



The state of the countryside 2007

Commission for
Rural Communities
Tackling rural disadvantage

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of external partners to this work, both through the provision of data and wider evidence and also through the provision of general comments and support. In addition, we would like to thank the Countryside and Community Research Unit of the University of Gloucestershire for their work in gathering evidence and in developing and delivering the content of this report. As always, all errors and omissions remain entirely our responsibility.

Maps included in this publication are based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Commission for Rural Communities, John Dower House, Crescent Place, Cheltenham Spa, Gloucestershire, GL50 3RA. Licence number: 100046389. 2007.

Photography
© Commission for Rural Communities/
Nick Turner 2007

Contents

Foreword	2
1 Introduction	4
2 Living in the countryside	12
Population and migration	14
Access to services	19
Housing and homelessness	33
Health and healthcare	41
Education	48
Rural community and governance	52
Conclusions	62
3 Economic wellbeing	64
Income, wealth and consumption	66
Full and fulfilling employment	80
Enterprise and entrepreneurs in rural England	89
Conclusions	101
4 Land and environment	102
Land use	104
The value of the land	111
Environmental quality	123
Climate change	136
Conclusions	141
5 Discussion	142
Sustainable rural communities	146
Looking forward	148
Annex	150
Annex 1 – the data table	151
Annex 2 – signposts	158
Annex 3 – references	159
Annex 4 – your voice	162

Foreword

I have great pleasure in welcoming you to the 2007 edition of the *State of the countryside* report. This is the ninth such report, and the third under the Commission for Rural Communities' banner.

This year we have had access to a range of new information at a detailed level, often thanks to the good work of the Office for National Statistics and their neighbourhood statistics programme. This has enabled us to explore many new topics such as accessibility to services, improved indicators of levels of health, the amount and nature of pollutant emissions in rural areas, and to have a 'first shot' at assessing the contribution of rural areas to climate change.

From the wealth of information in the new report, two specific issues stand out for me - the changing demographics of the rural population and the way that the use of land is starting to change.

We know that people in rural areas tend to be older than those living in urban centres – however, as the report highlights, the scale of the difference has increased in recent years. Since 1985, there has been a notable fall in the proportion of young people in our rural communities and an increase in the numbers of more elderly people (in some local rural areas, more than half of the population is now over 60). This should not be seen as a negative story – older people make a huge contribution to our rural communities and we are seeing more rural residents continuing to work after the state retirement age. However we do need to understand how best to make the most of these changes. It may be that, in responding to demographic change in rural areas, we will learn lessons of value to urban areas which may face similar challenges in future years.

How we use the land is now an increasingly important issue – particularly as we respond to the challenges created by climate change. David Miliband has initiated an important debate about our future land use and, as this report shows, we are already seeing key changes such as the use of land for non-food crops, especially for energy generation, and the substantial growth in the number of wind turbines for generating electricity. At the same time, we are still working through the changes in farming triggered by the new system of government subsidies. These changes will, I believe, continue. My plea is that, in determining the future priorities and strategies for land use, we ensure that the voices of rural communities themselves are heard clearly.

Finally, we return to a previous theme of inequity. This report again highlights the significant disparities between outcomes experienced in the 'mainstream' of rural England and those experienced in the sparsely populated rural areas. As you will see as you read through the report, for most, if not all, social and economic measures – whether it be income, health, educational attainment or housing affordability, sparsely populated areas do less well. This has been a consistent pattern for a number of years and the challenge for action – both for government and for those of us concerned with rural England – still remains.

My encouragement to all readers is to draw your own conclusions from this *State of the countryside* report. It is, I believe, a key means by which we can all understand the way in which rural England is changing and by which we can all start to identify the actions that will ensure a just and a sustainable future.

Stuart Burgess

Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities

