheme for Lost Sales, Fees and Charges". This allows principal authorities to claim compensation for irrecoverable and unavoidable losses from sales, fees and charges income generated in the delivery of services in the financial year 2020/21. The scheme provides for a 5% deduction to be absorbed by the local authority and then provides compensation of 75p in the £ of the balance of the loss which simply has to be certified by the Section 151 officer.

Mixed messages have been received from the Government and principal authorities with regard to hardship funding. The Minister for State suggested that principal authorities should pass on hardship funding to Parish and Town Councils (see letter attached). Very few have done this. No funding has been provided direct to Parish and Town Councils in relation to the pandemic other than through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. As local authorities, Parish and Town Councils do not qualify for any relief or assistance linked to business rates.

Cornwall Council is one of a few principal authorities that have implemented a hardship scheme for Parish and Town Councils although, to date, it has only provided assistance to 9 Town and Parish Councils who applied and could demonstrate that they had lost income or incurred additional costs in the period up to the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Cornwall Council has recently decided to extend this scheme to cover the remainder of this financial year which is of course very welcome.

With the growing role of Town and Parish Councils the element of risk borne by each Council is likely to increase. Many now earn income from their services and are very reliant on it. St Austell Town Council has an annual budget spend of £1.1m and commercial income funds approximately 30% of that figure. The precept only accounts for in the order of 70% of expenditure. Padstow Town Council in Cornwall is funded 100% from income earned and has no precept. Such authorities would benefit significantly from a scheme such as the Income Compensation Scheme which applies to principal authorities.

In conclusion, Central Government needs to recognise the growing role and importance of Town and Parish Councils and to introduce funding mechanisms which reflect those roles. This will most likely require direct funding for Parish and Town Councils by Central Government in relation to some functions and initiatives.

David Pooley  
**Town Clerk**  
**St Austell Town Council**

23rd February 2021

# A rural perspective on government's place-based funds

Covering the Towns Fund, Levelling Up Fund, Community Renewal Fund,  
Welcome Back Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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- 1.0** In this document, we start by looking at the Key Rural Messages and Questions from each of the Towns Fund; Levelling Up Fund and Community Renewal Fund based on our current analysis (as at 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2021).
- 1.1** We then set out in an Appendix a Briefing Note about key components of each of the schemes plus Looking Ahead to the UK Shared Prosperity Fun.
- 1.2** *It should be said right from the outset that we generally welcome the fact that proposals to target these funds have avoided falling back to the Index of Multiple Deprivation and have sought to measure some broader aspects of needs. We welcome recent statements from the Communities Secretary, Robert Jenrick, reported in the Municipal Journal that “the Government wanted to help those that were ‘least adept’ at bidding for cash and to ‘redress historic levels of investment’ and comments that “officials explained they considered rural areas to be less economically resilient. These are points the RSN has been making for many years.*
- 1.3** It should be noted that we know more about the Towns Fund because it is already operational and the National Audit Office has produced a report which ‘sets out the facts about the process by which the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government chose the 101 towns in England it invited to develop Town Deals’
- 1.4** We intend to keep this document updated as things change or become clearer (as our understanding, analysis and further research continues).

### IMPORTANT:

It should be noted that the government has also published “Build Back Better: Our Plan for Growth”. This, we are given to understand, takes over from the Industrial Strategy (although much of the data and analyses from the Industrial Strategy and Local Industrial Strategies we are told remain relevant).

The RSN is yet to review the Plan for Growth through a rural lens.

Announcements were also made in the budget regarding a £150million Community Ownership Fund with a prospectus due to be published in the summer.



## 2.0 KEY RURAL CONCERNS

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**ACROSS ALL FUNDS WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE UNEVENNESS OF THE PLAYING FIELD IN WHAT ARE COMPETITIVE REGIMES.**

The concerns relate to:

- **Capacity to make bids and the complexity and time-consuming nature of such bidding regimes.**
- **Match Funding capacity**
- **Getting fewer outputs/outcomes because it costs more in rural areas**

### 3.0 TOWNS FUND

#### PURPOSE

The Towns Fund is expected to support towns that currently do not have the right conditions to develop and sustain strong local economies, recognising that many towns have not benefitted from the growth experienced by cities over recent decades. It aims to provide a selection of struggling towns across England with funding to address issues such as ageing populations, limited regional economic opportunities and lack of investment.

#### KEY MESSAGES

- The approach used by MHCLG to rank town for the Towns Fund was patently unfair towards smaller (rural) towns. For reasons which are unstated, all towns **with a population of less than 15,000 were placed into a low priority category** meaning they were unlikely to be awarded any funding (although some have been e.g., St Ives and Glastonbury- see below for reasons given).

#### **Glastonbury, South West**

The town scores relatively poorly in productivity, EU Exit exposure, and the Index of Multiple Deprivation income deprivation metrics. The nearest transport links for the town are Castle Cary railway which has no direct bus links to the town.

#### **St Ives, South West**

Cornwall as a county faces low productivity, in particular for coastal areas. Cornwall's economy is also expected to have fairly significant exposure to EU Exit. There are growth opportunities for the sub-region in St Ives, for example, arising from investment related to the Tate gallery.

- NB The ONS report of July 2019 "Understanding Towns in England and Wales: An Introduction" was not written for any specific policy or resource distribution purpose and was only tangentially used (subsequently) as part of the selection process for the Towns Fund. It analysed 1082 towns with a 2011 census population between 5,000 and 25,000. Therefore, small Market Towns with a population of 5000 or less – which are essential employment and service centres in many rural areas – were not even in the list of 1082 Towns.
- The use by MHCLG of IMD Income Deprivation statistics as the most important criteria used to rank towns works against smaller (rural) towns. Jobs in rural areas are on average poorly paid with many in seasonal employment. The rural economy has many more SME's and self-employed.

- However, some residents commute out to larger centres and earn higher salaries. Income Deprivation statistics conflate the two, giving a misleading economic picture.
- The use by MHCLG of information it held about local economic shocks and private investment plans to rank towns favoured the larger towns. Their size means they tend to be home to larger employers and have large-scale investment potential. Almost certainly, it will be larger scale changes that are more known about within MHCLG. Yet, to a small town the loss of a medium sized employer is just as great an economic shock.
- 37% of the (1,082) towns that were initially ranked by ONS and MHCLG were located within predominantly rural local authority areas. However, only 18% of the towns that were subsequently invited to submit a funding proposal to the Towns Fund were in predominantly rural local authority areas.

### **KEY QUESTIONS**

- Was the approach that MHCLG applied to analyse towns and to rank them for the Towns Fund 'rural proofed' in line with Government policy – where is there any evidence that it was??
- What was the logic for MHCLG placing all smaller towns (with a population of less than 15,000<sup>1</sup>) into the low priority part of the list of towns from which some would be chosen to submit a proposal to the Towns Fund?
- When using criteria to rank towns, what was the source or what were the sources of information used by MHCLG for the qualitative criteria about exposure to economic shocks and private investment plans?

[Click here to access Towns Fund Briefing Note Appendix](#)



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<sup>1</sup> In the South West region, the population threshold was set at 10,000. In all other regions it was 15,000.

## 4.0 LEVELLING UP FUND

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### PURPOSE

The Fund will focus on capital investment in local infrastructure thereby building on and consolidating prior programmes such as the Local Growth Fund and Towns Fund. It will have a visible, tangible impact on people and places, and support economic recovery. In doing so, it will also create opportunity across the country, prioritising bids that invest in regeneration and growth in places in need and areas of low productivity and connectivity.

### KEY MESSAGES

- In referring to the Levelling Up Fund in his budget statement the Chancellor said. “To ensure that funding reaches the places most in need, the government has identified priority places based on an index of local need to receive capacity funding to help them co-ordinate their applications. **So, at least for the rural areas included there is a clear recognition of needing support.**
- There are 93 English Local Authorities in category one (priority) for the Levelling Up Fund. Around two thirds of rural places on this list are the same as for the Community Renewal Fund, but the rest differ.
- It is worthy of note that the **government’s rationale** for including transport connectivity (beyond the fact that the Department of Transport is providing some of the funding!!) is ‘**where transport links are limiting local economies**’

[Click here to access Levelling Up Fund Prospectus Appendix](#)



## 5.0 COMMUNITY RENEWAL FUND

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### PURPOSE

The UK Community Renewal Fund will run a series of local pilot projects in 2021/22, designed to test approaches and to inform the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in April 2022.

### KEY MESSAGES

- In referring to the Community Renewal Fund in his budget statement the Chancellor said. “To ensure that funding reaches the places most in need, the government has identified 100 priority places based on an index of economic resilience to receive capacity funding to help them co-ordinate their applications. **So, at least for the rural areas included there is a clear recognition of their lack of economic resilience,**
- The timescale looks pretty ridiculous for pilots. Winners announced at the end of July, so not project spending until the Autumn realistically. How will these pilots therefore inform the design of the wider roll out of the Shared Prosperity Fund by April 2022? That said, the money really is small. Bids can only be up to £3 million each.
- It cannot be right that a geographically huge Unitary Council area has exactly the same £3M cap compared to the smallest District
- Of the 100 defined priority places (local authority areas) for this fund, 13 are in Scotland and 14 are in Wales, leaving 73 in England. In England 21(28,76%) are Predominantly Rural, 8 are Urban with Significant Rural and 44 are Predominantly Urban.

[Click here to access Community Renewal Fund Prospectus Appendix](#)



## 6.0 METHODOLOGIES PUBLISHED BY GOVERNMENT RE LEVELLING UP AND COMMUNITY RENEWAL FUNDS

### COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE TWO FUNDS

- For LUF there are 17 Predominantly Rural places in category one (compared to 20 for the Community Renewal Fund (CRF)). For LUF there are 8 Urban with Significant Rural places in category one (compared to 5 for the CRF). So, some shift away from the most rural.
- Places of interest on the LUF list, but not the CRF list are: East Staffordshire, Folkstone & Hythe, Forest of Dean, Isles of Scilly, Lewes, Rother and Staff Moorlands.
- Places of interest on the CRF list, but not the LUF list are: Cornwall, Fenland, Herefordshire, North Norfolk, South Somerset and West Devon. Some notable losses, here.
- So overall, we would say the LUF category one list is less helpful than the CRF priority list, though 17 Predominantly Rural LAs out of a total of 93 is still 18%, so probably just about passable overall for an exercise of this kind.

### KEY MESSAGES

**Our initial overall view of the methodologies is much more positive than negative. Whilst the Methodologies have been published the 'scores' have not. This limits evaluation of appropriateness.**

- Where matching indicators are used these are highlighted below, although weightings are applied differently.
- **The indicators used to create the UK Community Renewal Fund priority list areas are:**
  - a) The natural logarithm of the nominal smoothed Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked (2018) (30% weighting)
  - b) The natural logarithm of the Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) per head at 2017 prices (2017) (10% weighting)
  - c) The proportion of those aged 16–64 with no qualifications (NVQ) (2019) (20% weighting)
  - d) The ONS model-based estimate of the unemployment rate among those aged 16+ (July 2019 - June 2020) (20% weighting)
  - e) The natural logarithm of those aged 16-64 per squared km of land area (high water excluding area of inland water) (20% weighting)

- The RSN has always had reservations about the use of **Gross Disposable Household Income** which we believe includes income from those who live in rural areas but travel to better paid urban jobs, as well as those with private pension. It has however, only been given a low (10%) weighting as felt to be similar to the productivity measure. **In the RSN's view Incomes Earned in the Local Economy is a much better indicator of challenges faced in different places.** Of course, any income measure by itself does not reflect higher costs of living and housing
- **Population density**, which is in fact a sparsity indicator being population aged 16 to 65 per square kilometre (20%). Obviously, we have no problems with that one!
- **The indicators used to rank the England authorities for the Levelling Up Fund are:**

Target metric	Indicator	Data source (data for)	Indicator weight (Target metric weight)
<b>Indicator 1: Need for economic recovery and growth</b>			<b>50%</b>
<b>Productivity</b>	Natural log of GVA per hour worked	ONS (2018); For any LA that had changed boundaries since 2018, a data point was constructed using population sizes and the previous LA statistics	(33.3%)
<b>Unemployment</b>	Estimates of unemployment rate in the 16+ population	ONS model-based estimates of unemployment rates (October 2019 – September 2020) in the first instance; Where data was not available for an LA, ONS raw estimates of unemployment rates over aggregated geographies (2) (October 2019 – September 2020) were used	(33.3%)
<b>Skills</b>	Proportion of the 16-64 population without NVQ qualifications	ONS (January 2019 – December 2019) in the first instance; Where data was not available for an LA, ONS estimates over aggregated geographies (2) (January 2019 – December 2019) were used	(33.3%)



Target metric	Indicator	Data source (data for)	Indicator weight (Target metric weight)
<b>Indicator 2: Need for improved transport connectivity</b>			<b>25%</b>
<b>Journey time to employment by car</b>	Average journey time to the nearest employment centre of at least 5,000 jobs when traveling by car	DfT (2017); For any LA that had changed boundaries since the 2017 data publication, weighted journey time stats were created based on population and previous LA statistics	(75.2%)
<b>Journey time to employment by public transport</b>	Average journey time to the nearest employment centre of at least 5,000 jobs when traveling by public transport	DfT (2017); For any LA that had changed boundaries since the 2017 publication, weighted journey time stats were created based on population and previous LA statistics	(21.2%)
<b>Journey time to employment by cycle</b>	Average journey time to the nearest employment centre of at least 5,000 jobs when traveling by cycle	DfT (2017); For any LA that had changed boundaries since the 2017 publication, weighted journey time stats were created based on population and previous LA statistics	(3.5%)

Target metric	Indicator	Data source (data for)	Indicator weight (Target metric weight)
<b>Indicator 3: Need for regeneration</b>			<b>25%</b>
<b>Commercial vacancy rate</b>	Proportion of retail, industrial, office and leisure units that are vacant	Publicly available commercial location data from Whythawk and <a href="https://www.sqwyre.com">Sqwyre.com</a> (July 2020); Where LAs did not share their vacancy rate data, the average vacancy rate of the LAs in the same ONS aggregated area (2) that did share their commercial vacancy rate was used as a proxy. Where no LA in the ONS aggregated area shared their vacancy rate, the average vacancy rate of the LAs over larger aggregated geographies (3) were used as a proxy. For any LAs where boundaries had changed since 2020, a data point was constructed using population sizes and the previous LA statistics	(75%)
<b>Dwelling's vacancy rate</b>	Proportion of dwellings chargeable for council tax that are classed as long-term empty (empty for more than 6 months) (4)	MHCLG (2020)	(25%)

## The Levelling Up Fund uses three of the same indicators as the Community Renewal Fund

1. **Productivity**, (GVA per hour worked), which is given the most weight (30%). **Probably reasonably helpful for the rural or at least peripheral areas case;**
2. **Unemployment rate** which is for aged 16+ and measured through a year (20%). **Whilst never a good rural indicator, measuring through a year should largely address seasonal employment concerns. Does not capture 'under-employment' where a person has 2 or 3 part-time, low paid jobs to make ends meet.;**
3. **Skills**. which is per cent aged 16 to 64 with no NVQ level qualifications (20%). **Again, probably reasonably helpful in some rural areas, given the outflow of skilled people;**

It also uses:

- **Transport connectivity**, measured as average journey times to the nearest employment centre by car, public transport and bike. This is helpful, of course, though not as helpful as it could be because journey by car is given a much greater weighting (what a strange message that is in the context of net-zero!) than journey than public transport or by bike. Urban-rural differences are much greater in that DfT data set for public transport.
- **Regeneration need**, measured by vacancy rates for commercial and residential buildings (with commercial given the greater weight). We are not too sure what type of area this favours.

## 7.0 WELCOME BACK FUND

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**This New Fund was announced on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021 as part of a “New Raft of Measures to Prepare Our High Streets and Seaside Resorts for Summer.” In effect the proposals are to support high streets and seaside resorts after COVID-19 lockdown restrictions are lifted. We concentrate in this Briefing Note on the financial support proposals only.**

The Welcome Back Fund is worth £56.1M. Regional allocations have been detailed but not allocations to specific places. The Fund “will help councils boost tourism, improve green spaces and provide more outdoor seating areas, markets and food stall pop-ups – giving people more safer options to reunite with friends and relatives”.

Part of this funding will be allocated specifically to support coastal areas, with funding going to all coastal resorts across England to safely welcome holiday makers in the coming months.

The funding can also be used by councils to:

- Boost the look and feel of their high streets by investing in street planting, parks, green spaces and seating areas to make high streets as beautiful and welcoming as possible
- Run publicity campaigns and prepare to hold events like street markets and festivals to support local businesses
- Install signage and floor markings to encourage social distancing and safety
- Improve high streets and town centres by planting flowers or removing graffiti

Also announced was the first 70 councils “who will benefit from targeted, hands-on support from the government’s High Streets Task Force, an elite team of high street experts who will advise them on how to adapt to meet changing consumer demands so they can thrive in the years ahead.”

### **KEY MESSAGES**

**Our initial analysis shows just 4 Predominantly rural areas are in the list of 70 authorities. The need for this support has been “assessed using the Index of Multiple Deprivation and a measure of retail exposure.” Details of the exact measures used have not yet been made available. The RSN has long argued that the IMD has a bias against rural areas in its composition.**

## 8.0 LOOKING AHEAD TO THE SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

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It is worth noting that the Community Renewal Fund Prospectus states that the UKSPF (which will at least match EU receipts, on average reaching around £1.5bn a year) will have 2 strands:

- **A place-based portion “which will target places most in need across the UK, such as ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and rural and coastal communities”.**
- **A second portion will be “targeted differently to people most in need through bespoke employment and skills programmes that are tailored to local need”**

Details of this UK-wide Investment Framework will be published this year and the (financial) profile will be confirmed at the next Spending Review.

## APPENDICES

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### TOWNS FUND BRIEFING NOTE

Looking at the £3.6bn Towns Fund (which includes £325m for the Future High Streets Fund)

- Through the £3.6bn Towns Fund, 101 towns were announced that will work toward a Town Deal (part of the government's plan to level up the regions)
- The 101 towns were invited to develop proposals for a Towns Deal, with the establishment of Town Deal Boards, with investment priorities and project proposals then set out in a locally-owned Town Investment Plan.
- Proposals would drive long term economic and productivity growth through investment in connectivity, land use, economic assets including cultural assets, skills and enterprise infrastructure.
- Capacity funding allocation per town has been set out (funding provided to unitary councils, metropolitan borough councils, and district councils, to assist with the development of proposals)
- The 101 towns were selected from 1,082 towns in England (populations from 5,000 to 225,000, not including any towns within Greater London). Using the ONS measure of deprivation at town level, the less needy half of towns were excluded from being eligible. Officials gathered information on the 541 eligible towns, using different indicators of need, opportunity and alignment with other government priorities. These were then grouped into high, medium and low priority categories. All high priority towns were selected, and ministers selected the remaining towns using the information provided and their own judgment. **(detail of the selection process below)**
- The Towns invited to develop proposals as part of the Towns Fund programme have been divided into Cohorts, with each Cohort progressing through the Towns Fund programme at different times.

**The following is an extract from a National Audit Office report which ‘sets out the facts about the process by which the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government chose the 101 towns in England it invited to develop Town Deals’**

The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government’s (the Department’s) officials (officials) assessed there were 541 towns across England potentially eligible for Town Deals. Officials took as the starting point all 1,082 towns across England as designated by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). These were defined as built-up areas with a minimum area of 20 hectares (200,000 m<sup>2</sup>), with individual settlements separated by at least 200 metres, and with a population between 5,000 and 225,000. Towns do not necessarily mirror established administrative areas, such as local authorities.

Officials ranked all towns by income deprivation, an indicator the ONS had estimated for all 1,082 towns and published in July 2019. The Department regarded income deprivation as the most relevant of the few town-level indicators available at the time. Officials identified the 541 towns with an income deprivation above the median value as potentially eligible for Town Deals.

Officials scored and ranked the 541 eligible towns across England using a weighted formula across multiple criteria. In each region of England, officials scored and ranked towns based on a formula that combined scores against seven criteria chosen to reflect local need and growth potential: income deprivation, skills deprivation, productivity, EU Exit exposure, exposure to economic shocks, investment opportunity and alignment to wider government intervention (see table below – Fig 1). The first four criteria were drawn from official statistics and the remaining three were based on officials' assessments. Officials differentially weighted the separate criteria to give greater significance to those they determined to be based on more robust data at town level geographically.

Fig 1 - Criteria used to assess towns' need and growth potential. Officials combined seven criteria to give an overall score for each town

<b>Metric</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Geography</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Weight</b>
Income deprivation	Income component of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation	Town Level <sup>1</sup>	MHCLG (the Department)/ Office for National Statistics (ONS)	2015	3
Skills deprivation	Proportion of the working-age population with no qualifications at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level	Local authority	ONS	2018	1
Productivity	Gross value added per hour worked	NUTS3 <sup>2</sup>	ONS	2017	1
EU Exit exposure	Gross value added of sectors identified as 'at risk' by the Bank of England with respect to a "no deal, no transition" EU Exit <sup>2</sup>	NUTS3 <sup>2</sup>	The Department/ONS/Bank of England	2017	1

Exposure to economic shocks	Significant economic shocks in the town's recent history (qualitative)	Town level	The Department	2019	1
Investment opportunity	Opportunity for investment Signaled by significant current or upcoming private investment(qualitative)	Town level	The Department	2019	1
Alignment to wider government intervention	The presence of other government funding or programming with which the Towns Fund could have additionality and synergy (qualitative)	Town level	The Department	2019	2

In addition to these seven criteria, the selection process included a regional element, with the aim of focusing funding on the regions with higher need. A town's prospects are affected by the wider region it sits within.

Officials therefore applied a needs-based regional allocation formula which incorporated Local Enterprise Partnership-level (LEP-level) data on: ***productivity, income, skills, deprivation and rural/urban classification (with rural areas assumed to have greater need)***.

Officials calculated a recommended number of deals, from the planned total of 100 towns, for each of the eight English regions, see table below (Fig 2). The Greater London region is excluded because it does not contain towns as defined by the ONS. Recommended number of towns per region to be invited to bid for Town Deals. Officials recommended how the 100 towns should be distributed across regions.



Fig 2

Region	Recommended number of towns
North West	21
Yorkshire and the Humber	19
West Midlands	18
East Midlands	14
North East	11
East of England	6
South West	6
South East	5

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Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Officials divided the 541 eligible towns into high-, medium- and low-priority groups.

- High-priority towns: The Department placed 40 towns in the high-priority group. Within each region, officials categorised 40% of the number of recommended towns as high priority, so that high-priority towns were spread across the regions in proportion to the total number of recommended towns (Figure 2). These towns were those with the highest scores within each region, scored highly across most criteria, and for which officials found that using different formula weightings resulted in only small changes to their scores and rankings. They were not the 40 towns with the highest scores across the whole of England because the aim was to identify high-priority towns in each region of England.
- Low-priority towns: Officials categorised 181 towns as low priority either because they were among the 15% lowest-scoring towns in their region or **because they were small (fewer than 15,000 inhabitants, or fewer than 10,000 in the South West region, unless they formed part of a cluster of small towns that made up one economic unit).**

- Medium-priority towns: Officials designated the remaining 380 towns as medium priority.
- Officials made recommendations to ministers regarding their selection of towns from the three priority groups:
- High-priority towns: Officials recommended to ministers that all 40 high-priority towns be selected to bid for funding, and that no additional explanation for their selection was required.
- Medium-priority towns: Officials recommended that ministers select up to 60 medium-priority towns, depending on how many low-priority towns they chose, to bring the total number of selected towns to 100 (ministers ultimately selected 101 towns). They were asked to provide a brief rationale for their selection in this category.
- Low-priority towns: Rather than ruling them out entirely, officials left it open for ministers to select towns for Town Deals from the group of 181 low-priority towns. Officials recommended that ministers choose relatively few low-priority towns and record a strong rationale for any selected.

Officials provided ministers with additional suggestions on other factors they might consider in their selection. This included:

- Disqualifying the largest towns, or towns with a City Deal. Officials suggested that ministers should consider ruling out places which were in principle eligible to benefit from City Deals (another policy for supporting local growth). Officials provided ministers with a list of the 15 largest towns (as defined by the ONS) to illustrate which ones might be ruled out if the largest towns were disqualified.
- Clustering towns. Officials suggested that clusters of small, nearby towns that function as a single place could be offered the opportunity to bid for a ~~single~~ shared Town Deal.
- Aiming to spread Town Deals across and within LEAs. Officials suggested that ministers might aim for a spread of towns across LEA areas, in addition to the spread of towns across English regions. It also suggested a mixture of larger and smaller towns within each LEA.

Consulting with mayors on town selection. Officials suggested that in metropolitan areas with directly elected mayors, ministers might want to consult with these mayors before settling on their final selection of towns.

- 14 High Streets are in Predominantly Rural authorities, 12 in Urban with Significantly Rural and 46 in Predominantly Urban. As proportions of total schemes, that's 19%, 17% and 64% respectively.

- This is in comparison to the proportion of all authorities in these classifications of 28%, 17% and 56% respectively. So, the distribution of schemes is thus far, skewed towards Predominantly Urban local authority areas, at the expense solely of Predominantly Rural. A second round with new assessment criteria was mentioned within the initial prospectus.
- Looking at the total value of the projects per head of population within the classifications, Predominantly Rural has funding of £37.99 per head, Urban with Significantly Rural has £67.00 per head, and Predominantly Urban has £53.24. So, in addition to the funding distribution already being skewed towards Predominantly Urban (for whatever reason that may be), the funding that does get awarded in Predominantly Rural is smaller per head of population.
- The funding guidance states: “We expect bidding local authorities to put forward a single, transformative submission covering one high street or town centre in their area” However, it also states that: “authorities with populations significantly higher than the national average are able to submit more than one expression of interest to the Future High Streets Fund”
- A breakdown of how many bids each authority is able to submit to the Future High Streets Fund was provided.
- Taking West Devon as an example, it has below average population for a local authority and so can only submit a single bid. However, it has two towns as defined by ONS, Tavistock and Okehampton, approximately 15 miles apart. Any transformative effect of a successful bid in one of the towns, is going to have minimal positive impact on the residents or businesses of the other town. Looking therefore at the number of bids possible for each classification, and applying it to the geographical area covered by the classification nationally; if every bid were successful, a project in a Predominantly Rural local authority would have to have transformative effects covering 80,460 hectares, where as a scheme in a Predominantly Urban authority would cover 7,380 hectares.
- Looking at it another way, if a project had a significant transformative effect spanning a 5-mile radius of the funded high street, Predominantly Urban population would benefit significantly from multiple schemes (taking the situation based on classification averages and all bids being successful), in that a population greater than that of all Predominantly Urban authorities nationally could benefit from projects successful in that classification of authority)
- The competition took place over two phases. Phase 1 was a light-touch process calling for Expressions of Interest from Metropolitan and Unitary Councils, London Boroughs and Shire Districts.

- Phase 2 Business Cases were assessed by HM Treasury Green Book methodologies (with the urban bias therein). Phase 2 revenue funding to support development of project plans was available. Expressions of Interest were required to indicate the level of revenue funding needed, but the full amount was not guaranteed.
- The question exists of whether Shire Districts (and rural authorities in general, given their historic underfunding) would have the same capacity as their single tier, urban neighbours to develop robust project plans, given full capacity funding would not be guaranteed, and is a significant consideration to the fairness of the competition.
- The prospectus also states that “We expect projects to be co-funded by public and private sector additions”. Are rural areas in an equal position to be able to offer public and private sector finance in their bids, or is it a financial hurdle that precludes them from developing bids of sufficient value to ensure rural residents get their fair share of Government funding locally, and to create the transformative change that Government expects and rural residents deserve?

## THE LEVELLING UP FUND PROSPECTUS

Areas (Districts or Unitary Council areas) are categorised as Priority 1 (highest), 2 or 3 (lowest)

ANALYSIS	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
Predominantly Rural	20% (19)	31% (34)	30% (34)
Urban with Significant Rural	13% (12)	16% (17)	18% (20)
Predominantly Urban	67% (62)	53% (57)	52% (59)
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>113</b>

- **This is limited to “high-value” local infrastructure.**
- Explicitly states that the funding structure for the Levelling Up Fund does not set a precedent for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- Fund is open to all areas and the amount of funding each area receives will be determined on a competitive basis.
- For this first round priority will be given to bids that can demonstrate investment or begin delivery on the ground in 2021/22. There will be subsequent rounds. Government expects all funding from this fund to be spent by 31 March 2024 (exceptionally 2024/25 for larger schemes)
- Local authorities most in need of levelling up identified in an index published alongside the prospectus. Index is “based on a combination of metrics including need for economic recovery and growth, need for improved connectivity and need for regeneration” **The methodology used to calculate the index has now been published and is being reviewed.**
- MPs expected to back one bid they see as a priority. Councils can submit one bid for every MP whose constituency lies wholly within their boundary.
- Focus on bids that require up to £20M of funding (between £20M-50M for transport projects)
- Bidding authorities should consider how to reach stakeholders from harder to reach rural communities in formulating their proposals.
- 3 themes for first round:

- Smaller transport projects – in particular public transport, active travel, bridge repairs, bus priority lanes, local road improvements and major structural maintenance and accessibility improvements.
  - Regeneration and town centre investment. **[The Prospectus notes that whilst some local areas have benefited from programmes such as the Towns Fund “some places such as smaller towns have not yet been able to access this investment]” Under this Levelling Up fund a bid can include “Towns Deals for individual or groups of smaller towns that did not receive investment from the Towns Fund”**
  - Cultural investment
- Projects should be aligned to and support Net Zero Goals.
- Bids to be submitted by 18<sup>TH</sup> June. Government decisions by ‘autumn 2021’ (for this first round).
- Bids ‘encouraged to include a local financial contribution of at least 10% of total costs. If private sector stakeholders stand to benefit from a specific project a contribution from them is expected.
- Over and above the metrics that Ministers will have the opportunity to exercise discretion to meet the following additional considerations:
- Ensuring a reasonable thematic split of approved projects (e.g., across regeneration and town centre, transport and culture and heritage);
  - Ensuring a fair spread of approved projects across Great Britain;
  - Ensuring a fair balance of approved projects across places in need;
  - Prioritisation of either ‘strategic fit’ or ‘deliverability’ or ‘value for money’ over the other criteria (noting this must be applied consistently to all projects);
  - Taking into account other investment in a local area. In future rounds, this could include funding provided to local areas through the first round of this Fund.
- Further detail on the assessment and scoring process will be published following the Budget.

**UK COMMUNITY RENEWAL FUND PROSPECTUS 2021-22**

There is a List of named **101 lead authorities** invited to submit proposals.

ANALYSIS		
Predominantly Rural	26%	percentage of English priority group of 72 authorities
Urban with Significant Rural	28%	
Predominantly Urban	46%	
SPARSE ASSEMBLY	50%	percentage of English priority group that are RSN members

- This is a Fund for 2021/22 only and has a value of £220M
- Its purpose is stated as “help support local areas to pilot imaginative new approaches and programmes that unleash their potential, instil pride and prepare them to take full advantage of the OK Shared Prosperity Fund when it launches in 2022’.
- Supported projects are described as pilots “to empower places to explore how best to take local challenges – whether through building skills, supporting local businesses, supporting communities and places, or providing employment support” and to “allow government to evaluate how best to ensure levelling up right across the country”
- Competitive process with no pre-set eligibility. That said the Prospectus says that these pilots should support those most disengaged from the labour market. Bids may include, but are not limited to, interventions that address:
  - ✓ Supporting people to engage with local services which support them on their journey towards employment
  - ✓ Identifying and addressing any potential barriers these individuals may face in gaining support
  - ✓ Raising aspirations, supporting individuals to access Plan for Jobs employment support, find jobs and find sustainable employment
  - ✓ Supporting people to gain the basic skills they need to develop their potential for sustainable work
  - ✓ Testing what works in helping people move towards work

- The government is also interested in proposals for innovative pilots and projects that address community needs and support local places through projects such as:
  - ✓ Feasibility studies for delivering net-zero and local energy projects.
  - ✓ Exploring opportunity for promoting culture-led regeneration and community development.
  - ✓ Improving green spaces and preserving important local assets.
  - ✓ Promoting rural connectivity- for example, developing opportunities for digital functionality and physical connectivity to help realise the full potential of rural businesses. This may include exploring proposed innovative ideas for enhancing accessibility and social, economic and cultural opportunities for rural communities, including rural and green infrastructure.
- The 100 places have been identified based on an index of economic resilience” **Methodology has now been published and is being reviewed.** Will be capacity funding provided to the lead authority for these 100 places.
- Bids due by 18<sup>th</sup> June. Decisions Late July onwards.
- Maximum £3M per place (District or Unitary geography).
- Maximising the leverage of other funding encouraged. No match funding required for employment support projects and recognition that “not all projects or applicants will be able to secure match funding”





## "Rural Transport Survey" 2021

Report to the Rural Market Town Group

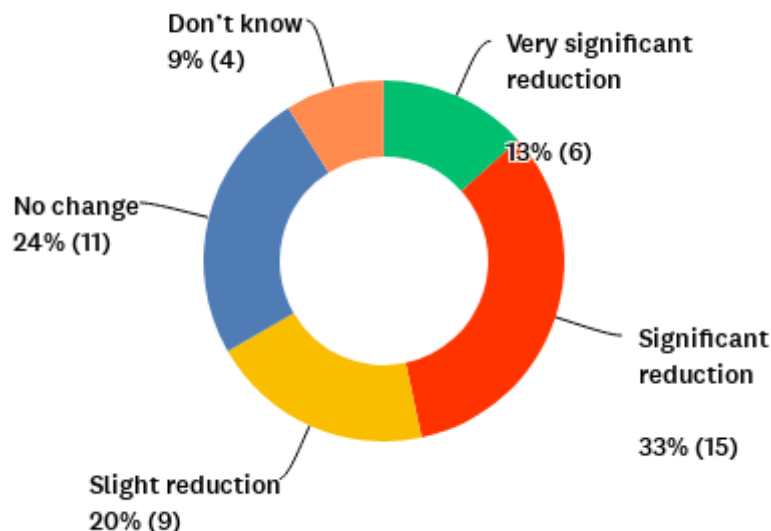
### Background

During the inaugural meeting of the RSN's Rural Market Town Group held on 9th November 2020, members in attendance requested to be surveyed on rural transport. Members highlighted the important role of their respective towns as service hubs for rural residents in their areas and that the vitality of their towns is detrimentally impacted by reductions/removal of bus service. To establish the position on rural transport across the Group's membership, we agreed to carry out this short survey.

At the time of this survey over 160 RMTG members were requested to provide feedback on this issue and 45 of our RMTG members from all over England shared their views on the rural transport situation in their area. A 28% response rate to any survey is very good.

### Bus Service Provision

Q1 Do you think that over the last 3 years there has been a significant reduction in bus services from your surrounding rural areas into your rural/market town 'hub'?



According to survey results 46% of RMTG members have noted a 'very significant' or 'significant' reduction in bus service provision from their surrounding areas to their respective local rural/market town 'hub'.

**Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers**

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

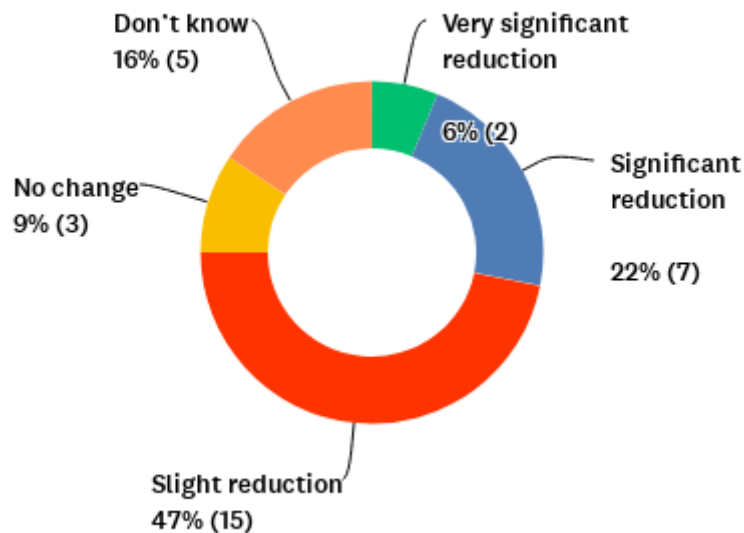
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## Impact on the rural market hub town

Q2 As a result of lack of rural transport, do you think there has been a significant reduction in the number of people using rural market town / rural 'hub' town shops and services?



A smaller number of respondents (32) answered the question on the impact of the lack of transport services on their rural market town businesses and other services, with most stating that they have noted only a 'slight reduction' in the usage of local rural business and services in their respective rural market towns and just 9 indicating a significant or very significant impact.

## Other Outcomes

### Data & evidence showing any decrease in trade due to reduction in bus services.

No respondents provided or were able to provide any data or evidence to show the value of any decrease in trade due to the reduction in local bus services. Several reasons about the lack of data in their local area were provided instead:

- The impact of collecting such data in the current Covid-19 pandemic will inevitably heavily skew any relevant data due to people preferring to use private modes of transport (cars, bicycles) due to health & wellbeing reasons.
- No available data in their area (for example, County Councils not monitoring/collecting and making such data available anymore).

### Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers



- The overall visible signs of local shop closures on their respective high streets due to lack of footfall.

## Spotlight

It is worth noting that in each area of Derbyshire, Lancashire, and Suffolk two local town/parish council members per area, have highlighted that they have been experiencing 'very significant reduction' & 'significant reduction' of bus service provision in their areas.

Q1 on Bus Service Provision	Q2 on Impact on rural market 'hub' town	County/Area	RMTG Member
Significant reduction	Significant reduction	Barnsley	Penistone Town Council
Significant reduction	Significant reduction	Bath and North East Somerset	Midsomer Norton Town Council
Very significant reduction		Cambridgeshire	Soham Town Council
Significant reduction	Very significant reduction	Cornwall	St Austell Town Council
Significant reduction	Slight reduction	Cumbria	Penrith Town Council
Very significant reduction	Significant reduction	Derbyshire	Bakewell Town Council
Significant reduction	Don't know	Derbyshire	Bakewell Town Council
Very significant reduction	Significant reduction	Devon	Great Torrington Town Council
Significant reduction		Durham	Middleton-in-Teesdale and Newbiggin Parish Council
Significant reduction	Don't know	East Sussex	Uckfield Town Council
Significant reduction	Slight reduction	Gloucestershire	Wotton Town Council
Significant reduction	Very significant reduction	Herefordshire	Leominster Town Council
Very significant reduction	Slight reduction	Lancashire	Charnock Richard Parish Council
Very significant reduction	Significant reduction	Lancashire	Earby Town Council
Significant reduction	Slight reduction	Leicestershire	Earl Shilton Town Council
Significant reduction	Significant reduction	Shropshire	Wem Town Council
Significant reduction	Significant reduction	Somerset	Chard Town Council
Significant reduction	Slight reduction	Staffordshire	Uttoxeter Town Council
Significant reduction	Don't know	Suffolk	Clare Town Council
Significant reduction	Slight reduction	Suffolk	Saxmundham Town Council
Very significant reduction	Slight reduction	West Yorkshire	Wetherby Town Council

## Conclusion

Despite the impacts of Covid-19 and the lack of local evidence/data available to members, **all 45 respondents highlighted that over the past 3 years, 66% of RMTG members have seen either a 'very significant', 'significant or 'slight' reduction in bus services connecting them to their nearest rural market & 'hub' towns is a worry and shows a clear issue with rural transport provision.**

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