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**Commission for Rural Communities**

(an operating division of the Countryside Agency)

This report has been written by the **Future Foundation** for the Commission and provides a review of futures related literature and summarises recent thinking about the future of rural disadvantage.

This report is one of a number of products produced as part of the Commission for Rural Communities' first major thematic study to gather evidence about rural disadvantage.

Other products in the study:

**Rural disadvantage: Priorities for action**

A short summary of our findings and presents priorities for action to tackle rural disadvantage.

**Rural disadvantage: Reviewing the evidence**

A review and assessment of existing research and documentation relating to rural disadvantage and the policy responses.

**Rural disadvantage: Hidden voices**

A DVD film of real life experiences of living in rural England.

**Rural disadvantage: Quality of life and disadvantage amongst older people – a pilot study**

A report to the Commission on new research to understand better how older people living in rural areas experience disadvantage.

**Attitudes to Rural disadvantage: a segmentation analysis**

A report to the Commission on new research on rural attitudes to disadvantage. Available in pdf form on the Commission's website.

For further information on the rural disadvantage study contact:

**Lynn Watkins**

Head of Thematic Studies

Lynn.Watkins@countryside.gov.uk

For further information on the Commission's work generally visit:  
[www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk)

## **Rural disadvantage: Futures thinkpiece** A report by the Future Foundation for the Commission for Rural Communities

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## Introduction

This report has been prepared by the Future Foundation as part of the Commission for Rural Communities' (CRC) thematic study into rural disadvantage. The overall aim of this thinkpiece was to take a systematic look at the future of disadvantage in the English countryside, identifying the main drivers of change and likely trends. The findings of the thinkpiece have been used to help the Commission provide forward looking advice to government and others on how best to tackle rural disadvantage.

Rather than undertake new analysis of trends and drivers, the thinkpiece draws primarily on existing futures related literature, and on discussions held at a stakeholder workshop.

### Literature review

A literature review was undertaken, which comprised of gathering all relevant and readily accessible futures work relating to the future of the countryside and the future of social exclusion. A rigorous process of analysis and evaluation was applied, in order to identify key learning about the future of rural disadvantage, considering both the impact of future trends on existing rural disadvantage issues and on the emergence of new types of rural disadvantage or disadvantaged groups.

### Stakeholder workshop

A full day workshop was held as part of the thinkpiece, with a carefully selected group of countryside and social exclusion experts and those with special expertise such as housing, transport, health and employment. Based on structured exercises using existing material identified in the literature review, participants were tasked to identify the implications of futures trends on disadvantaged groups in particular types of countryside, and then to identify what types of policy interventions would be required to move towards the 'Triple whammy' scenario developed by the Countryside Agency in 2003.

Subsequently the Future Foundation team have spent further time analysing the outputs, identifying the research implications and formulating recommendations for the future. The aim of this report is to summarise the key learning points and recommendations emerging from the process, rather than providing an exhaustive description of the project.

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## Review of relevant futures literature

### 2.1 Literature reviewed

Two main strands of futures studies were assessed in the first stage of the project – those exploring the future of the rural environment and those examining the likely trajectory of disadvantage. The purpose of the review was to identify which studies could help provide a better understanding of the future of rural disadvantage. The intention was that this could then form a knowledge base for the futures strand of the CRC's thematic study on rural disadvantage. The studies examined are summarised in Table 1. Full references are provided in Appendix A.

The analysis was conducted in the most systematic way possible given the variability in range and scope of the works examined. Each was summarised in a standard format that required the identification of the key drivers and assessed the level of insight provided about disadvantaged rural communities in the present and future (10–15 years). Any key policy implications relevant to the CRC were also noted.

This section summarises the key learning from this process. It provides an overview of the main points that have emerged from the evaluation, covering both an assessment of the methods used to create future visions and the actual outputs themselves.



## 2.2 Top level trends identified from the literature review

There is an extensive body of work describing the broad economic and social trends that have significantly changed rural England over the last few decades. Many of these trends have had an impact on the nation as a whole, but have a particular effect on the countryside. Futures analysis has, to some extent, further examined what the effects of these trends could be if they continue on their current trajectory, or change in the near or more distant future.

In addition to the general shift in employment (from agriculture to tourism and services), Table 2 summarises the anticipated impact of these trends in rural areas, with a particular focus on disadvantage<sup>1</sup>.

**Table 1.** Literature reviewed

<b>Study</b>	<b>Published</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Drivers of social exclusion	For the Social Exclusion Unit	Literature review.
The state of the countryside 2020	For the Countryside Agency by the Tomorrow Project, April 2003	Literature review. Expert interviews, consultation with researchers, policy-makers and practitioners.
Beyond digital divides? The future for ICT in rural areas	Demos, April 2005	Expert interviews, scenarios workshop, desk research and analysis.
Virtual villages: community networks for rural development	Warren & Skerratt (University of Plymouth; University of Newcastle), April 2004	Online survey of webmasters. Online and offline ethnography.
Regional futures and courses of neighbourhood realities	National Housing Federation (NHF), 2003	This uses longitudinal survey data to examine life housing association clients. There is a set of seven scenarios, of which two deal with different kinds of rural neighbourhood.
Social Exclusion The Future of Services in Rural England – a scenario for 2015	The Tomorrow Project University of Gloucestershire, Countryside and Community Research Final report to Defra, June 2005	Analysis of existing trends and literature. Desk research. Personal interviews. Focus groups. All used to create draft scenario which was then tested on 6 focus groups to finalise.
Rural Transport Futures, 2003	Published by Transport 2000 in conjunction with the Countryside Agency and Citizen's Advice Bureau	Examines other Western European countryside transport examples as case studies.
Rural Economics and Land Use (RELU) Scenarios Project	Prepared by the Institute for Alternative Futures and the Manchester Institute of Innovative Research for the ESRC, April 2004	Summary of trends impacting rural land use. Develop scenarios with stakeholders in workshop.
Forecasting Future Trends in Social Exclusion, 2004	For the Social Exclusion Unit by the Future Foundation, March 2004	Analysis of social trends. Numerical forecasts generations surrounding drivers.
Rural Futures Project	For Defra by the Future Foundation with Newcastle University, July 2004	Statistical modelling of the differentiated countryside to create seven rural typologies. Monte Carlo simulations to create probabilities of typologies growing or shrinking. Working with visualisations.
Foresight Futures 2020: revised scenarios and guidance	UK Department of Trade and Industry, 2002	Global and national futures literature review. Scenario framework developed, reviewed and revised over four-year period.

**Table 2.** Anticipated impact of trends on rural disadvantage

Economic growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nearly all of the future scenarios and forecasts anticipate economic growth overall to be roughly the average of that achieved in the post-war decades.</li><li>• This means that those living below 60% of median income will have a real standard of living in 20 years time equivalent to someone living on median income today.</li><li>• If the decrease in relative poverty experienced since the late 90s continues, then the improvement would be greater than this.</li></ul>
Household and population trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There will be an additional 1.8 million people aged 70+ in the population by 2020.</li><li>• Lone person households will increase particularly fast in the working age population, to make up the largest percentage of households (more than a third).</li><li>• An average of 150,000 new households per year are required to accommodate this growth over the next 20 years even before migration is taken into account.</li></ul>
Employment trends and workless households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unemployment has decreased overall from 1992–2002, levelling off in 2004, but is anticipated to increase slowly through 2010, with 1.5 million workers claiming unemployment benefit.</li><li>• The number of working age 'poor' (those in households below 60% of median income) is projected to fall by 25%.</li><li>• Nearly half of poor-income households are 'workless'.</li></ul>
Education and skill-less households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Skills differentiation has had a strong impact on social exclusion, as the shift toward a more service-based and knowledge-based economy has decreased the demand for unskilled or semi-skilled labour.</li><li>• Among households with incomes below 60% of the median, there will be a forecasted decline in households with children (single parent or otherwise) but an increase in skilled, workless, childless households (approximately 30%).</li><li>• ICT-related skills are amongst those most in demand. Some rural areas, particularly those with the least population density, lag behind in access to ICT and development of these skills.</li></ul>
Migration and counter-urbanisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Net migration from urban to rural England over the past 50 years is one of the most critical trends. 840,000 people moved from urban to rural areas from 1991–2001.</li><li>• These net figures mask outflows, particularly of young adults moving out of the countryside, with counter-urbanisation exacerbating the degree to which the population is ageing in rural England.</li><li>• Immigration is slowing somewhat, with increases in the ethnic minority population increasing, but at a slower pace than in the 90s. In 2010, the ethnic minority population is set to reach approximately 10.8% of the total, although the main concentrations of ethnic minorities and immigrants tend to be in urban centres.</li></ul>
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The UK's car culture has resulted in strong growth in personal transport ownership, with increasing congestion.</li><li>• The lack of public transport in more remote areas has a significant impact on access to employment and services. It can also contribute to social isolation among those without private transport.</li><li>• The percentage of households without their own car will decrease over the next two decades, but nevertheless just over a fifth of households will not have access to a car in 2024. Roughly half will have one car and approximately a third will have two or more cars in 2024.</li></ul>
Housing and homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Joseph Rowntree Foundation forecasts a housing shortage of about one million by 2020 if rates of new building are not increased.</li><li>• New builds have stabilised at approximately 150,000 per year.</li><li>• From 1996–2000, the number of homeless people increased steadily after having declined in the early 90s.</li></ul>
Disability rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The proportion of registered disabled people living in poverty will increase to 24% in 2020, although this will be a moderate decrease in absolute numbers.</li><li>• Stress-related claims now make up nearly a quarter of all claims, and have been the most common type of disability claim since 1995.</li></ul>

1. Except where noted, these forecasts were created for the Social Exclusion Unit in Forecasting Future Trends in Social Exclusion in 2004.

## 2.3 Differences between rural futures and social exclusion work

The review identified that there are two bodies of futures literature relevant to rural disadvantage – rural futures work and social exclusion work. These two approaches tend to be quite different in starting point, methods and outputs.

- There has been a proliferation of scenario creation exercises in the rural futures arena whereas studies dealing with social exclusion tend to be more straightforward forecasts and projections of current trends. This difference may be due to the fact that scenarios have become relatively 'fashionable' among academics specialising in rural policy in recent years, whereas social exclusion has not been considered to be such a suitable subject for a scenario led approach.
- Studies in each of the two distinct areas tend to have considerable commonality with each other in terms of the drivers identified as key to creating future outcomes. There are four factors that appear to be given some weight in every study examined, whether or not these are explicitly used as drivers or not: demography and the ageing society; levels of economic growth; transport and accessibility issues; and housing.
- Concepts of social inclusion are *always* referenced in the rural futures studies, but examinations of social exclusion do not always explore the differential nature of rural exclusion, suggesting that there is more work to be done in 'rural proofing' such studies in the future. However, the level at which social inclusion is considered in the rural studies often fails to provide an understanding of the real nature and shape of rural deprivation in sufficient depth. This does not negate the value of the work, it simply highlights the fact that there is a gap in mapping rural exclusion which confirms the need for a better spatial understanding of the current reality and future trajectory of disadvantage in the countryside.

Scenarios have been more widely used in thinking about the future of rural areas than the future of social exclusion.

### 2.3.1 Specific features of rural scenario creation

Scenario work has been gaining popularity in the public sector, and some notable works have been generated since 2000. The purpose of scenario work is not to predict the future, but to envision creatively potential outcomes, dependent on a range of selected factors. These outcomes are not forecasts, but are intended to portray future possibilities, and to encourage discussion and generate ideas. Thus scenarios are often either 'aspirational' in nature or intended to be more 'practical' in envisioning the future.

The methods used to generate the scenarios are subject to some variation. The most common approach is to generate four competing scenarios based on prioritising two key axes from a wider list of drivers and possible outcomes. This is generally undertaken through a workshop process. This method tends to create scenarios that present extremes in terms of whether they deliver desired objectives or fail to achieve policy priorities. It can generate scenarios that apparently meet all key government targets for the future (sustainability, inclusiveness and prosperity). The main focus is often to find an idealised scenario

where actions and legislation for the three targets are mutually reinforcing, such as in the RELU Project<sup>2</sup> scenarios where a 'synthesis' scenario ('Green Together') used all three to look at a future where 'village clusters' minimised the strain of migration while government invested more heavily in housing, transport and skills training. Although these targets arguably can be seen as unrealistic projections, they provide a useful challenge to policy makers in terms of thinking through how such scenarios might be achieved.

Other methods used vary from developing a single 'central scenario' based on evaluating the most likely outcomes of key trends, to a more complex process based on combining quantitative projections with more qualitative assessments of policy interventions in a 'Monte Carlo' simulation process. An example of the latter, was completed for Defra as part of its Rural Futures study<sup>3</sup>. These methods provide alternative outputs to consider, designed to stimulate an assessment of policy with reasonable success, and require an evaluation of the most fruitful futures approaches for generating policy ideas and outcomes.

Alongside the four factors identified above (demography, levels of economic growth, transport and housing), one significant driver – counter-urbanisation – was identified in all the main rural futures exercises. This suggests that this is, in the view of the many analysts and policy makers involved, an incontrovertible component of the future of the countryside. No study has identified a future in which the countryside would become relatively less attractive to more affluent segments of the population, although there are plausible reasons why this might not be so. For example, it is possible that the next generation of more affluent and active older people, and some families, may find urban living more attractive. This suggests that it might be interesting to posit an alternative to this view.

Another key academic concept used in describing the current reality and the future development of the countryside, which is given much less influence and weight in most studies, is the concept of the '*differentiated countryside*'. This identifies a range of countryside types emerging and evolving due to uneven distribution of outcomes resulting from the interaction of the key drivers, not least the forces driving migration within local areas. Counter-urbanisation, for example, will affect various regions, counties and towns differently. Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire and West Sussex are anticipated to grow significantly (approximately 10%) between 2001 and 2011, while other areas might only grow at 1–2% over that time period<sup>4</sup>. It is for this reason that, to date, most successful pilots for initiatives such as transport schemes and skills incentives have had to take place at a local level. Most studies of the future do not take into account this more 'fine grained' approach to describing the reality of the countryside and, therefore, tend to create scenarios that are very broad based and general. This makes an analysis of how they might affect disadvantage in specific areas quite difficult. The one study that adopted a differentiated countryside model did not use this to explore the evolving nature of social exclusion.

Counter-urbanisation is widely thought to continue into the future.

2. RELU/Institute for Alternative Futures and the Institute for Innovation Research – Scenarios Project Report, April 2004.

3. Rural Futures Project – Rural Futures 20 Year Scenarios, for Defra, August 2004.

4. Anon (2002) 2000-based Sub-National Population Projections for Health Authorities in England. Population Trends 108, as referenced in The Future of Services in Rural England – a Scenario for 2015.

Recognising the 'differentiated countryside' needs to be fundamental to an analysis of rural communities, to ensure that interventions are designed to work in real-life circumstances. There needs to be greater understanding of differences within rural areas.

One key challenge that emerges from the overview of all the scenario work is the creation of usable and realistic visions of what life might actually be like under the different scenarios, integrating effectively the body of knowledge about social and consumer needs (typically sociologically derived) with a top down driver-led approach to creating the future. Most often the work fails to represent the 'demand side' view of the future, although a range of techniques have been experimented with to help bring the future to life – including visualisation; describing future towns; identifying future inhabitants; and so on. There is little evidence that any of this has successfully articulated or brought to life the disadvantaged rural residents of the future.

### **2.3.2 The role of technology in the future**

Technology is referenced in most of the scenario work analysed, but more often as a facilitator of other trends rather than as a driver in itself. However, a couple of the studies reviewed placed technology at the heart of their analysis and used technology dimensions to create different outcomes. This reflects a fundamental dichotomy in the way that technology is treated by analysts more generally. Technology can be considered a driver that can help minimise rural disadvantage or can be an expression of more fundamental inequalities, through the development of a 'digital divide'.

It has further been suggested that the solution to many service delivery issues will revolve around ICT technology developments allowing remote access. Within the literature review, the report 'Future of Services in Rural England – a scenario for 2015' specifically looks at delivery of services within this context.

Anticipating an erosion of public transport in rural areas, as well as continued stress on the 'individual' (including personal mobility), the paper highlights that, without government intervention, those who rely on public transport and who are less adapted to a knowledge economy will suffer if current trends continue. In addition, accessibility of post offices, emergency services and schools will effectively be reduced if current trends continue.

There is considerable unevenness in terms of access to services and without intervention, polarisation in service access and quality will continue. The report suggests that more coordination between government departments that have responsibility for local service delivery is necessary to ensure 'local sensitivity' alongside general growth and progress. It also points to the need to address the lack of sustained funding for local ventures. But the project also clearly highlights that, in terms of disadvantage, services are already polarising and this will worsen without intervention.

**Technology is viewed as both a driver and cause of social exclusion.**

Determining the form and extent of intervention in this area is a huge challenge for the local or national authorities concerned, but futures work can help identify the alternatives available. For example, research for the Countryside Agency on the digital divide<sup>5</sup>, examined the issues around getting future generations of broadband rolled out, and more widely available, in remote areas. This is necessary for certain outcomes, but time-consuming and costly. A number of scenarios was developed, one of which is for national investment on a huge scale. There is also a technology-progressive scenario where service delivery depends more on mobile operators than local services. Where the responsibility lies for each of these, where the investment comes from and which level of government makes the decisions are less clear. For example, should service delivery in a knowledge economy depend on national investment for infrastructure?

In a report on rural transport futures<sup>6</sup>, recommendations are made for an overhaul of the entire transport system, and a complete reorganisation of rural transport, both in terms of its physical structure and of departmental structures. While this would clearly be beneficial, it would also require heavy investment and an understanding of the needs of distinct parts of the countryside (which could blur where the decision making responsibility should lie).

### **2.3.3 The need to be explicit about the political dimensions of futures work**

A key point that emerges from this evaluation of futures work is the influence that assumptions about the direction of current and future policy have on the outcomes created by the exercises. Thus, feeding current policy into a scenario creation exercise (as noted above) will result in scenarios that meet government objectives, but do not necessarily reflect a realistic or likely trajectory of current trends. However, the counter to this point is to state clearly that it is necessary to recognise how influential government policy and actions are in shaping our society and, therefore, to feed policy into the process explicitly, in order to test out the potential influence of different policies.

The degree to which government intervention will impact on scenarios has long been a key issue for futures work, explored particularly through a 1998 publication from the DTI on Foresight Futures 2020<sup>7</sup>. These scenarios use axes looking at balance of control between local and larger scale government and authorities. In subsequent works, they have been used as the basis for addressing issues such as the shifting role of national government and the extent to which Europe has an impact on commercial decisions, or the extent to which globalisation of commerce continues. There is no view on how this specifically relates to the challenges of governing more rural areas.

The Future Foundation's 20-year scenarios, developed with the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University, are a specific example of policy and governance issues being central to scenario creation work for rural futures. The modelling process has a major emphasis on the extent to which protectionist or laissez faire policies will operate. The project produced three potential scenarios for the 20-year future of rural Britain<sup>8</sup> that were examined as part of this review.

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5. Beyond digital divides? The future for ICT in rural areas, Commission for Rural Communities/Demos, April 2005

6. Rural Transport Futures, Countryside Agency/Transport 2000, September 2003

7. Foresight Futures 2020: revised scenarios and guidance, Department for Trade and Industry, 2002

8. Rural Futures Project – Rural Futures 20 Year Scenarios, for Defra, August 2004

In addition to the broad policy stance, factors that were considered critical were the degree of conservation and protection of traditional occupations within rural areas, the relative importance given to ecological sustainability or economic dynamism and the balance between visitors and the economic activity of residents in new industries. Where the strongest protectionist policies were in place, economic growth was projected to be the most modest and vice versa. The implicit nature of rural disadvantage differed between the scenarios. In general, when the balance of policy is protectionist and focused on the environment, it is accompanied by rising housing costs and a lack of new employment opportunities that exacerbate social exclusion. In the more laissez faire scenario, uneven access to services for those on low income, was relatively more important.

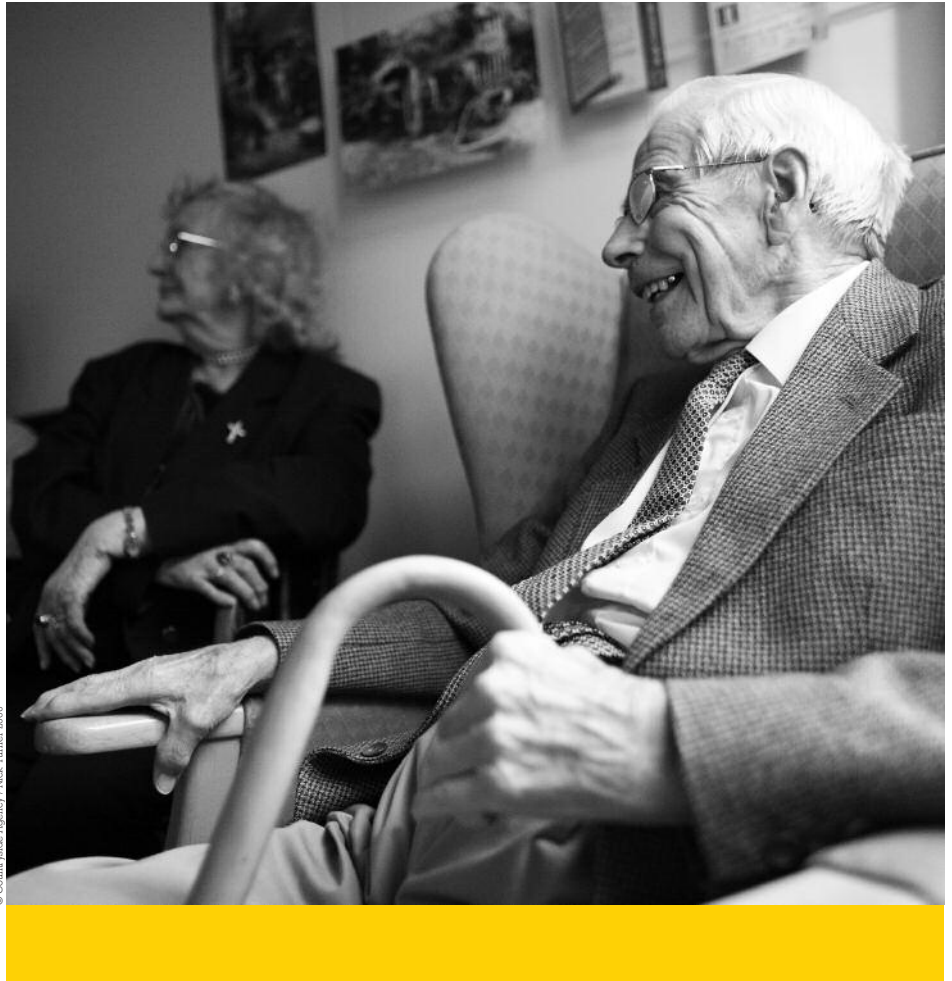
It must also be recognised that many forms of disadvantage are temporary and that, although poverty will be a long-term state for some people, others move in and out of poverty during their lifetime.

Future policy affecting housing availability and costs (both urban and rural) is also key, whether based on an assumption of a more liberal and socially driven planning regime or one more like the current system, that is often controlled by vested interests wishing to maintain a particular form of 'symbolic rurality' in desirable areas. Both have a fundamental affect on the shape of the countryside in the future and the affordability of housing for disadvantaged groups, but at opposite extremes.

#### **2.3.4 Overview of the analysis of social exclusion in the future**

Projecting a picture of the future of disadvantage is more complex than, for example, coming to a concrete measure of poverty, given the relative and changing nature of social exclusion. The three main works examined as part of this review (those produced by the ODPM, The Tomorrow Project and the Social Exclusion Unit) all paid testimony to this complexity in their approach to the subject, but none dealt specifically with the issue of exclusion in the countryside.

However, in 2004 the ODPM published a wide-scale document on social exclusion, 'Breaking the Cycle', which clearly acknowledged the past drivers of social exclusion, including low income, under or unemployment, inequalities in education and health, and the structural risk factors in housing, transport, social capital, and crime. The report noted both the fluidity of disadvantage and that it can occur at several levels (such as unemployment and mental ill health) which interact and are mutually reinforcing. But it must also be recognised that many forms of disadvantage are temporary and that, although poverty will be a long-term state for some people, others move in and out of poverty during their lifetime. This report particularly highlights the need to help the most disadvantaged and emphasises that, although there has been progress to date in some demographic segments such as the reduction in child poverty, the situation of those who suffer from multiple disadvantage will continue to worsen.



The Tomorrow Project's work in progress on social exclusion highlighted trends that impact, and are likely to continue impacting, on the nature of social exclusion in the UK. Most important to the discussion is the growth in the 'hourglass' society, whereby the middle of the socio-economic spectrum is deserted, while the number of those at the very top and bottom swells significantly. The Tomorrow Project suggest that policies should focus on two areas: reducing the income gap and addressing the 'quality' of parenting. Although the paper acknowledges that this is already happening to some extent, it points out that some success in reducing the income gap for most could actually cause more problems in the future by putting the employment 'ladder' further out of reach of those at the very bottom.

In 2004, the Future Foundation worked with the Social Exclusion Unit to prepare forecasts of social exclusion. Key figures from the 'central' forecast show a decrease in overall figures for those socially excluded, although it also predicts that, if unchanged, current policy strategies will continue to leave a 'core' of hard to reach groups.

However, none of these projects on social exclusion address 'rural' disadvantage. Instead, they look at over-arching trends (particularly in terms of age and other demographics). Nevertheless, many of the groups identified as at risk are, in some cases, more relevant to rural areas. Certain groups (such as ethnic minorities, seasonal workers, the homeless, the mentally ill and those who may not become literate in ICT skills) may be particularly at risk in rural areas and issues which affect them need to be further explored.

## 2.4 Summary of the main learning points from the literature review

A number of important learning points emerge from the literature review. Table 3 provides a summary of selected studies, setting out what information they provide specifically on rural disadvantage as it is now, and how the drivers and assumptions each study identified will shape rural disadvantage in the next 10–15 years.

As a result of the analysis, a number of general conclusions informed the next stage of the project. These were:

**The need to bring different perspectives together in a useful synthesis:** The exercise confirmed that there are two distinct bodies of knowledge about the future which are relevant to the CRC's thematic study on rural disadvantage. One relates to the future of social exclusion and tends not to have a rural dimension. The body of literature relates

**Table 3.** Summary of main learning points from the literature review

Study	What does this tell us about rural disadvantage now?	In 10–15 years?
Drivers of social exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some progress made through initiatives to combat social exclusion but scale of problem remains large.</li> <li>• Improvement has occurred, particularly in reducing child poverty.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ageing population will be a challenge</li> <li>• Housing pressures nationwide will continue – this will impact on rural areas.</li> </ul>
The State of the Countryside 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low skills.</li> <li>• Affordable housing shortage.</li> <li>• Pensioner poverty.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependent on scenario taken.</li> <li>• More jobs and emphasis on retraining could relieve poverty.</li> </ul>
Beyond digital divides? The future for ICT in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First generation broadband now widespread.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impacts will depend on the roll-out of next generation broadband in rural areas.</li> <li>• Concerns over groups who may be excluded by lack of access to broadband.</li> </ul>
Social Exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mainly a result of polarisation.</li> <li>• Certain areas are poverty 'traps' where leaders move out.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic trends will limit increase (e.g. fewer children).</li> <li>• Hourglass structure will worsen.</li> <li>• Spatial element will worsen.</li> </ul>
The Future of Services in Rural England – a scenario for 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning of polarisation of services. Current trend to more 'championing' of localism.</li> <li>• Considerable un-evenness of levels for access.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addresses several key trends – including stress on the individual, car culture.</li> <li>• Further erosion of public transport as a result of greater e-delivery of services.</li> </ul>
Rural Transport Futures, 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems with public transport in many rural areas, in terms of frequency and availability, disadvantages those who do not have access to private transport.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If current trends persist, there will be worsening isolation for those without private transport and fewer viable service outlets.</li> <li>• There will be an increase in traffic on minor roads and pressure to accommodate increased traffic will result in loss of 'countryside'.</li> </ul>
Rural Economics and Land Use (RELU) Scenarios Project Forecasting Future Trends in Social Exclusion, 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on rural land use, not disadvantage.</li> <li>• However, demonstrates that strong economic growth leads to exclusion to some extent.</li> <li>• Does not address 'rural', but over-arching trends (particularly in terms of age and other demographics) relating 'exclusion' are in some cases more relevant to rural areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All scenarios assume economic growth, but this will result in those on the 'fringe' being left behind.</li> <li>• Current policy strategies will continue to leave a 'core' of hard to reach groups if unchanged.</li> </ul>
Rural Futures Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four of the current typologies have lower than average income levels, some due to higher levels of retired people, others due to nature or lack of employment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three scenarios were generated in the workshops based on planning policy and protectionist attitudes to the countryside.</li> <li>• None provide specific guidelines for rural deprivation in 20 years time.</li> </ul>

to the future of rural areas and, whilst this covers issues of social inclusion, does not do so at a level of detail or spatial awareness sufficient to make the scenarios directly useable for creating targeted policies. A worthwhile futures exercise should, therefore, bring these two together in some tangible way.

**There are already enough scenarios for the future of the countryside:**

Many rural futures scenarios have been created in recent years. Each have strengths and weaknesses dependent on both their initial assumptions and the methodologies used to generate them. As identified above, their greatest feature is commonality rather than difference and none of them really provide sufficient analysis of the differential nature of rural disadvantage to be directly useful to the CRC in their current form. All the scenarios analysed have degrees of similarity to the extent that there is, generally, common agreement on the main axes and drivers of the rural future. This is a strong basis on which the CRC can build.

**The need to target specific questions and deepen knowledge about rural disadvantage:**

The CRC would benefit from identifying areas in which there are significant knowledge gaps about the current nature, and future evolution, of rural disadvantage in order to facilitate evidence based policy-making. Rather than creating more generic views of the future, the key to progress will be in investing in specific exercises that plug gaps and help prioritise policy initiatives. Several gaps have been identified, but there is a clear need to make more effective use of the existing case studies, particularly those which are future-focused, in order to give a more realistic picture of issues such as housing or transport.

**Effective decision-making is vital to maximise value from futures exercises:**

A general point for policy makers in government also emerged from the evaluation of these many futures exercises and the way in which they have been documented. There is little in the literature about how the scenarios have actually been used to help formulate policy and, therefore, it is hard to assess the real value of each of the exercises for their ultimate purpose, that of informing decision making in government. This means that, without interviewing those involved in each of the projects, it is difficult to assess what is the best route forward for the CRC. It would certainly be helpful to have a clear summary of how scenarios and other outputs have been used by government and what specific decisions they may have prompted and inspired. This would give a more rounded picture from which the CRC and other organisations in government could assess the relative value of different approaches when embarking on futures studies.



New scenarios are not required.

# 3

## Stakeholder workshop: Insights generated by working with futures material

### 3.1 Introduction

A workshop was held, as part of the futures thinkpiece, to investigate which policy areas and interventions might be particularly important in reducing rural disadvantage. The workshop was attended by a carefully selected group of around 40 people, comprising experts in countryside and rural issues, social exclusion and specific policy areas such as housing, transport, health and employment. The workshop concentrated on policies that could have implications for disadvantage in the areas of employment, cultural and social participation, and access to services. These can all be particularly important in affecting peoples' ability to participate fully in society, the definition of disadvantage used by the CRC. In order to reach potentially actionable conclusions, the groups were asked to assume the following:

- General macro-economic policies in the UK are successful with long-term economic growth at least as high as the long-term trend and consequently relatively tight labour markets.
- The view of the countryside as a desirable place to live, particularly for families and older people, remains strong so that counter-urbanisation continues.
- There is the political will for enough intervention and investment to drive rural England towards the scenario that the Countryside Agency identified as a 'Triple whammy' in its state of the countryside scenarios published in 2003 (see below)<sup>9</sup>. In this scenario, government policies are successful in delivering a 'synthesis of business, environmental and social interests'. For the purposes of identifying what policies would be necessary to reduce rural disadvantage, we therefore took as given that policies to ensure that the environmental and agricultural carrying capacity of the countryside succeeded. We also took as given that the macro-economic climate for business development would be reasonably benign. Clearly, at the stage when very specific policy propositions are made in the areas that the workshops identified as critical in tackling disadvantage, there would need to be an assessment as to whether those specific propositions threatened general economic or environmental success.

The purpose of assuming progress towards a desirable outcome in general terms was to allow the workshop to concentrate on the policies which might be required to reduce disadvantage, instead of debating the combination of policies which might deliver economic and social success at a general level. For the same reason, we did not discuss the implications of future developments that might be significant in shaping the course of rural England, but which have a low probability of occurring in the next 20 years, such as a war on British soil or a catastrophic environmental disaster. A broader discussion of the risks, uncertainties and assumptions behind relatively successful scenarios can be found in Chapter 7 of our report for Defra<sup>10</sup>.

9. See section 3.3.1 for a brief description of the 'Triple whammy' scenario and how it relates to other possible scenarios.

10. Rural Futures Project for Defra by the Future Foundation with Newcastle University (see Appendix A).

## 3.2 Assessing the impact of future trends on groups at risk of disadvantage

### 3.2.1 Types of rural areas assessed

Earlier stages of the project highlighted the lack of homogeneity within rural England. The concept of the differentiated countryside, as defined by the University of Newcastle and developed by the Future Foundation through a statistical analysis and clustering of the 2001 and 1991 Census, was used to identify different types of areas in which the nature and risks of disadvantage might vary<sup>11</sup>. Following strict guidelines, the workshop groups were asked to consider how each type of area might best be able to increase prosperity in the future, what that might mean for groups thought to be particularly at risk of disadvantage and what the causes of that might be in different types of rural areas.

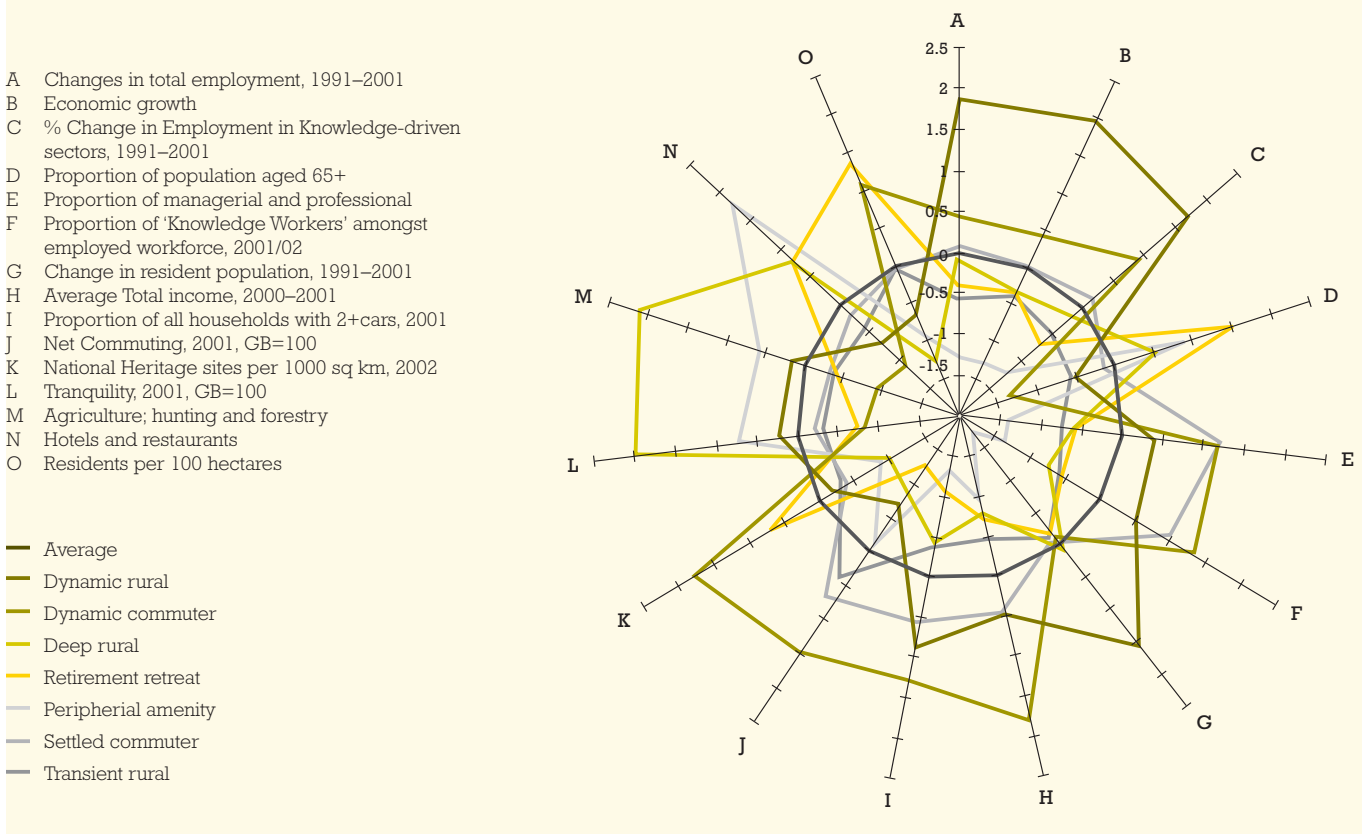
Breakout groups at the workshop examined one of the following, each with a particular demographic composition, economic trajectory, and other distinguishing characteristics:

- Deep rural
- Stagnant/transient rural
- Dynamic rural
- Affluent commuter (settled or dynamic)
- Peripheral Britain (peripheral amenity or wealthier retirement retreats)

11. A number of different definitions of rural or types of rural area could have been used and this was chosen given the available associated statistical analysis.

The differences and characteristics of each one are summarised in terms of deviance from the mean in rural England (which is shown in the black line) in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Different types of rural areas



### 3.2.2 Main findings from the exercise

#### **Economic vibrancy contrasts with stagnation and peripheral areas:**

Certain types of rural areas had commonalities in terms of the nature of disadvantage. Broadly, the more dynamic and affluent areas evidenced similar patterns of disadvantage to each other. Whether the area was more settled or still in transition as a dynamic commuter area, they had features in common, such as relatively high levels of isolation for those lacking the private transport that the majority benefit from.

Unsurprisingly, people particularly at risk of isolation include older people and some particularly poor households without private transport – especially if restricted due to parenting/caring responsibilities or physical impairment/mental health difficulties.

The more remote areas of deep rural Britain and the stagnant/transient rural areas near less successful conurbations/cities shared some similar characteristics of disadvantage as well, albeit for different reasons, such as their similar population structures, and their lack of transport links. Many areas of 'Peripheral Britain' also had similar issues to the more remote areas, despite the differing balances of tourism and older populations around the coast.

#### **Success does not confer affluence and inclusion to all residents:**

Within economically 'successful' areas, some groups have a high risk of social exclusion due to restrictions on personal mobility that might arise as a result of less collective provision in areas of generally high affluence and growth. This might include particular individuals within households that are not poor, but where the single car is being used primarily by one person, leaving the other isolated for much of the day and unable to access services – retail and leisure, as well as public ones. Unsurprisingly, people particularly at risk of isolation include older people and some particularly poor households without private transport – especially if restricted due to parenting/caring responsibilities or physical impairment/mental health difficulties. It was felt that an often-overlooked consequence of potential isolation could be that areas become unattractive to particular groups such as young people and some families, for whom access to facilities is particularly important. In general, disadvantage in prosperous rural areas was felt often to be associated with a lack of connectedness to more prosperous people and areas within the community.

#### **Transport and connectivity are crucial to overcoming disadvantage:**

Within deep rural communities the issue of transport and connectedness was also considered a major issue and similar groups were considered to be at risk as in the more prosperous areas. But there was also more of a concern, in common with the stagnant/transient rural areas about low income and low levels of employment creation.

**Housing shortages and high prices are critical:** The disadvantage of particular groups in prosperous areas (and sometimes within popular peripheral tourist areas) is made worse by the impact of spiralling house prices. This can cause certain groups to have to move, particularly young people and young families, leaving others with less support.

**Lack of independent income and poverty are most significant determinants of disadvantage:** Relatively concentrated pockets of poverty – not necessarily acute, but significantly affecting the ability to participate in society – are evident both in particular parts of low-growth or declining towns within the stagnant/transient areas and in particular communities within rural areas. As with urban areas, it was felt that

particular groups were at risk here. These included those reliant on benefits for their main source of income, lone parents and other groups where access to well-paid employment might be problematic. Particular mention was made of lone people who may be vulnerable because they are not priorities for tax credits and social services, but may find it difficult (for reasons such as mental ill-health) to be well-connected to the labour market.

**The continuing growth in older people increases risks of disadvantage:** In peripheral areas, older people were deemed to be particularly at risk. Their lack of access to support is often made more acute because either they have moved to the area or their children have moved away from the area, resulting in less day-to-day support from family members. Mobility is one of the key issues here. While there are transport projects attempting to address issues such as access to healthcare services, this is set to continue as a significant deterrent to inclusion for older people.

**Much rural employment is badly paid and insecure:** The type of employment generated by the tourism and hospitality services industries is frequently low-paid and seasonal, as is some agricultural work so there is a concern about those on low incomes.

**Poor education and low skill levels also play a part:** In both the deep rural areas and the peripheral areas, it was felt that low skill levels can combine with the dominant form of employment available locally (agriculture or tourism) to perpetuate a situation where large groups of people are locked into low quality, insecure employment that greatly restricts household income growth. Low-skilled workers and specific groups, such as migrant workers, are at particular risk. Investment and change in this situation is sometimes limited by the capacity of the local economy and the nature of local employers that tend to be smaller businesses in traditional sectors, rather than in the knowledge economy.

[Older people's] lack of access to support is often made more acute because either they have moved to the area or their children have moved away from the area, resulting in less day-to-day support from family members.

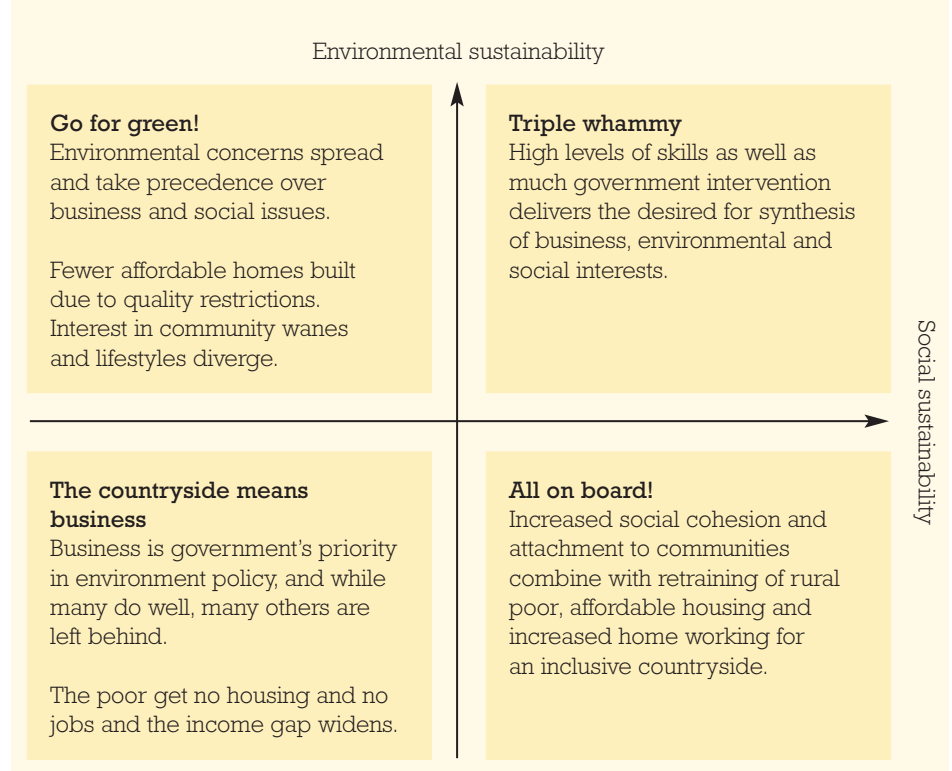


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### 3.3 Identifying policy areas

In order to be able to identify more concrete policy areas that would be critical in tackling rural disadvantage, it was necessary to establish a common goal. To do this, the workshop used a synthesis scenario, essentially an idealised vision of the countryside known as the 'Triple whammy' scenario created in the Countryside Agency's 'The State of the Countryside 2020' (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Scenarios for 'The State of the Countryside 2020'



A combination of positive trends in social cohesion, economic prosperity and environmental sustainability, the 'Triple whammy' scenario would require significant investment from a government that had put preservation of countryside character as a priority. If rural areas are to reach the 'Triple whammy', then what steps must be taken and how would rural disadvantage be minimised?

As a result of the Future Foundation's analysis of the literature review and the nature of the earlier discussions, a number of policy areas were prioritised for the groups to identify key issues and policy areas to address:

- Maximising individual wealth
- Enterprise development and skills training
- Area renewal
- Planning, housing and land use policies
- Transport, ICT, networks, and service delivery

Clearly these policy areas are not exhaustive and contain some overlap – however, the purpose of the exercise was to explore whether the future could provide a framework for identifying priorities going forward. This proved to be the case and here we summarise the main findings from the syndicate groups under these headings:

### **3.3.1 Maximising individual wealth**

#### **More effective means of distributing benefits to those that qualify**

A key focus in maximising the income of disadvantaged households was benefits policy. There was felt to be a lack of detailed information on take-up rates in different areas, but a particular concern was the potential stigmatising impact of collecting benefits in small communities where the receipt of benefits could be very visible. Possible initiatives in this area could include campaigns not only to raise awareness of the benefits available, but also to reduce the stigma associated with them; more training of staff in methods of reducing stigma; and better delivery systems that are less visible and more convenient, such as claiming online or by telephone. In general, it was felt that more thought and information was required on where people in rural areas would naturally want to turn for information on benefits and the types of reassurance that would be required on issues such as data protection, so that people felt easier about giving out the sort of personal information required to claim benefits.

#### **Improving the quality of work available to rural residents**

Given the seasonal and low quality nature of some employment in tourism and the 'care of older people', it was felt that the number of people moving in and out of work with fluctuating incomes, could be particularly significant in some rural areas. A more flexible benefit system that better addresses the needs of those moving in and out of poverty could therefore be a priority alongside local economic development policies to develop higher quality jobs.

#### **Creating a sense of aspiration**

A less concrete but potentially important suggestion was to address emotional elements of exclusion, and if possible, to help to develop a sense of aspiration for those who have been left behind. This is particularly relevant to those who are 'excluded' in dynamic areas, and who would suffer in comparison to others in the prosperous area in which they live. Key actions which could be taken in the next five years include the Learning and Skills Councils providing courses and training in rural areas; providing mentoring; raising the 'profile' of those from the local area; identifying various types of role models (possibly 'local business heroes'); or possibly looking to parallel success stories from outside the community as an inspiration.

In general, it was felt that more thought and information was required on where people in rural areas would naturally want to turn for information on benefits and the types of reassurance that would be required on issues such as data protection, so that people felt easier about giving out the sort of personal information required to claim benefits.

### **Reducing the exploitation of migrant workers**

A contentious issue in some sectors is the exploitation of low paid or migrant workers. This is particularly relevant to dynamic areas, where low paid or migrant workers may be more likely to be employed. One suggestion was for the CRC to press for regulation or legislation on this and to actively work, possibly in partnership with regional development agencies, to reduce discrimination and exploitation of these types of workers. An area for further investigation would be how to enable (or require) employers to support their employees in some cases, although the legal ground here is less clear.

### **3.3.2 Enterprise development and skills training**

#### **Creating new criteria for evaluating investment needs**

Some rural areas, particularly outside those defined as affluent or dynamic, have accessibility and/or skill shortage issues that make them less attractive to businesses considering relocation, investment or growth on traditional criteria. It was felt, therefore, that both economic development agencies and businesses need to be encouraged to think about measuring success on newer criteria. Initiatives to try to change the way in which business success is measured already exist. It is necessary to set 'business goals' more appropriate for the character of rural businesses (not just job creation or GDP), and possibly to include more social factors or household gross value added (GVA). Local businesses need not 'grow' in the traditional way to be good for a community.

Some rural areas, particularly outside those defined as affluent or dynamic, have accessibility and/or skill shortage issues that make them less attractive to businesses considering relocation, investment or growth on traditional criteria.

#### **Improving the distribution of skills training**

It is crucial to deliver virtual (or other) skills training so that rural areas can benefit more from new knowledge-based employment opportunities. This is more of a problem for the more remote areas and less relevant to the affluent/dynamic rural areas, where the uptake of technology is already greater. However, it is necessary to demonstrate the potential of self-employment and remote work before this will have any relevance to community members.

#### **Understanding the role of transport and location issues on rural enterprise**

Further research is needed to identify the implication for the location of work, of different jobs in knowledge-intensive sectors. For example, are there some jobs that require people to travel to urban areas for some parts of the week and, if so, what does this imply for transport? To what extent is there a necessity to have some proximity to other skills that are more likely to be found in urban areas or larger towns? Do the more lucrative roles that would allow those in more remote areas to be self-employed as knowledge workers require a person to migrate to urban areas to acquire the relevant skills in the first place? It is necessary to determine if the skills needed to function within a knowledge economy can be acquired organically within a rural environment or whether more imaginative ways of integrating with urban or other types of environment are required. It is essential that local agencies and, in particular, the regional development agencies take account of these issues of rural-urban linkage in their planning and consider the impact they may have on ways of alleviating disadvantage in rural areas.

### **3.3.3 Area renewal**

#### **Testing models for effective decentralisation**

It was felt that one of the key lessons from the experience of urban renewal is that governance needs to be decentralised – probably in the rural context to the parish level – to allow development to be influenced by a very local assessment of community resources and needs.

Agencies at the local level then need to be supported to tackle rural disadvantage, with mechanisms to put this high on their agendas. One possibility for this support would be the development of area-based advisers, equivalent to the neighbourhood renewal advisers in urban areas. Many policies used in urban renewal programmes could be effective, particularly as they would be on a smaller scale.

#### **Attracting and retaining the affluent**

Urban renewal projects have often concentrated on attracting and retaining affluent people as necessary to prevent a spiral of decline. In rural areas the environment is often attractive, but targeted improvements in schools and other services may also be required.

#### **Developing local governance**

Local governance needs to be developed so that a) the local population is the key influence and its capacity to influence is enhanced and b) local bodies have a duty to be inclusive. Goals for area renewal include: improving the number of 'quality' jobs in an area (possibly through relocating public sector employment); enabling the grey economy; raising local delivery of services to a national standard; and enabling an inclusive locally trained approach to tackling skills gaps and surpluses through mechanisms such as a skills audit. A potentially more radical suggestion was that this could all be made more effective by a local 'context-sensitive' tax and benefit policy. One way to assess and develop the performance of local bodies could be to 'twin' rural and urban counterparts.

#### **Develop criteria that will encourage investment in stagnant areas**

The costs of delivering area renewal support and skill and employment development is likely to be relatively high in some rural areas. It will therefore be essential to demonstrate to national government the cost of not tackling disadvantage – not only in terms of the externality costs on health etc, but also in terms of the wasted economic potential of significant areas of the country.

### **3.3.4 Planning, housing and land use policies**

#### **More inclusive and effective planning processes required**

Making community planning work better was considered a priority, especially in those areas with strong economic and social polarisation, such as commuter areas, and more dynamic rural areas. There is a need for qualitative research to understand issues, barriers, opportunities and ambitions in the different types of rural areas. Case studies illustrating best practice in social engagement and decision-making in different rural circumstances could help clarify what remains to be done in order to effect any real change. It will also be very important to link the learning from these to national housing policies, exploring how these policies need to be developed to take account of the variety of needs in rural areas.

More inclusive governance and planning is required.



### **Allocating resources for transport and infrastructure**

Allocating resources for transport and infrastructure is critical because transport links are a major element of the attractiveness of an area for investment and for the degree to which different groups vulnerable to disadvantage can access employment and services. Interconnectedness needs to be considered at local, regional and national levels and with a particular consideration of the access needs of disadvantaged groups.

### **Methods for overcoming local objections to socially beneficial developments**

Strategies for transport and housing development – even in areas currently not receiving investment – need to be sufficiently persuasive to resist the objections of current residents and landowners who may not wish to see development.

### **Review of the current ‘sustainability’ criteria**

It was noted that the current criteria used to evaluate the potential sustainability of areas for housing development are not necessarily working. The present system results in many areas being denied the investment they need because the infrastructure and transport facilities do not currently exist. Therefore, a more flexible and useable approach is required for the future.

### **3.3.5 Transport, ICT networks and service delivery**

Tackling the digital divide is considered crucial, as noted in Chapter 2.3.2. Several concrete suggestions were made as to how to do this, some of which are already being put into practice in some places in some form.

### **More investment in rural ICT support**

The first is subsidy and support to bring ICT technology to more remote areas. The Internet will be a key way of delivering services in the future and will help link, not only local villages and shops, but also older generations to younger ones (for example, linking younger people with technical skills with older people who have the means to pay for access). It was acknowledged that computer rooms (such as those in a library) are a positive step, but they are not necessarily the ideal way to encourage making Internet use a part of everyday life. Pilots already exist that do this, but there is a need to disseminate information about those which are successful, in order to generate buy-in at the national level.

### **Creating accessible one stop shops – virtual and real**

As noted in *The Future of Services in Rural England* – a scenario for 2015, ICT and networking can lead to economies of scale. For remoter areas, ICT could be the main way of creating a 'one stop shop' of multi-services. While this type of multi-service outlet may not offer complete access, it could at least allow such services as police, healthcare, and even grocery deliveries to be shared via technology. It is also possible to put a multi-service outlet next to a business that may need bolstering, such as a local pub, making supporting the local community a priority. Criteria could be set for these facilities that are similar to the sort used by the NHS to determine whether a GP surgery should be established (for example, within two miles).

### **Minimising the cost of centralisation**

A difficulty for transport and linkages can be large suppliers, whether it is a service such as a post office or a larger supermarket, deciding to 'centralise' its services. A possible policy to explore would be one that makes 'centralisers' pay for accessibility charges, much like a 'polluter pays' scheme. When large supermarkets, post offices or hospitals close local branches, perhaps they should pay to subsidise the cost burden that is being pushed back on the consumer? Currently local planning does include an accessibility audit, but this needs to be accelerated. The main obstacle for implementing such a suggestion is determining how access charges are priced and then determining where the funding would go. One such suggestion would be to fund additional and more flexible transport solutions, such as those offered in Rural Transport Partnerships, as discussed below.

### **Creating more flexible transport solutions and using successful examples better**

Many transport solutions, such as shared taxis, demand responsive bus services and wheels to work schemes already exist, and the Countryside Agency has produced case studies looking at the success and benefits of many of these. They can be a clear counterbalance to the effects of centralisation, which would make funding from a centraliser a logical step. While several of the initiatives that currently exist focus mainly on transport to health services, there are also examples which focus on transport for leisure, education and employment journeys. All of these schemes contribute to fostering a greater sense of independence, control, and individual empowerment.

It was acknowledged that computer rooms (such as those in a library) are a positive step, but they are not necessarily the ideal way to encourage making Internet use a part of everyday life.

# 4

## Conclusions and implications

The countryside is not homogenous and the shape of disadvantage varies between different types of rural areas. It would be possible to use pooled British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) data, or possibly Labour Force Survey data, to determine the current and future size of socio-demographic groups in rural areas, that are particularly at risk of disadvantage in relation to skill levels, household composition and employment. This would provide policy makers with a firmer basis for decision-making and could be done using a method similar to that which the Future Foundation used on national data for the Social Exclusion Unit.

The literature review and workshop established some particular groups that might be at risk in certain types of rural communities, in addition to those defined by their skill level and employment status. These include:

- Individuals with *no access to private transport*, even if there is a car within the household
- *Older people*, particularly in 'retirement retreats' in peripheral Britain
- *Low-income households* – particularly those who may be missing out on benefit payments because of issues of stigma in small, traditional communities
- Those *without the support of extended family networks* because spiralling house prices in the more affluent and dynamic rural areas have forced out groups such as young people or young families
- Those who are *in and out of low quality, poorly paid occupations* within the tourism, 'care for the elderly' or agricultural sectors, compounded sometimes by the seasonal nature of these jobs. The disadvantage of these groups is exacerbated when they do not feel able to claim benefits either because of the conditions attached to the benefits, lack of access or stigma
- *People living alone* who for a variety of reasons are not firmly connected to the labour market and require support services that may be difficult to access in the absence of further developments of ICT infrastructure for their delivery
- *Migrant workers in low paying occupations.*

In the light of this analysis of groups at risk and in relation to the projected trajectories for different types of rural areas, it was felt that further policy development was needed in most policy areas. Among the promising approaches discussed in the workshop are:

- **Benefits policy.** Explore how the structure of benefits could better serve those who move in and out of employment at fairly frequent intervals, and how information and access could be provided in a way that makes the stigma associated with benefits, in some small communities, less of an inhibitor to claiming.

- **Work with Employers.** Assess how small businesses in particular can be enabled and/or required to support their more vulnerable employees, such as migrant workers.
- **Encourage business development.** Consider how the criteria for assessing business success can be changed to include aspects such as social factors or household Gross Value Added, in order to make the case for establishing and developing enterprises in less dynamic and affluent rural areas.
- **Knowledge-intensive employment.** Make the case more strongly for ICT investment in remoter areas to reduce the digital divide and also link closely to other infrastructure development that takes account of issues such as the transport needs of knowledge workers who need to travel to urban areas a couple of days a week.
- **Governance.** Encourage sufficient devolution of governance to parish level to allow a local assessment of skills, other resources and community development needs. Put in place support for local communities and agencies to tackle the particular shape of disadvantage they are faced with, for example by creating area-based advisers.
- **Training.** Find ways of delivering training opportunities and support, such as mentoring, to remoter areas. The cost of this could be high, so there is a need to develop the case for this and to show central government that there is a high cost to not tackling disadvantage in rural areas.
- **Transport, housing and employment policies.** These need to be considered together rather than separately at the local, regional and national level with particular consideration of the access needs of disadvantaged groups. Sometimes the unintended consequences from the interaction of, for example, house prices and transport costs, exclude people from access to services or employment.
- **Service delivery.** Investigate how new technology and other mechanisms can be used to deliver services in ways that not only improve access, but also contribute to local economic/community development, for example, situating multi-service, virtual or real, outlets next to local businesses such as pubs. Investigate whether the cost of service providers closing local outlets as they centralise operations, can be shared more by the centraliser rather than all the costs falling on the local consumer.

The cost of tackling rural disadvantage could be high, so there is a need to develop the case for this and to show central government that there is a high cost to not tackling it.

Much more detailed policies would need to be developed in these areas if they were to be implemented and there are clearly implications for further research that could give policy makers the confidence to act. Among these are:

- More research on *what works* in terms of the above areas, for example, in relation to benefits, investigating where people would like to go for information and what delivery mechanisms would work for different people in both improving access and reducing stigma. This should probably include a mapping exercise of current practice and case studies of good practice.

There is a need for more research – both quantitative and qualitative.

- A range of *firmer and more finely-grained quantitative information* and forecasts of vulnerable groups in rural areas. This should look both at the 'pool' of people and households at general risk from factors such as their education, employment status, family structure and age, and at the numbers of people facing particular situations, such as an unmet need for mental health services or the numbers of different eligible groups who are failing to take up benefits. Demographic projections, in particular, need to be more finely grained. For example, the older population is not homogenous and the demographic projections need to be cut by health and economic considerations, among other things.
- Good *qualitative research* to understand how different issues of disadvantage play out for different groups in the different types of rural area identified. What are the barriers and opportunities and ambitions in particular types of area? It is also necessary for greater clarity about the local resources that are actually available, for example, what potential is there for volunteering?
- Policy papers that bring together the material to *make the case for investment* in people and areas in order to reduce disadvantage. In particular, there is perhaps a lack of quantified evidence that shows the costs, in terms of social externalities and lost productive potential, of not tackling rural disadvantage. This may help build a consensus that policy interventions are worthwhile, even though (because the cost of delivery of services to rural areas is higher than in urban areas) they often appear to policy makers as not being good value for money. It is important also that, in making the case for investment, there is greater clarity and consensus about who the countryside is for, whose interests should take precedence and what should be the basis for prioritising the needs of particular areas, particular groups of people or particular types of disadvantage.
- Policy papers around the issue of *governance*. In particular in relation to disadvantage there is an issue about how excluded groups may be brought into the democratic process and what mechanisms will allow responsiveness to local need in the context of regional and national policy frameworks.
- Learning from history. It was suggested during the workshops that we are possibly not learning enough from long-term historical experience of assimilation and change. As well as quantifying the number of people who are vulnerable to disadvantage in different ways, it is essential to *assess how the nature of groups defined as vulnerable to disadvantage might also change over time if policies are to be robust for the long term*.

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## Appendix A: Works analysed for the literature review

*The Future of Services in Rural England – a scenario for 2015*, Countryside and Community Research Unit, University of Gloucestershire, June 2005

*Beyond Digital Divides? The future for ICT in rural areas*, Commission for Rural Communities/Demos, April 2005

*'Virtual Villages': community networks for rural development?*, S. Skarratt and M. Warren, April 2004

*'Social Exclusion'* (draft excerpt), Tomorrow Project/Countryside Agency, November 2005

*Breaking the Cycle: Drivers of social exclusion*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, SEU, September 2004

Rural Futures Project – *Rural Futures 20 Year Scenarios*, for Defra, August 2004

Rural Futures Project – *'Blue Skies' Inputs* for Defra, July 2004

Rural Futures Project – *Rural Knowledge Base*, for Defra, May 2004

*Forecasting Future Trends in Social Exclusion* for the SEU, February 2004

*State of the Countryside 2020*, Countryside Agency, 2003

RELU/Institute for Alternative Futures and the Institute for Innovation Research – *Scenarios Project Report*, April 2004

*Foresight Futures 2020: revised scenarios*, Department for Trade and Industry, 2002

*Regional Futures and Neighbourhood Realities*, National Housing Federation, 2003

*Rural Transport Futures*, Countryside Agency/Transport 2000, September 2003

### Additional sources:

*Our Countryside: the future*, Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000

*Working in the 21st Century*, Moynagh/Worsley, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)/Tomorrow Project, 2005

*Portrait of UK Poverty*, Elizabeth Finn Trust, April 2005

*Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, December 2004

*Futures Analysis, Public Policy and Rural Studies*, Centre for Rural Economy, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, October 2004

*Rethinking the Future of Rural Services Delivery*, Simon Berry, ruralnet/uk, 2004

*Social and economic change and diversity in rural England*, Rural Evidence Research Centre, Birkbeck College, March 2004

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**Commission for  
Rural Communities**

**London Office**

20th Floor Portland House  
Stag Place London SW1E 5RS

**Telephone** 0207 932 5800

**Facsimile** 0207 932 5811

**Cheltenham Office**

John Dower House Crescent Place  
Cheltenham Glos. GL50 3RA

**Telephone** 01242 521381

**Facsimile** 01242 584270

**Email** [info@ruralcommunities.gov.uk](mailto:info@ruralcommunities.gov.uk)

**www** [ruralcommunities.gov.uk](http://ruralcommunities.gov.uk)

