



# **a vision for rural england**

## TCPA Policy Statement

**Town & Country Planning  
Association**

January 2012

# A Vision for Rural England

## Summary

This policy statement sets out the TCPA's views on the future of rural England. Cherished for its distinctive landscapes and diverse wildlife, rural England is also home for over 12 million people and at least half a million businesses; it is also an open-air factory for growing food and providing essential eco-services such as water, flood control, recyclable energy and carbon sinks.

In this statement the TCPA addresses five critical challenges and opportunities:

### 1

**How do we meet the immediate needs of many rural people for affordable homes, well paid jobs, and access to services?** These are familiar problems which have developed over many decades, partly as a consequence of planning and housing policies. The national policy response is also familiar, with a rhetoric in favour of a 'living, working countryside'. But the delivery of this policy has largely failed. A new Rural Coalition was set up in 2009 under the chairmanship of Lord Matthew Taylor to show how successful implementation could be achieved. It published *The Rural Challenge* in 2010, and the TCPA – as one of the founder members of the Rural Coalition – supports its recommendations.

### 2

**How do we meet the additional housing and employment needs of a growing and ageing population?** England's population and household total continue to grow, and there is a strong and growing desire to live in rural areas. Rural England can be a sustainable location for people to live and work in, as part of a wider urban-rural connected space: rural living and working now extends beyond the rural land-based economy and is essentially part of a wider peri-urban settlement pattern. ***The TCPA believes that it is possible to locate well designed, connected and sustainable development in the countryside.*** The garden city, new market town and eco-town (and eco-village) models can offer a radical approach – provided that local and sub-regional circumstances are fully recognised. However, planning new communities is not without formidable challenges to relationships with existing rural residents, including providing sustainable transport and delivering truly 'sustainable development' in the rural context.

## 3

**How can rural England cope with the economic pressures and restrictions facing the nation?** Rural economies are varied and have great potential for growth. They are relatively well placed to respond flexibly to changes in world markets and growth technologies – provided that the infrastructure is supported and improved, for example by providing small workplace units, fast broadband and helpful support for home working. ***Rural planning policies should recognise and facilitate the potential for rural economies to change and grow.***

## 4

**Rural areas have crucial roles to play in growing food and providing eco-services in a world facing the threats of climate change.** The food security imperative means that ***rural policy must support farms in growing food more efficiently while also delivering essential eco-services such as water, drainage and flood control, recyclable energy and carbon sinks.*** It will not be easy to undertake these multiple roles, but success will be critical for successful sustainable development, especially in facing up to the urgent need for mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

## 5

**Implementing these policies successfully will be the greatest challenge of all.** Many of these rural problems and opportunities are familiar. So are some of the solutions. But delivering them will require a joined-up approach which is not at the forefront of recent proposals for change to the planning system. Fundamentally delivery will require:

- **National policies** which through ‘rural proofing’ recognise and respond to specific rural issues such as affordable housing, declining services, and the provision of eco-services; and also respond to rural areas’ potential to provide sustainable jobs and homes for a significant number of people.
- **Sub-national** analysis and co-operation which recognises and responds to key strategic inter-relationships between issues such as employment, housing, transport, energy, recycling and conservation through effective collaboration between appropriate bodies.
- **Local and community planning** which recognises and responds to the distinctive needs and opportunities of rural communities through effective collaboration between community-led planning initiatives and the local plans and strategies of local authorities and other bodies.

## Section 1

# Introduction

This Policy Statement sets out the TCPA's views on the future of rural England. It articulates the Association's vision for that future, and the spatial planning policies required to realise that vision. It has been produced at a time when the planning system is going through a very radical transformation, with a strong emphasis on localism alongside the removal of the strategic tier. Rural communities, with their strong traditions and experience of community-led initiatives, have much to gain from localism, provided that it is implemented in a constructive, inclusive and practicable way. Indeed, they are in a position to lead the way in showing how a 'bottom-up' approach can work. However, there are demographic, social, economic and environmental challenges facing rural areas which cannot be resolved by local communities alone. The TCPA is concerned about these wider challenges and how they can be addressed. The Association is thus taking the longer – and wider – view.



## Section 2

# The story so far...

Rural England is the product of a long historic relationship between human activity and the land. Since the Second World War it has also been the object of distinctive state policies in support of agriculture, recreation, conservation and urban containment – the latter in particular through Green Belts around selected cities and towns, together with strong protection of the wider countryside. While delivering considerable success on their own terms, these policies have also led to some unintended consequences for many rural communities – such as a narrow economic base, low wages, declining services and, above all, unaffordable homes. Furthermore, they have failed to release the rich potential which rural England offers for much wider economic enterprises (see **Box 1**), providing secure and attractive homes, and facing up to the challenges of climate change – the ‘living and working countryside’ expounded in the official policy rhetoric of two Rural White Papers produced by separate successive governments in 1993 and 2000.

But if the Rural White Papers heralded a new policy direction for rural England in the 21st century, the *implementation* of the policies they set out has been less than satisfactory. An analysis undertaken by the TCPA<sup>1</sup> has shown that rural planning remains essentially restrictive: rural villages – especially the smaller ones – are more often than not regarded as fundamentally ‘unsustainable’, mostly owing to the limited availability of

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1 Unpublished analysis by the TCPA and Trevor Cherrett, Feb. 2010

### Box 1

## How rural economies have changed and grown

‘As food security moves sharply up the agenda, so rightly has the recognition of the importance of our farms and food producers. However, the rural economy is not just about farms and land-based businesses. Millions of people live and work in the countryside, at least half a million businesses are based there, and rural business is worth nearly £14,500 million to the national economy every year (*Source: State of the Countryside 2010*. Commission for Rural Communities). Taken as a whole, rural areas are more entrepreneurial and generate higher levels of business creation per head of population than all of Inner London. The survival rate of most businesses is high. However, the overall figures conceal the fact that in many rural areas average incomes for those who actually work there are lower than the urban average.’

*Source: The Rural Challenge: Achieving Sustainable Rural Communities for the 21st Century*. Rural Coalition, Aug. 2010, p.18)

services. Economic activities beyond the bounds of traditional land-based activities are often resisted. Above all, affordable housing remains a problem of crisis proportions, and is repeatedly the subject of 'dying village' news stories. Government-commissioned reports in 2005 (Eleanor Goodman's *Final Report of the Affordable Rural Housing Commission*) and in 2008 (Matthew Taylor's *Living Working Countryside*) are testaments to a lack of progress, as well as pointers to much needed solutions.

To help close the gap between rhetoric and reality, in August 2010 a new 'Rural Coalition', chaired by Lord Taylor, published *The Rural Challenge: Achieving Sustainable Rural Communities in the 21st Century*. This report not only reflected an impressive consensus concerning the need for more positive policies to meet the needs and release the potential of rural England, but also explained in some detail what such policies comprised and how they could be delivered (seven national organisations – including the TCPA – signed up to the report, and the Rural Coalition has now grown to 15 members). The report's detailed recommendations and propositions show what is needed in practice to address the ongoing crises in meeting rural housing needs, building thriving rural economies, delivering excellent rural services, promoting flourishing market towns, and truly empowering rural communities in the emerging context of localism (see **Box 2**).

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## Box 2

### The Rural Coalition and *The Rural Challenge*

In its report *The Rural Challenge: Achieving Sustainable Rural Communities for the 21st Century*, published in August 2010,<sup>i</sup> the Rural Coalition called for action on the following key propositions:

- 1 Creating and maintaining sustainable rural communities** through guidance and support from national and local spatial plans, and through genuine collaboration and engagement with local communities.
- 2 Meeting the affordable housing needs of rural communities** by augmenting existing mechanisms (such as exceptions sites and developer agreements) through:
  - the 'Community Right to Build' (provided that specific criteria are met – namely evidence of need, affordability in perpetuity, appropriate siting, scale and design, and community support);
  - more options for 'intermediate' affordable housing;
  - incentives for landowners; and
  - more freedom for local authorities to manage their housing finances.
- 3 Building thriving rural communities** by:
  - providing a good supply of appropriate sites and premises;
  - redesigning business support services tailored to rural needs;
  - adopting innovative approaches to rural enterprise;
  - providing support and encouragement for home-working;
  - encouraging high-speed broadband access;
  - providing support and encouragement for acceptable small-scale renewable energy developments; and
  - ensuring positive engagement with Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- 4 Delivering great local services** by:
  - taking more account of the additional costs of rural delivery;
  - supporting Universal Service Obligations that prevent 'urban cherry-picking' by service deliverers;
  - promoting the 'Community Right to Bid' in ways that encompass community-led initiatives in flexible ways;
  - encouraging multi-purpose service outlets (for example in post offices); and
  - investing in more effective, innovative and sustainable transport solutions for rural areas.
- 5 Enabling the growth of flourishing market towns** by improving the quality of new housing, supporting services, and open spaces, through the effective engagement of local communities in shaping sustainable proposals and through stronger guidance and advice on design (for example through 'Enquiry by Design' and 'Planning for Real').
- 6 Empowering communities** by building on the experience of rural community-led activity and supporting local capacity for delivery via advice, training, community enablers, and modest funding opportunities.

i The authors of this report were the following members of the Rural Coalition: Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE); the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE); the Country Land and Business Association (CLA); the Local Government Group (LG Group); the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI); and the TCPA. The Rural Coalition was also advised and supported by Action for Market Towns (AMT), the National Housing Federation (NHF), the Rural Services Network (RSN), and the Plunkett Foundation – who are all now also members of the Rural Coalition – together with the National Farmers' Union (NFU), the Arthur Rank Centre, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). Further help and advice was provided by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), English Heritage (EH), the English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA), and the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC)

## Section 3

# The TCPA's rural vision

Many of the ideas and principles put forward here were first articulated as far back as 1991 in a report prepared for the TCPA by Ray Green and John Holliday.<sup>2</sup> For example, their report called for new policies which 'relate to social, economic and technological change' and which 'should replace existing but outdated policies of countryside 'protection' and the overdevelopment of historic country towns and villages'.

Green and Holliday anticipated that 'a large proportion of the 1 million new households projected in the next decade will be formed in the countryside... and new settlements will be needed if historic towns and villages are to be conserved'. They argued that as 'our concern about global warming grows and we strive to make sustainable development a reality, efficient settlements linked to high-standard public transport systems become an essential ingredient of planning'. And underpinning these arguments was a view that the countryside 'should not be a preserve for the few but a place in which new lives and landscapes can grow'.

In the meantime, as argued in the previous section, our progress on meeting even the basic needs for jobs and affordable housing has been slow. The Rural Coalition's report *The Rural Challenge* was undertaken to show how the national policy rhetoric of several decades could actually be implemented in practice.

The TCPA's position now is that, first and foremost, it supports the Rural Coalition's vision of a rural England in which every rural community can thrive. This means 'supporting new, better-paid and diverse employment opportunities, providing the homes needed for those who live and work in rural areas on low incomes, and maintaining and evolving the services they rely on' (*The Rural Challenge*, p.3).

This vision is essentially that of the 'living, working countryside' launched by the Rural White Papers, but reinforced by the Rural Coalition's more detailed propositions for policy and action to 'make it happen' (see **Box 2**). However, there are several specific challenges within this vision, many of them foreseen by Green and Holliday's 1991 report – challenges which deserve further exploration and emphasis. Three of these major challenges to a 'living, working countryside' are:

- First, the demographic pressures of a growing and ageing population, with many people keen to live and work in rural areas, presents formidable challenges to the planning and development of settlement

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2 R. Green and J. Holliday: *Country Planning: A Time for Action*. TCPA, 1991

patterns and the connections between them. We need to understand how rural communities fit into this 'big picture' in a sustainable way. Rural England can be a sustainable location for people to live and work in, as part of a wider urban-rural connected space: rural living and working now extends beyond the rural land-based economy and is essentially part of a wider peri-urban settlement pattern.

- Secondly, rural areas and communities need to face up to the global challenges of struggling economies and climate change. They must meet continued demands for precious natural resources such as food and water, while contributing effectively to climate change mitigation and adaptation, arguably the greatest of all the challenges facing human development.
- Thirdly, rural policies must be effective and deliverable. We need to ensure that the political drive towards 'localism' works for rural communities, building on many decades of experience in rural community-led activity. This 'bottom-up' approach needs to be supported by ways in which wider strategic issues such as economic regeneration and transport can be effectively addressed.

The responses to these challenges set out here are based on a number of fundamental principles and assumptions about rural England.

The starting point is what a recent OECD report<sup>3</sup> referred to as the nation's deep cultural attachment to the 'English countryside', with a focus on environmental preservation. This English rural landscape is, of course, the product of centuries of interaction between human activity and the land. Very little is 'wild' in the sense of 'untouched nature'. And this linkage between mankind and the land has profound implications for any vision for the future of the countryside. The TCPA accepts that human settlement and development are part of that continuous history, and are part of what is loved about the English countryside.

Our 'cultural attachment' is not only to the extraordinarily diverse geography of the land itself, but also to the way that the land has been used, whether for agriculture, forestry, mining or transport. Even quite extensive industrial activity has enriched our appreciation of both the appearance and enjoyment of the countryside. The English canal system is one example. Here, our admiration is not just a matter of nostalgia – although that undoubtedly plays a part – but is also rooted in our respect for the integrity of the development itself, in particular its design in relationship to both its function and the shape and form of the land in which it is built. Villages nestling into the fold of the hillside or farmsteads set within a wooded landscape are similar examples. The notion of protecting the 'intrinsic nature of the countryside', embedded in much of our national planning policy, should thus apply to the countryside as a human habitat as well as a wildlife habitat. We should also recognise,

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3 OECD Rural Policy Reviews: England, United Kingdom. OECD, Jan. 2011

celebrate and enhance the distinctiveness of different rural places, and plan accordingly. **The question for the future direction of rural planning should be as much concerned with *how* rural development should take place as *whether* it should take place.** Matters of *scale and design* are critical.

The TCPA believes that rural areas have a positive contribution to make to meeting housing and employment needs, as well as to recreation and conservation. Such provision might take the form of a carefully sited garden city, new market town or eco-town (or eco-village), connected by good public transport to urban and 'peri-urban' England. There may be specific reasons to say 'no' to development (such as the need to protect precious landscape or wildlife, at national and local levels), but there should not be an automatic presumption against development in the countryside to 'protect it for its own sake'.

Rural areas have significant potential to contribute to economic change and growth. They are also well equipped to meet the challenge of providing natural resources and of **rising to the carbon challenge and adapting to or mitigating climate change** – whether through the development of the green economy, such as the production of food, water and recyclable energy, or through the mobilisation of community efforts at local level. In the words of the recent OECD report,<sup>4</sup> 'rural areas make a positive contribution to the overall health – economic, environmental and social – of an area, and so all should benefit from intervention directed at improving rural life'.

However, **mitigation of and adaptation to climate change will be very challenging for rural communities, especially as fossil fuel energy bills rise.** Climate change will impact on rural communities through increasingly extreme weather conditions. The resulting effects – including storms, flooding, drought, fires, loss of cultivatable land, species extinction, and damaged power lines and flooded sub-stations – will impact negatively on quality of life and economic opportunities, particularly in the farming and tourism sectors. At the same time, rising fossil fuel prices will hit rural communities harder than high density urban areas. This is because rural communities have a greater reliance on cars, and rural areas have greater home heating requirements, because of lower external air temperatures and (in part as there is a greater prevalence of detached homes) lower overall thermal mass. Furthermore, much of the countryside is off the gas grid and consequently many rural residents pay more for oil or electric home heating systems.

The localism agenda should, in theory, be able to reinforce initiatives such as village community transport and low-carbon energy schemes which both mitigate green house gas emissions and adapt to climate change and rising fossil fuel prices. It is therefore likely that many rural communities will be highly motivated to play their part in mitigating and adapting to climate change and rising fossil fuel prices – and planning will be an essential tool

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4 OECD Rural Policy Reviews: England, United Kingdom. OECD, Jan. 2011

in helping to realise their aims. Aspects of this motivation will lie in the 'cultural attachment' to the countryside already mentioned, as well as in the pressing need to widen the narrow economic base through the development of a rural green economy. The emotional desire to protect the *romantic* landscape will be strong and will often lead to landscape and habitat preservation and subsequent tourism opportunities.

**Transport also presents a difficult but crucial challenge for rural communities.** Most journeys in rural areas are made using private cars. As rural population has grown, so too has both rural area car ownership and car use – both out of necessity and at a proportionally higher rate than population or housing growth. All the current evidence suggests that this trend will continue in future. To date, planning authorities have reacted by focusing rural growth in a limited number of villages with some local facilities and bus services. **This is an approach that is not viable in the short term, let alone the medium or long term, because it effectively makes many rural communities *less* sustainable.**

Ownership and use of a car is increasingly expensive, and there is considerable evidence that many families and communities suffer from deprivation of access to services, education, jobs and leisure activities. This situation most affects young and older people and those with lower income levels, and can only deteriorate as incomes fall or remain at current levels while fuel costs rise.

The approach to rural transport taken by local authorities has traditionally been based on subsidising a limited number bus routes, with little investment being made in walking or cycling – many villages have lengths of road with no footpath and narrow roads which are considered unsafe for walking or cycling. As local government resources are cut, many subsidised bus routes are disappearing, thus exacerbating access problems.

The new localism's neighbourhood planning provides an opportunity to address this situation through linked **community travel plans**, which, together with a radically different approach to the provision of a public transport network across an area developed in partnership with transport operators, businesses, education facilities etc., could secure a more viable and effective transport network. There is an opportunity to take a new and more effective approach to sustainable transport in rural areas through, for example, identifying local transport investment priorities in Infrastructure Delivery Plans and funding them through the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Critically, the simplistic notion – based almost entirely on crude measurements of available services – that villages are necessarily less 'sustainable' than urban areas must be challenged. Sustainability in social, cultural, economic and environmental terms will **depend far more on lifestyles and transport options than location per se** (see **Box 3**). This is not by any means to argue for a 'free for all'; rather it is to argue for plans based on a thorough and up-to-date understanding of the links

between housing, the economy and the environment, and above all for sustainable ways in which to connect people and activities. How we define and measure sustainable patterns of rural development is critical, and by no means easy. There is still much to learn.

How, then, can these policy approaches be effectively *delivered*?

Community-led development offers an important route to implementation. Rural communities already have much valuable experience in the 'bottom-up' approach, gained through initiatives such as Village Design Statements and Parish Maps. That experience shows that success in 'bottom-up' approaches will depend crucially on community confidence, adequate technical and organisational support, and most importantly the trust that develops from a strong and serious reciprocal relationship with the institutions of governance holding responsibilities for the policies and decisions affecting them. **This relationship should be a mix of participatory and representative democracy, where 'top-down' planning meets and genuinely negotiates and collaborates with the 'bottom-up' articulation of needs and knowledge.** The Localism Act 2011 makes a welcome commitment to this 'bottom-up' approach, but questions remain concerning effective delivery. In fact, good models for community-led participatory and representative democracy have already been created in rural areas – but they await widespread successful and effective implementation.

### Box 3

## Defining 'sustainable rural communities'

Research and policy thinking undertaken by the TCPA, the Commission for Rural Communities and the Rural Coalition<sup>i</sup> shows that 'rural sustainability' has been widely interpreted in practice as focusing on the availability of services, and especially public transport. This has typically produced Local Plans which focus development almost exclusively in market towns and a few larger villages. While the criteria on which such plans are based are without doubt very important, they are by no means the only ones. Opportunities to generate local employment, develop decent homes in attractive settings, and even provide local services such as shops and community centres based on local voluntary efforts should all be added into the 'sustainability' equation.<sup>ii</sup> A pilot project aimed at devising relevant and appropriate local sustainability criteria has produced a DIY toolkit which can be used by local communities and planners to identify key sustainability factors to shape planning policies for the local areas.<sup>iii</sup>

i See T. Cherrett: 'The future is rural too'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2010, Vol. 79, May, 233-7; the Commission for Rural Communities website, archived at [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/\\*/http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/*/http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/); and *The Rural Challenge: Achieving Sustainable Rural Communities for the 21st Century*. Rural Coalition, Aug. 2010

ii These issues are discussed in greater detail in the works cited in Note i, above

iii *A Toolkit for Sustainable Rural Communities*. Final Study Report. Roger Tym & Partners and Rural Innovation, Dec. 2008

Likewise, there are serious questions concerning the ways in which wider strategic issues such as economic growth, regional imbalances and transport – all of which affect rural as much as urban communities – will be addressed under the new planning regime. Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Duty to Co-operate could have important – if limited – roles, and it is essential that the opportunities and problems of rural areas are included in the purview of any strategic planning initiatives.

Rural conditions and issues will vary significantly between different areas of the country. These differences based not only on levels of remoteness – the ‘near country’ and the ‘far country’<sup>5</sup> – but also on different patterns of socio-economic activity,<sup>6</sup> all of which points to a *differentiated countryside*, calling for different approaches to local planning. Ray Green’s map of the socio-economic divisions in the rural areas of England and Wales, drawn from an analysis of the 2001 Census and shown in **Box 4**, illustrates some of this differentiation.

To conclude, the TCPA’s vision of rural England is based on, but also *strengthens*, the vision of a living and working countryside. Not only does the TCPA support the Rural Coalition’s call to meet the social and economic needs of existing rural communities, but it also extends that call to embrace, if necessary and appropriate, well designed sustainable development in the countryside to meet the needs and demands of a growing population and growing economies. This vision recognises in particular the ‘peri-urban’ nature of much of rural England and accepts that such sustainable development is both possible and desirable, and that it can be informed and shaped by effective community-led participation. It might take the form of modest additions to smaller villages or substantial extensions to larger market towns and villages, new market towns, garden cities and eco-towns (or eco-villages) in carefully selected locations. But any such development must be fully informed by local knowledge and opinion, detailed analysis of local and strategic economic, social and environmental circumstances, and considerations of high-quality siting and design – all predicated on continuously improving knowledge and understanding of what ‘sustainable rural development’ means in practice.

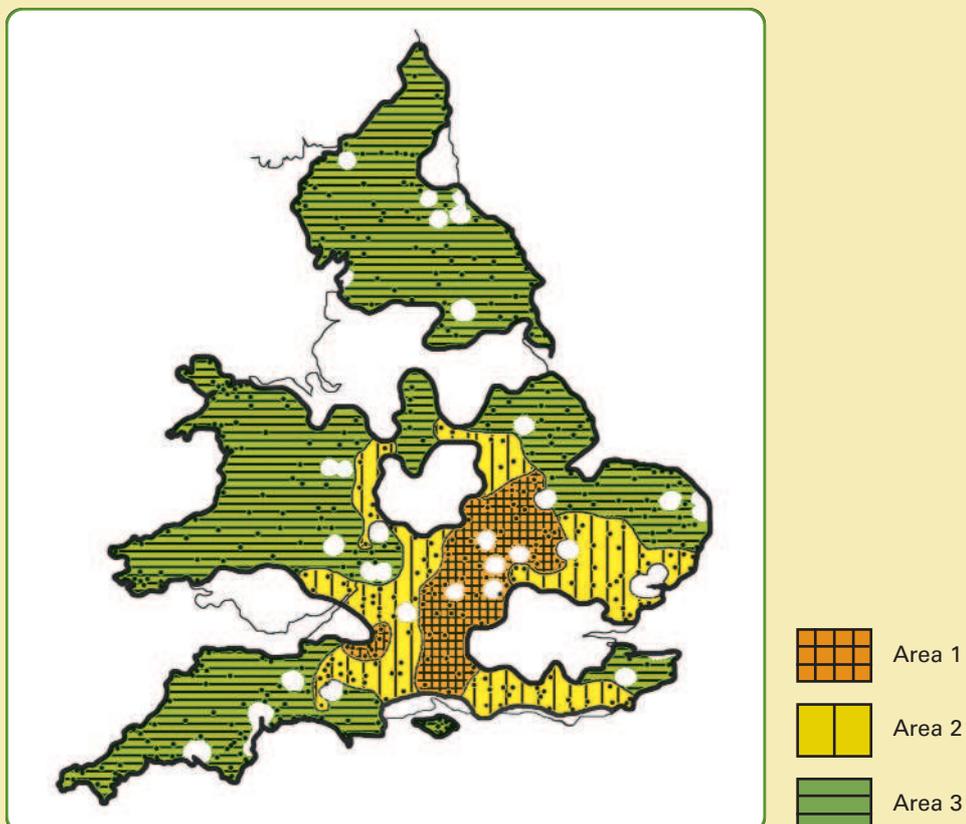
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5 P. Lowe and N. Ward: ‘Rural futures: a socio-geographical approach to scenarios analysis’. *Regional Studies*, 2009, Vol. 43 (10), 1319-32

6 R. Green: ‘The town in the country’. *Town & Country Planning*, 2009, Vol. 78, Feb., 74-82

## Box 4

### Socio-economic divisions in the 'rural regions'



The socio-economic divisions set out in the map above are derived from a study of 2001 Census data from over 400 towns in the 'rural regions' (demarcated by the thicker black boundary) of England and Wales.

- **Area 1** is based upon the larger towns of recent growth. In this area in 2001 there was great reliance upon service sector employment, economic activity rates were high, and unemployment was low. Car use was high, and distances travelled to work were greater than in most of the other study towns, while fewer walked or cycled to work.
- **Area 2** is an extension of Area 1, within which the characteristics of town growth and car usage and ownership were less extreme and economic activity rates and educational attainment were a little lower.
- **Area 3** includes two-thirds of the area of the rural regions – in this area capability of growth may be greater, but the potential is reduced by relative remoteness.

Source: R. Green: 'The town in the country'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2009, Vol. 78, Feb., 81 (Fig. 12)

## Section 4

# Rural planning policy for the future

In the context of a new planning regime, focused on localism but also based on a presumption in favour of 'sustainable development' as set out in the (as yet draft) National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and given the wider and longer-term pressures and drivers of demographic change, economic revival and environmental constraints, the TCPA argues that the following requirements must be met if its vision for rural England is to be translated into practical working policies for the future.

### 1

**National planning policies which acknowledge the particular needs and opportunities presented by rural areas (see the Rural Coalition's recommendations set out in Box 2) and which incorporate the principles of sustainable rural development (as outlined in Box 3) within the new National Planning Policy Framework.** It will be important to highlight key rural issues which will otherwise be in danger of becoming 'lost' in the mainstream of general policies, as the recent OECD report recognised.<sup>7</sup> These include:

- providing special support for affordable housing in rural communities, where the sale of council houses and high land prices severely restrict the opportunities to provide homes for local people on lower incomes;
- encouraging and supporting local rural economic opportunities (including new businesses and home-working as well as diversified land-based enterprises) in rapidly changing and growing rural economies;
- developing effective and sustainable transport networks for rural areas which complement the use of private cars (and help to reduce reliance on them);
- helping rural communities – so often deemed unviable by service providers – to continue to address their own needs for community services and facilities of all kinds;
- producing and safeguarding crucial resources, including food (as food security becomes an increasingly important national and global issue),

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<sup>7</sup> OECD Rural Policy Reviews: England, United Kingdom. OECD, Jan. 2011

water supplies, minerals, recyclable energy (sun, wind and water), carbon sinks, etc.; and

- conserving and celebrating England's rural landscapes and wildlife.

These are examples of key rural needs which can be addressed by strong national policies, supported in turn by appropriate sub-national and local planning policies (see below). In the longer run the TCPA calls for a national spatial plan which can translate these needs into real solutions on the ground, integrated with wider urban policies.

## 2

**Sub-national planning policies which recognise the different socio-economic and environmental circumstances of different rural areas (as illustrated in Box 4) and the particular problems and opportunities they present to local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships.** Guidance on the implementation of the 'Duty to Co-operate', now enshrined in the Localism Act 2011, should ensure that rural issues are properly addressed at this scale.

## 3

**Local Plans which adopt the very best practice in analysis and the formulation of policies for their rural areas, recognising the important changes under way in rural employment, movement and socio-cultural characteristics.** 'Sustainable development', as defined in the UK Government's Sustainable Development Strategy of 2005, should be interpreted locally and should not be limited to a limited list of indicators such as available services.

## 4

**Community-led planning which effectively and fairly expresses local community needs and aspirations and which can be used as a basis for statutory planning vehicles such as the Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders (as defined by the Localism Act).** Although there is widespread experience of rural community-led planning, this challenging and time-consuming process will need to be substantially resourced (for example by deploying the proceeds of the Community Infrastructure Levy and/or the proposed New Homes Bonus) and supported, and should take place through **collaboration between the local planning authority and the community** – 'bridging the divide' between 'them' and 'us'. By applying the lessons and principles of community-led planning, rural planning can 'go local' through a genuinely collaborative process between local

communities – who know their locality, their problems, and their aspirations – and the local authorities and agencies who have responsibility for managing and co-ordinating the wider picture.<sup>8</sup> Such an approach should command consensus support. In addition, transparent and effective statutory mechanisms for delivering neighbourhood planning must be clearly set out.

As noted, community-led planning is not new; it will be important to learn from good practice. For example, the kinds of initiatives and activities typical in many villages, and the collaborative planning needed to promote and support them, are being explored in a pilot project jointly designed and funded by the University of Brighton and Action in Rural Sussex.<sup>9</sup> Other guides to good practice are in preparation elsewhere, including a guide to the choices to be made from the plethora of new neighbourhood planning mechanisms now on offer.<sup>10</sup>

The new wave of rural local authority Core Strategies – either completed or in preparation – will have a critical role in shaping the future in terms of the issues described above. Encouragingly, there are signs that these rural issues are being seriously addressed. Cornwall Council, for example, recently endorsed a ground-breaking study of the functions of and interactions between the county's towns and villages – throwing more light on how its rural areas 'really work'. It has embarked on an ambitious and comprehensive programme of engagement with community networks across the county, aimed at identifying, agreeing and delivering local priorities via a series of meetings, seminars and training events which involve local elected members and help to build the crucial bridges between the local authority and communities.<sup>11</sup> Such good practice needs to be spread far and wide.

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8 J. Bishop: 'What chance for neighbourhood plans?'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2011, Vol. 80, Feb., 72-6

9 See <http://www.community21.org/about/>

10 *Planning and Localism: Choices and Choice Making*. CPRE Gloucestershire (forthcoming)

11 A. England: *Case Study: Rural Community Based Planning and Local Development Orders*. Presentation at the TCPA Conference 'Neighbourhood Planning: Building a New Relationship between People and Planning', London, Mar. 2011. [http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/microsoft\\_powerpoint\\_tcpa\\_cornwall\\_case\\_studyv4\\_webversion.pdf](http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/microsoft_powerpoint_tcpa_cornwall_case_studyv4_webversion.pdf)

## Section 5

# Conclusions

Calls for a 'living and working countryside' have been made for at least 20 years. This objective has been recognised in official policy rhetoric, yet successive reports over the last decade reflect deep failures to translate that rhetoric into reality.

The TCPA supports the policies promoted by the Rural Coalition and others to tackle immediate problems and opportunities – more positive planning support for rural enterprise, affordable homes, and integrated services, especially transport. But the TCPA goes further than this. It believes that rural England, as part of a country with a fast growing but ageing population in the decades ahead, must play a wider and deeper role, particularly within the peri-urban areas in which most rural dwellers live. This role should properly recognise rural areas' relationship with urban areas – for recreation, for conservation, for renewable energy; but also for wider economic activities in a local and global economy, often reliant on information and communication technology and made possible by home-working; and for homes within a desirable environment, sustainably linked to jobs and services within an accessible peri-urban locality. New forms of sustainable transport will play a crucial role in this new rural territory, effectively linking it not only to the city-regions or the network of polycentric towns within its more immediate orbit, but also to the wider national and international networks.

But this Policy Statement in no way advocates a 'mega-politan' 'free-for-all'. The TCPA's vision for rural England does not lay claim to the use of more than a small fraction of the available rural land in England for development. It calls for tailored policies and plans which carefully reflect the regional and local circumstances prevailing in different rural areas, the distinctiveness of individual rural places, and, most importantly, the knowledge and views of local people. For example, more remote rural areas such as the uplands will require policies quite different from many of those applicable to lowland rural areas. Accordingly, this Policy Statement attempts to positively define who and what the countryside is for, and how we can achieve sustainable rural communities in all their social, economic and environmental dimensions.

Achieving this vision for rural England will clearly be challenging in a climate of severe economic constraint and under a new national policy regime which sees a limited role for strategic planning at the level above the local. The Government is currently finalising the National Planning Policy Framework following a consultation and has an opportunity to incorporate the components of the rural messages put forward here into

the new framework. The emerging Local Enterprise Partnerships should also pay attention to the needs of their rural areas (and especially the links between rural areas and urban settlements), as should joint planning between local authorities, prompted where necessary by the Duty to Cooperate. At the same time, the Localism Act sets out a neighbourhood planning process in law which could be used to embed a long tradition of community-led activity in rural England – provided that Local Plans take up the challenge of planning for sustainable rural communities set out in this Policy Statement, that local planning authorities engage constructively and collaboratively with local communities, and that neighbourhood planning arrangements are clear, transparent and effectively administered.

But in the end the TCPA is looking to the long-term needs and prospects of a rural England which is facing huge demographic, economic and environmental challenges. Climate change is arguably the greatest challenge of them all, and rural areas have a great role to play in a campaign of adaptation and mitigation. These challenges will not go away any time soon. The TCPA's rural vision and policies are intended to face the problems and prospects of the decades ahead. The TCPA is taking the long view.

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