RTPI
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RTPI Research Paper

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RURAL PLANNING IN THE 2020s

Main Report

University of Hertfordshire UH

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

The RTPI champions the power of planning in creating prosperous places and vibrant communities. We have over 27,000 members in the private, public, academic and voluntary sectors.

Using our expertise and research we bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking, putting the profession at the heart of society's big debates. We set the standards of planning education and professional behaviour that give our members, wherever they work in the world, a unique ability to meet complex economic, social and environmental challenges. We are the only body in the United Kingdom that confers Chartered status to planners, the highest professional qualification sought after by employers in both private and public sectors.

About this paper

This paper examines the challenges facing rural communities throughout the UK and in Ireland in the 2020s. It seeks to address how rural planning will need to change to deal with these challenges, as well as how rural communities can meet policy and practice objectives for achieving sustainable development.

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Front and back cover image

Crowds shopping at street stalls during Nunney Fayre in Nunney, Somerset, UK on 1 August 2015, photograph taken by Nigel Jarvis and used under licence from Shutterstock.com, Stock Photo ID: 1211590690

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Foreword

Planning, if delivered effectively is capable of significantly improving people's lives, whether this is through creating access to green space, integrating infrastructure that provides access to essential services or by unlocking the economic potential of regions. This is true whether the projects being delivered are in an urban setting or a rural one. However, we must recognise that the requirements and objectives for projects in cities and towns is different from those of our rural communities and the pressures they face are not always the same.

It is the RTPI's desire that planning delivers positive outcomes and results no matter where people live. We also recognise that the 21st century has brought with it a unique set of challenges that may have long-lasting ramifications for the decisions our members make in whatever the setting.

Our profession began as a response to the rapid and world-changing developments of the Industrial Revolution and the poor urban living conditions that came with that. As a result, there is a view that planning is about delivering healthy and sustainable urban environments while at the same time protecting the countryside and rural landscapes against that development.

We at the RTPI want to ensure that rural planning is delivering the best it can for communities. That is why we commissioned a group of experts and academics to conduct a deep dive into the condition of rural planning, the challenges that those communities face, and the important role the countryside can play in achieving our sustainable development objectives in the coming years.

The report provides us with a critical insight into the challenges facing rural areas and, particularly, the impacts that climate change, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic have had, and are continuing to have, on rural communities. This report and accompanying technical reports will be of vital use to planners, politicians and communities throughout the UK and in Ireland and will assist researchers as they undertake future rural planning research.

There are several issues that leap from the pages of this report which I believe should focus the mind. The impact of demographic changes following the pandemic including counter-urbanisation as people seek to leave cities or buy second homes is pushing up house prices and putting pressure on the limited housing stock. Tourism and recreational demands are changing and raising challenging questions for local planning authorities. The mitigation of and adaptation to the impacts of climate change are an issue that we should all be alive to, alongside the challenges of delivering sustainable transport solutions in rural areas where the private car is currently the dominant mode.

I am delighted to present this report and would like to thank the consultant team and RTPI members who formed part of the project Reference Group, and who also attended the various roundtable workshops that helped to inform many of the report's findings and conclusions.

There is much food for thought here and I recommend anyone with an interest in the past, present and future of our rural communities uses the report as a cornerstone of their work.

Timothy David Crawshaw MRTPI FRSA, RTPI President 2022

Executive Summary

Rural communities in the UK and Ireland are facing a number of *forces for change* in the 2020s – factors which create challenges for those communities, but also opportunities. These include Brexit, COVID-19, climate change and the potential for the countryside to be a site for adaptation, to these and other forces for change. This research explores how land use planning can effectively support the delivery of sustainable development in rural areas in the 2020s including, for example, through new working practices, new flexibilities, or new patterns of resourcing.

The research has involved the gathering and analysis of a wide range of primary and secondary data. We have: produced six thematic reviews, drawing on public available data and literature; analysed housing market change linked to the COVID-19 pandemic; carried out 12 roundtables, involving stakeholders and experts on various themes, and across the regions and nations of the UK and Ireland; assessed the success (or otherwise) of government policies, schemes and processes currently in place in relation to rural planning; and explored 16 case studies that highlight good practice in responding to the forces for change noted above.

Brexit is having most acute impacts in the farming sector, but with broader linked effects across many rural areas. Increasing costs has exacerbated long-term problems of marginal activity in some parts of the sector, leading to businesses no longer remaining viable. This in turn has led to some changes in the number and size of agricultural businesses. In the UK, changes to agricultural practices incentivised by the new support mechanisms introduced by the UK Government after Brexit may have planning implications where land is put to different uses.

Climate change is of course a major force for change for all places and for people across the world, but there are rural-specific challenges and opportunities linked to climate change. Changes to the global climate are affecting growing seasons, in turn impacting upon the farming sector. This can lead to a need for more accommodation for seasonal workers, and/or more structures such as polytunnels, in areas where planning policy tends to try to restrict development. Many rural communities are reliant on private cars, with alternatives often more difficult to implement than in urban areas. There are however opportunities for rural areas to play a greater role in mitigating and adapting to climate change, whether through greater provision of renewable energy or through “just transitions” to different forms of development. In either case, current planning policy and practice can often be a barrier.

COVID-19 has been a ‘stress test’ for rural areas, magnifying the importance of many extant challenges including counter-urbanisation and pressure on rural infrastructure, including housing. The latter is reflected in significantly higher house price rises in many rural areas, including those close to urban areas and/or in areas of high landscape value. Tourism and recreation demand also surged in many rural areas, with ongoing pressures for additional and changed patterns of accommodation provision. The pandemic revealed shortcomings in service and school accessibility in many rural areas. Poor broadband connectivity made it difficult, in some areas, to replace face-to-face services (and teaching) with online substitutes. Yet, there is evidence that a stronger sense of community helped some rural areas cope more effectively with the impacts of COVID-19.

Demographic change was not one of our initial forces for change, but was highlighted across themes and nations. Counter-urbanisation, and an ever-increasing demand for second and holiday

homes, is causing significant problems for many rural communities. The potential approach to these challenges recently consulted upon in Wales - to introduce use classes that distinguish between primary or sole residences and secondary homes and short-term holiday lets - will be viewed with interest across the UK and Ireland. The ageing of rural populations is a further issue, with challenges around service provision and community cohesion.

Rural areas can play a crucial role in adapting to broader societal and environmental challenges by acting as a *site for adaptation*. The forces for change discussed here, and others, all point to the need for a diversified, green rural economy, which increases resilience to future shocks whilst contributing to the achievement of net zero. We heard often while undertaking our research that planning could do much more to help in this endeavour, with barriers including outdated policy, whether from national governments or local authorities. Perhaps most profoundly, however, we were told that a *lack of resources* within and beyond local planning authorities was fundamentally limiting the scope for more innovative approaches, and that without urgent access to address this, change at scale was hard to envisage.

Despite the challenges summarised here and expanded at greater length in the report, we found evidence of a number of **opportunities** and some inspiring examples of **good practice** which, subject to the constraints of capacity and policy, could be replicated across the UK and Ireland.

The Welsh Government's planning policy on *One Planet Development Policy* seeks to promote a new balance between people and nature, protecting biodiversity and restoring landscapes. There are a number of examples of One Planet Developments across rural Wales, one of which we discuss in depth, and we reflect upon the scope for the principles in the policy to be more widely applied. For that to happen, planning policy in Wales and in other nations would need to move from what we heard was an urban-centric approach, to embrace a different view of sustainability.

Some other local examples of such an approach can be seen in the *Derbyshire Dales* in England, where a positive and proactive approach to rural housing over a sustained period of time has led to increased affordable housing delivery, rebalancing the market in an area of high demand. The scope for innovation in Scotland is higher in some respects thanks to legislation which prioritises community rights and needs. There are particular historical reasons for this approach, which may not always be replicable elsewhere, but we show evidence of communities in other places seizing the opportunity to do things differently, for example in *Bridport* in the South West of England.

Partnerships which cut across local authority or national boundaries; or bring together local authorities, communities and others, can be transformative. Examples of such collaborative work include the *Corca Dhuibhne 2030/Dingle Peninsula 2030* partnership in Ireland; the *North West Greenway Network* in Derry and Donegal; the *Greenprint* partnership in South East England; and the *Haltwhistle Partnership* in North East England. All of these cases illustrate that working beyond traditional "silos" of policy or geographical remit can address challenges in relation to the forces for change.

The *Haltwhistle Partnership* and the *Our Future Towns* initiative of which it is part are also examples of innovation in engaging community members and other stakeholders in thinking about, and planning for, the future of rural places. *Talking about our Place* in Scotland is another such example, empowering (rural) communities to better represent their needs and preferences in landscape planning, seeking to balance expert-driven approaches to ecosystem services with community input.

The use of novel technology to engage with people is an ever-growing trend in planning and related fields, and the *Corca Dhuibhne 2030/Dingle Peninsula 2030* partnership illustrates what is possible in relation to connectivity and 'smart' activity in rural areas, often subject to poorer broadband infrastructure than towns and cities. Connectivity through transport links is also an ongoing challenge in many rural places, with a dispersed population making public transport harder to deliver. In *Cornwall* the planning system is working alongside an innovative approach to integrating ticketing and timetabling and investment in trains and buses to show what can be achieved with long-term investment and careful integration. In *Snowdonia National Park/Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri* a more recent plan is focused on reducing the impact on tourist travel in a National Park by changing patterns of parking and providing alternatives to the private car for the "last mile" of journeys.

There is no silver bullet to address the challenges facing rural areas. Planning needs to balance a myriad of competing claims in rural space, from housing through habitat protection, flood management, biodiversity net gain and tree planting, to the effective management of landscape designations and the promotion of economic diversity. We heard that many rural areas need to urgently transition from where they are now – from locked-in carbon dependency and unsustainable patterns of development and energy use – to where they need to be very soon – places of economic diversity and adaptation. A framework is needed in which to make sense of competing needs and land-uses, and in which to rebalance sustainability's 'wobbly stool'. The ecosystem services approach is one such framework, and the *Bristol Avon Catchment Market* is an example of this in practice.

An integrated national governance framework is needed to more successfully deliver on the scope for rural areas to act as sites for adaptation. Across the nations of the UK and Ireland, there is often separation between government bodies responsible for delivering different aspects of rural planning. For example, in England key responsibilities sit in different departments – DLUHC and DEFRA – and their various executive agencies. Likewise, in Northern Ireland, rural planning transcends three government departments: DAERA, DfC, DfI. In Wales, an expansive ministerial portfolio on climate change enables planning to make important connections with other dimensions of sustainability, although rural affairs remains a separate and discrete ministerial portfolio. Bridging frameworks are needed to offer more integrative visions of rural futures across multiple domains, such as the *Local Environment Planning* being explored by the RTPI and others, and the *Food, Farming & Countryside Commission's (FFCC) Land Use Framework*. These could provide very important frameworks for future planning in rural areas.

Planning is central to the necessary transitions for rural places, guided by principles that are agreed but flexibly applied at all levels, and delivered by a broad partnership of community, public, voluntary and private interests. This report highlights the opportunities for planning to maximise on this central role, and to become an influencing force driving positive change in rural areas over the coming decade and beyond.

Introduction, definitions and scope

The *Rural Planning in the 2020s* project was undertaken between September 2021 and May 2022. During this period, the project team gathered and analysed a large amount of secondary and primary data. This report presents our summary of this data and our interpretation of the most significant parts of it. We have not, at the request of the RTPI, offered any recommendations for changes to policy or practice. However, apparent issues or problems with how planning is currently working in rural areas are drawn from the evidence, as are examples of good practice which might be replicated in other nations or regions. The RTPI will use this report, and the broader evidence base, to shape its own response to rural planning issues, and to engage with policy and decision makers across the nations of the UK and Ireland.

What do we mean by rural planning?

Rural planning is a means through which policy makers, planners and communities pursue sustainable development. It is centred on the use of land, but its impacts are felt in community well-being and in the functioning of local economies. Rural planning has a number of elements that work at different scales and that are led by different actors. It comprises public or statutory land-use planning, spatial or community-led plan-making, countryside management and environmental designations or planning elements that relate to agriculture.

The components and functions of rural planning, as we conceive it in this report, are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Rural planning components and functions (from Gkartzios, Gallent & Scott, 2022)

Components	Functions
Public or statutory land-use planning	National policy Strategic planning for infrastructure and housing Development (settlement) planning Land-use control and other regulatory functions
Spatial or territorial planning	Area visioning Co-ordination of service investments Co-ordination of all public/private and third sector initiatives
Community action and planning	Campaigning and lobbying Voluntary delivery and control of services Support for community development and social infrastructure Community visioning Interfacing with public and spatial planning activity
Market-based instruments	Fiscal incentives or disincentives to rural landowners to induce desirable land use outcomes (e.g., farmland preservation) Incentives to stimulate physical investment or adaptive reuse of the rural built environment

	Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES)
Countryside management	Farming and stewardship Strategies and actions that focus on the spaces beside or between physical development Strategies for renewable energy, mineral extraction or 'fracking' Engagement/leaning with rewilding and Nature Recovery Network projects
National Parks or public ownership	Closely related to countryside management Public ownership of important rural assets by state organisations e.g., wilderness areas National parks to manage 'prestigious' or culturally significant landscapes Land often remains in private ownership, but strictly managed and regulated by designated park authorities
Other projects and programmes	Governmental and pan-national directives and programmes Departmental or agency-based (sectoral) projects around health, education, transport and so on Development agency interventions Private sector (industrial) programmes and initiatives

Rural areas across the UK and Ireland face a number of common challenges, which are often flagged by national media. These include access to affordable housing, population ageing and more limited access to digital infrastructure. The opportunities for positive change receive less attention, and include the transition to greener energy and new economic activities taking root outside of towns and cities. Not all rural areas are the same: rural places can be remote or near urban, coastal or upland, some are resource and amenity rich, whilst others face significant deprivation. Their locations within more- or less- prosperous regions shape opportunities, as do issues of population concentration or sparsity, and movements that bring new people and new ideas to the countryside.

The starting point for this report is that rural areas are subject to Forces for Change and that these forces are potential triggers for innovation and renewal. Whilst rural areas were once viewed as backwaters, unable to adapt to economic restructuring, thanks to factors including in-migration and an increasingly diverse economy, they are now viewed as sites of potential adaptation, dynamic and open to innovation (Gallent et al, 2017).

Rural planning has a clear role to play in realising the adaptation potential of rural areas and supporting innovation. But planning may be held back by factors such as outdated ideas of acceptable land use in rural locations, by a lack of resourcing, or by siloed thinking which is closed to partnership with communities and key stakeholders. Rural planning has traditionally focused on local concerns (e.g. housing); however, global challenges relating to biodiversity loss, climate change, food security and energy security, have specific rural dimensions. The RTPI commissioned this research to explore how rural planning will need to change to deal with the challenges faced by rural communities, as well as how those communities can meet policy and

practice objectives for achieving sustainable development. The project team has been guided by the following broad question:

How can land-use planning effectively support the delivery of sustainable development in rural areas in the 2020s including, for example, through new working practices, new flexibilities, or new patterns of resourcing?

Introducing the Forces for Change and the elements of the rural

The project team has focussed on four Forces for Change, and how these might shape rural planning in the decade ahead. The first of these was **(A) Brexit**: the UK's decision to leave the European Union and its implications for rural places. The second was **(B) climate change and CO_2 emissions**: how rural places will be affected by, and how they should respond to, the challenge of climate change and the need to limit future emissions from travel and other activities. The third force for change was **(C) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**, and what lasting effects (and mitigation needs) this might produce for rural places. The final force for change was slightly different – more of an opportunity than a contextual challenge: the potential of rural areas to be **(D) sites for adaptation** to these and other challenges.

Regular analyses of rural planning tend to compartmentalise what planning does, or could do, according to sectors: so how planning interacts with rural services, with transport, with local infrastructure or investment, with old and new economic activities ranging from farming to high-tech business start-ups. The focus can become even more specific, exploring the plight of post offices, bus services or pubs. Our goal has been to build a more integrative framework for thinking about rural places and planning, starting with the view that those places broadly comprise built, economic, land (and landscape) based, and socio-cultural components. Places are 'made' by tangible and intangible things; by the opportunities these things offer; and by a mix of activities, possibilities and experiences. The importance of this thinking here is that planning interacts with built assets, with the economy, with land and landscape, and also impacts upon the social and cultural dimension of place. These ideas draw upon a framework recently set out by Gkartzios and colleagues (2022). Rural planning interacts with and impacts on the following *Rural Place Elements*:

The **built rural**, comprising built infrastructures, services (including broadband) and housing – the material rural that facilitates human habitation and wellbeing.

The **economic rural**, comprising traditional and new activities that support rural livelihoods, and more specifically community wealth-building infrastructure (including locally-owned businesses) that capture spending and investment and reinvest it back into rural places. It is important to be very clear that the rural economy goes far beyond traditional conceptions of agriculture, comprising a range of rural enterprises.

The **land-based rural**, comprising land and landscape, but more specifically land as a socially-productive asset from which benefit is captured through access and in the form of ecosystem

services or nature-based infrastructure that mitigates climate change, biodiversity loss, etc, and also delivers key social benefits such as health and wellbeing.

The **social and cultural rural**, comprising both the soft infrastructure of places (leadership, support networks and social capital) and patterns of inclusion that sustain the energy and diversity of places. Language is a particularly important element of culture and identity in some places.

This combined framework of *Forces for Change* and *Rural Place Elements* is used to structure our findings, which are summarised after a brief explanation of the methods used to collect key evidence – and details of where that evidence can be found.

Methods and Key Outputs

The evidence gathering and analysis work of the project was focussed around five stages, which we summarise here.

Stage 1 of the project was the preparation of six thematic reviews:

- Rural Housing & Community Change
- Rural Transport, Connectivity and Energy
- Ecosystem Services & the Rural Economy
- Agricultural Transitions
- Green Infrastructure & Nature Recovery
- Community-led/Neighbourhood Planning

These thematic reviews, presented in **Technical Report 1**, were used to frame the discussion in the roundtables (Stage 2) and drew from publicly available data and literature.

Stage 1(a) comprised an analysis of evidence relating to housing market change linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, the aim being to consider the short and longer term impacts on rural house prices and affordability. This phase of work was added at the request of the RTPI at the shortlisting stage, and the results can be found in **Technical Report 2.**

Stage 2 was the organisation of 12 roundtables, bringing together stakeholders and other experts to discuss rural planning in practice. These roundtables included five related to the thematic reviews above (Ecosystem Services & the Rural Economy and Green Infrastructure & Nature Recovery being combined together given the overlap in potential attendance); an additional thematic roundtable on Tourism and the Rural Economy; and six geographically-focussed roundtables focusing on Ireland, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, South East England and North West/North East England (the latter three RTPI regions being co-funders of this research, along with RTPI Cymru and RTPI Northern Ireland). A broad summary of the roundtable discussions is presented in **Technical Report 3.**

Stage 3 comprised the production of five policy assessments, exploring the success (or otherwise) of government policies, schemes and processes which have been put in place to address the Forces for Change in Ireland, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England. These policy assessments are presented in **Technical Report 4.**

Stage 4 involved the identification and exploration of 16 case studies that illustrate the Forces for Change that rural communities are facing, and which illustrate good practice in responding to these forces. These are drawn from across the nations and regions of the UK and Ireland. We also commissioned two “thinkpieces” from independent experts to bring different perspectives on rural planning. The case studies and thinkpieces are presented in **Technical Report 5.**

Key findings

As noted above, we have gathered and analysed a significant amount of data in the course of this project. We heard a great diversity of views on many aspects of rural planning, and indeed other topics. In the summaries of the roundtables (Technical Report 3) and the case studies (Technical Report 5) we have tried to fairly represent that diversity of views. In this report we present our interpretation of the data, and our view on the most significant issues for the future of rural communities in the UK and Ireland. In some instances our research told us issues were relevant to all nations of the UK and Ireland. More often, something was raised in relation to one context (e.g. Ireland), but may well have resonance beyond.

The *key findings* contained in this part of the report draw mainly from our thematic reviews, roundtables and policy assessments. The *key debates, ideas and propositions* presented in the next part of the report draw from our case studies, which are focused on good practice and opportunities for change.

This key findings section is structured to consider our *Forces for Change*. Beneath these forces, starting with Brexit, we look at each of our *Rural Place Elements* and explore impacts for the built, economic, land-based, and social and cultural rural. Whilst we use this framing as an organisational device, it is important to acknowledge that the extent to which our research participants identified 'key forces' as being critical to rural planning varied significantly – in the Irish roundtable, for example, Brexit was scarcely discussed as other challenges and opportunities were prioritised. Things are different in the UK where, for example, significant uncertainty remains around the post-Brexit agricultural support framework. But whilst variable weight was placed on the framing forces, many participants saw shifting demographics and resources for planning as critical everyday concerns for planning practice. These are therefore discussed further at the end of this section.

Brexit

The Built Rural

The evidence gathered suggests that Brexit's impacts are most acutely felt in the farming sector, with implications for land and land use. However, Brexit will have broader linked effects across all Rural Place Elements.

Changes to the market for agricultural[1] products from the UK may require agricultural businesses to adjust their operations, affecting infrastructure needs and creating a demand for new buildings – needed for processing and distribution. Brexit has implications for the seasonal workforce whilst climate change will impact on growing seasons and the choice of crops. The combination of these factors will have implications for seasonal accommodation demand, placing new pressures on the housing stock in some locations. The roundtables drew attention to 'known unknowns': uncertainties around future farming needs with knock-ons for local infrastructure including housing. Brexit has added to the uncertainties linked to climate change and was viewed as a complicating factor in many roundtable discussions.

[1] By agriculture here, we include related land uses and businesses such as aquaculture.

Roundtable participants observed that some agricultural businesses have become unviable, with Brexit exacerbating cost challenges and sinking those activities which were already struggling to stay afloat. By eliminating economically marginal activities, Brexit is exacerbating a long-term trend. The Agricultural Transitions review (Technical Report 1) notes a 30% reduction in the number of English farms since 1990 and a corresponding increase in average farm size to 87 hectares – far above averages in other nations (for example, Ireland has an average size of 32 hectares, Northern Ireland 41 hectares and Wales 48 hectares). Brexit is likely to accelerate this rescaling of farming, with implications for the number, type and configuration of farm buildings and workers' housing.

Away from the farming sector, the Rural Housing & Community Change review (Technical Report 1) notes that the cessation of the freedom of movement for UK residents may impact on retirement plans and the demand for second homes within EU countries. If this happens, then at least some of this demand may be 're-shored' to rural and coastal communities, increasing pressure on rural housing stock and on rural services. In other words, Brexit may accentuate domestic counter-urbanisation pressures in the years ahead, consolidating the retirement and second home trends that are already a feature of many amenity areas. The Welsh Government is conducting a review of planning policy for second homes and holiday lets and has consulted on potential changes to secondary legislation, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities has also been looking at policy options for England, largely because of pandemic-induced pressures, arguably heightened by Brexit.

The Economic Rural

New trade agreements, linked to the 'Brexit dividend', were viewed as both risks and opportunities for UK farmers, and for the UK economy more generally. Roundtable participants noted that the complexity of agreements (and the different arrangements with different countries) make it very difficult to foresee whether the outcomes will be beneficial or detrimental. The only certainty is that farming faces a period of acute uncertainty. Despite this uncertainty, certain predictions appeared to be clearer for roundtable participants: trade deals with New Zealand and Australia – both major meat exporters – would likely impact on beef and lamb production in the UK, further impinging on the viability of domestic businesses.

Within a UK context, the dual impacts of trade competition and future agricultural support arrangements were thought to add to this uncertainty. There is not yet clarity about how farmers in the UK will be paid for the delivery of public goods and how far a future payments regime will diverge from the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. Changes to agricultural practices incentivised by the new support mechanism or as part of other changes in approach, as highlighted in case study 12 (The Food, Farming and Countryside Commission Land Use Framework), may have planning implications where land is put to different uses or different configurations of buildings are required.

Rural fishing communities are expected to be on the sharp end of Brexit impacts, especially if beneficial agreements cannot be reached on the export of fish. It was suggested by roundtable participants that a growth in tourism, facilitated via the UK government's 'levelling up' agenda, might compensate for Brexit losses. But there was considerable scepticism as to how this might be achieved. Fishing towns are often blighted by a lack of infrastructure to support the aspirations of their own populations, let alone the infrastructure needed to support a thriving tourist economy. We

were told that there is a need to (a) get beneficial trade deals in place, and (b) develop long term infrastructure strategies that support local populations and begin to capture new economic opportunities. A mixed economy is key to economic resilience.

Within an Irish context, roundtable participants drew attention to the severing of supply chains that previously connected businesses in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Participants noted problems for small developers in Ireland, unable to source materials on a cross border basis. Brexit has brought disruption to business. This is also the case in Scotland, where businesses such as whisky and shellfish exporters were said to be struggling with post-Brexit bureaucracy. Participants confirmed the veracity of media reports of delays affecting Scottish businesses, and shellfish unable to reach European markets and spoiling in lorries held up at Dover.

The Land-based Rural

The discussions of Brexit impacts in the preceding sections will have land and land-use implications for the UK. Economic activity is rooted in patterns of rural land use and whether land is a socially productive asset will depend on the detail of trade deals and agricultural support. Such debates sit aside from discussions of land use, although planning will need to adapt to and support emergent economic realities. Brexit may have a transformative effect on the UK, with many implications yet to become apparent. The decline of some activities will necessitate new support for others, including the renewable energy sector. But any drive to grow the renewables sector may be hampered by a lack of domestically-produced energy infrastructure and over-reliance on EU suppliers. It was noted in the roundtables that the UK has no domestic wind turbine manufacturers, though one is soon to be set up in Scotland[2]. Sourcing turbines and other parts has now become much more complicated, causing energy developers to factor import rules and uncertainties into their assessments of risk and their contingency budgeting. One participant told us that advancing wind projects is ‘not as easy as it used to be’. Whilst planning was once viewed as an obstacle to advancing projects, and a more permissive and streamlined planning approach was viewed as critical to the promotion of renewable energy, there is now far more concern for sector capacity, impaired by Brexit.

In addition to Brexit, the war in Ukraine has also brought energy security questions to the fore. Arguably a fifth ‘force for change’ this war will no doubt affect rural land use in the years ahead in the UK, Ireland and beyond.

The Social and Cultural Rural

The social and cultural life of rural places is underpinned by economic wellbeing. The fate of the farming economy, and the shifting balance between land-based and other occupations, has always been an important shaper of socio-cultural outcomes. A strong farming economy affords a degree of social closure, rooted in self-reliance and an economy tied to the land. Its replacement by tourism in the latter half of the twentieth century has opened rural areas to a range of external influences and pressures. If Brexit weakens the farming and fishing sectors, and causes a reshoring of investment in housing demand, it may accelerate existing counter-urbanisation pressures with profound social and cultural impacts for rural areas across the UK. Roundtable

[2] https://www.scotsman.com/business/uks-largest-offshore-wind-tower-factory-to-be-built-in-scotland-3481096

participants pointed to a range of tourism and housing pressures affecting key amenity areas such as National Parks. These were often attributed to the pandemic, although it is difficult to untangle Brexit and pandemic demand drivers. How Brexit will affect community wellbeing, through the economic channel, has become a critical concern. The decline of fishing communities, many of which have been labelled ‘left behind’, has attracted considerable media attention. In some places, planning will need to support new infrastructure investments, but social and cultural questions are more often linked (in policy debate) to external change drivers: what should be done about second homes and the transfer of homes to holiday letting? As some rural economies become more reliant on tourism, planning is called upon to prioritise local needs in support of ‘community wellbeing’, judged in terms of housing affordability and the viability of key services.

Climate change

Climate is of course a major force for change for all places and for people across the world, but there are rural-specific challenges and opportunities linked to climate change.

The Built Rural

Changes to the global climate, and to growing seasons, are having profound consequences for the farming sector. In some instances, farmers are having to crop later, which affects the supply of foodstuffs and brings farmers into competition with producers in other parts of the world. The desire by farmers to maintain consistent supply, and protect crops from extreme weather, is driving increased demand for structures such as polytunnels. Where these are larger and in long term use, they can require planning permission, although they constitute ‘permitted development’ in Ireland. Viticulture has become more popular in the UK in recent years, especially in southern England. But the need to protect vines from extreme weather – especially from frost – can increase reliance on mechanical heating. The need to protect crops, either new or traditional, from emergent weather patterns adds to the costs incurred by farmers. It also has a propensity to change the look of agricultural landscapes whilst reducing the sustainability of farming activity, making it more energy intensive and reliant on new technologies. These challenges sit parallel to questions of land-use regulation, but planning plays an important role in facilitating new forms of farming and mitigating its impacts.

Housing was a recurrent theme during our roundtable discussions. The challenges of retrofitting homes to help them mitigate, and adapt to, climate change, are significant across all of the UK and Ireland. Some rural-specific problems, which were identified through the roundtables, were a legacy of poor design and insulation which is not being addressed through existing funding streams, and the need to acknowledge that newer technology such as ground-source and air-source heat pumps requires highly skilled local maintenance, which can be harder to access in rural than urban areas. Ensuring that new housing is fit for the future, both in terms of design and location, is a key function of planning.

Dependency on private cars is a recurrent theme in rural planning debate and one that was touched upon in the roundtables, linked in Britain to the concentration of homes and services in key settlements (to aid walkability and limit car use), or in an Ireland and Northern Ireland context to highly dispersed patterns of rural settlement. Whilst many opportunities exist for promotion of

public transport, at different scales and in various guises, and indeed active travel, the inevitability of a higher degree of car dependency in rural than urban areas was recognised in the roundtables as a persistent challenge facing rural communities in a transition towards zero carbon targets. Because some rural journeys can require a car, it makes sense to support car sharing, through incentive schemes, and also to support the transition to electric vehicles. That transition is challenging in rural areas because of a sparsity of fast charging infrastructure, which is expensive to install, and because of a shortage of maintenance services for electric vehicles. There are clear parallels between digital connectivity and charging infrastructure issues in rural areas: low demand, which is in part due to infrastructure gaps, results in a lack of private investment and a greater need for public subsidy – which is not always forthcoming.

The Economic Rural

Other specific impacts of climate change on rural areas include the severity of the rise in energy costs, exacerbated by supply challenges rooted in Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Rural areas face specific energy vulnerabilities: some communities are off-grid and hence reliant on particularly expensive fossil fuels, including liquified petroleum gas (LPG) and oil, the price for which has risen faster than mains gas and electricity. Energy costs are also higher because of the car dependency noted in the previous section. Longer car journeys will be reflected in higher fuel or charging costs. Increases in fuel costs related to net-zero targets may compound existing cost of living concerns in car dependent rural areas; however, some of these impacts may be mitigated by growing trends towards remote working for rural-based service sector workers.

The Land-based Rural

Rural areas are susceptible to climate threats, for example via increased frequency and severity of riverine flooding; stronger and more regular extreme storms and associated damage to power lines, communications and transportation infrastructure; a greater potential for coastal erosion due to sea level rise; and impacts on farming, fisheries, forestry and aquaculture from rising temperatures, changing weather patterns, and ocean acidification.

Climate change is having a range of impacts on the ‘natural environment’, much of which is in its nature rural and non-metropolitan. Shifts in cultivation methods, in response to climate pressures, can impact negatively on soil quality and on the capacity of land to not only produce food but also sequester carbon and therefore mitigate climate change. The carbon sequestering function of rural land may be further reduced by development, which adds to the water quality issues that are now limiting development in many parts of the UK and Ireland.

The farming economy is a significant source of carbon emissions – accounting for a tenth of UK emissions by some estimates (DEFRA, 2019), while in Ireland on-farm agriculture practices accounted for 33.3% of national total greenhouse gas emissions in 2019[3]. In the UK, roundtable participants drew attention to difficulties and inconsistencies in how emissions are measured and attributed. DEFRA’s approach in England, for example, differs from that of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Farming emissions are of course a trans-boundary issue, and part of a bigger debate on whether emissions should be tied to sites of production or consumption (i.e. measured where food is produced or where it is consumed). Some land use changes are

[3] https://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2019/climate-change-and-irish-agriculture.php

clearly problematic: the loss of peatlands in Ireland, and the corresponding reduction in carbon sequestering capacity, was highlighted in the roundtables as an ongoing challenge.

It is of course difficult to capture the detailed geography of challenges in a summary report: some have localised importance and some issues that are minor in most places can be critically important in a small number of locations. But at a general level, it was acknowledged that rural areas are a point of critical interface with the 'climate crisis'. Their productive economies are greatly affected by extreme weather and by climatic change, but they also have a critical role to play in green energy transitions. The Agricultural Transitions review (Technical Report 1) noted that UK farms generate 10 per cent of the total national electricity supply and 70 per cent of total solar energy. Increasing the contribution of rural areas to farm-based energy production will require: (a) a sufficiently permissive planning regime (see the English Policy Assessment, Technical Report 4, for a discussion on this); (b) adequate grid/infrastructure connectivity; (c) a positive fiscal approach regarding subsidies, etc.; and (d) industry capacity (see discussion above in the Brexit section). Planning policy and practice (a and b) is clearly important, although it was repeatedly noted in the roundtables that 'grid issues' across much of the UK and Ireland are a significant barrier to the roll-out of renewables and also partly responsible for the lack of electrical vehicle charging provision noted above. These are nation-wide concerns that are particularly difficult to resolve in rural areas subject to development constraint and special landscape protections. Case Study 8 (Dingle / Daingean Uí Chúis) illustrates the potential of area-based approaches towards an energy transition in a highly dispersed rural community based on a re-localisation of energy systems.

The balance between wind and solar power was a significant talking point in the roundtables, with solar seen as being responsible for reduced agricultural productivity in some cases. It is land-hungry but financially attractive to those farmers not hindered by grid constraints. More generally, there has been a rising volume of applications for renewables, and significant pre-application discussions involving town, parish and community councils – often contesting landscape and farmland impacts. Roundtable participants argued that local authorities often lack the expertise needed to deal with planning for renewable energy developments applications, which was said to have resulted in a slowing of delivery in all nations of the UK.

How we use land has significant implications for climate mitigation and adaptation, and therefore how we manage and regulate land use plays a critical role in climate actions. Green infrastructure networks and nature-based approaches offer potential for managing exposure to climate change related risks, for example, through upstream flood mitigation. Increasing afforestation and preserving or restoring wetlands and peatlands are critical for carbon sequestration. Furthermore, payments for ecosystem services that address climate action offer potential pathways towards rural development and supporting rural livelihoods, with increases in land value noted in relation to the change of use of agricultural land for carbon sequestration (Scottish Land Commission, 2022).

The Social and Cultural Rural

Climate change and the push for renewable energy has catalysed community action in some rural areas. Community support and leadership can be important in local green energy transitions. Rural places can represent sites of resistance (e.g. local opposition to wind energy schemes) as well as opportunity spaces for low carbon transitions. It is important to map out how 'just transitions' will work and how livelihoods will be maintained and enhanced. For example, a just transition

approach has been adopted in the Irish midlands to shift from peat extraction for carbon-intensive energy towards peatland rehabilitation that supports rural livelihoods. Micro-schemes have been successful in various rural areas, but these frequently involve switches to electric vehicles for community use rather than community-led production projects. There are, however, some examples of local innovation. In Scotland, the Orkney Islands have integrated heat, transport and battery storage in a semi-autonomous off-grid system. Roundtable participants asked why such innovations are rare. One participant at the Scotland roundtable argued that whilst micro-schemes can have significant positive benefits for smaller communities, the planning system continues to prioritise landscape protection over residents' needs and technology-led innovation. That said, there was a 17% increase in community energy in Scotland between 2019 and 2021 (Energy Saving Trust, 2021).

But there are examples where low-energy lifestyles that exploit new flexibilities in national planning rules have become possible. Case Study 3 (Lammas) and the One Planet Development thinkpiece examine such flexibilities. On-site energy generation and alternative lifestyles provide one possible answer to climate challenges, albeit one that may be difficult to upscale.

COVID-19

COVID-19 has been a 'stress test' for rural areas, magnifying the importance of many extant challenges including counter-urbanisation and pressure on rural infrastructure, including housing.

The Built Rural

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the instruction to stay at home and work from home for periods of 2020 and 2021, has increased reliance on digital access. An acceleration in the rollout of faster broadband was claimed, by some of the roundtable participants, as one positive outcome of the pandemic. Case Study 8 (Dingle / Daingean Uí Chúis) illustrates the broad benefits arising from better ICT and smart technologies in rural areas.

But whilst faster connectivity has undoubtedly benefited rural communities, it has also facilitated new housing demands – from mobile and educated workers who, during the pandemic, tasted the 'freedom' of home working from a rural location. Technical Report 2 reviews the evidence of increased counter-urbanisation pressures during the pandemic, comprising rising demand for work-from-home residences, advanced retirement plans, and additions to the existing demand for second homes and holiday letting. Rural areas close to urban centres saw a 10% rise in house prices in the year to July 2021. Bigger rises were reported in some remoter areas, including in National Parks, AONBs, and coastal districts in southern England. Case Study 6 (Derbyshire Dales) exemplifies good practice in the delivery of affordable homes, but the scale of market change in some rural areas during the pandemic points to a growing affordability crisis that may require a different response. In Wales, stakeholders have recently been consulted by Welsh Government on amending the Use Classes Order to enable greater control over the conversion of residential properties from primary residences to second homes or holiday lets. Similarly, in Scotland local authorities can apply to introduce restrictions on Short-term Letting, requiring planning permission for housing to continue in that form of tenure.

For some rural places, the acceleration of remote working provided an opportunity to retain rural populations who might otherwise have sought service sector jobs in larger urban centres or to attract return migrants moving back to their community of origin. In an Irish context, this has been supported by new national remote working policies and funding to support the establishment of remote working hubs in rural communities to blend the benefits of remote working with cooperative workspaces.

An even more immediate impact of the pandemic on rural areas has been the sudden fall-off in public transport use. Stay at home orders and social distancing measures resulting in the cessation of some services and there is a fear that some will not resume because of the longer term impacts of Covid-19 on travel habits. The pandemic put already-struggling public transport services under acute financial pressure. In Britain, Network Rail's revenue shortfall has risen to £2.9 billion (Topsham, 2021), leading to further rationalisation of routes and services.

Increased housing pressure and decreased transport sustainability have been two very visible outcomes of the pandemic. On the transport front, Case Study 9 (Snowdonia), Case Study 5 (Cornwall), Case Study 16 (The Haltwhistle Partnership and Our Future Towns) and Case Study 4 (North West Greenway Network) illustrate how planners can support sustainable transport models, including active travel, but significant public funding has been required in many instances – and the problems with the short-term nature of such funding (with projects simply folding when funding ends) were noted by participants in our roundtables.

The Economic Rural

Tourism and recreation demand surged in many rural areas during the Covid-19 pandemic and also during the periodic national lockdowns. Although people were instructed to 'stay local', they often headed to National Parks or other amenity areas, bringing the sorts of pressures reported in Case Study 9 (Snowdonia). The appeal of green and open spaces soared during the pandemic, though the benefits of increased visitor numbers could not be immediately captured by hotels and cafes, which were unable to open. Once social distancing restrictions were eased and businesses were able to open – and also because visitor demand remained high – more of the spending benefit flowed into local economies. But that benefit has been offset by increased congestion and by pressure on amenities. National Parks and popular rural destinations have struggled with the increase in traffic and with parking demand, and some of the most popular attractions have been blighted by littering and by damage to footpaths.

These immediate impacts have been accompanied by pressure on housing stock and tourist accommodation. The roundtables drew attention to the increased volume of applications to turn bed and breakfast accommodation into self-catering holiday lets for larger groups. Some areas have seen a tenfold increase in the number of short-term lets being advertised on on-line platforms, which has been linked to the eviction of tenants from assured shorthold letting. Increased staycation demand in some areas has been associated with rising rents and reduced housing affordability (see previous section). But other planning issues have been linked to the increased popularity of rural breaks: Local Planning Authorities have seen increased demand for 'glamping' sites, but want to balance opportunities for this type of 'up market' camping experience with more traditional, lower-cost, provision. Some National Park Authorities in Britain have resisted conversion to glamping, with more fixed infrastructure, resulting in conflicts with landowners and a greater volume of appeals.

Although the popular narrative is one of grounded passengers substituting overseas holidays with staycations in the Lakes, the Cotswolds, the Scottish Highlands or the west of Ireland, the picture across the UK and Ireland has been variable. Great Britain, with its large domestic market, has seen an increase in rural tourism. But Northern Ireland saw a reduction in the number of visitors from other parts of the UK, a reflection of domestic airline service operations and reduced capacity of sea-based connections during the pandemic.

The Land-based Rural

Many rural amenity areas saw their 'honeypot' appeal increase during the pandemic. People flocking to National and Country Parks, or to coastal areas, drew attention to the value of these areas and their importance to urban populations seeking escape from urban confinement. The pandemic also revealed gross inequalities in access to green space, spotlighting one advantage that rural people potentially enjoy over their urban counterparts. It was noted above that many areas reported huge surges in visitor numbers: the challenge of protecting sensitive landscapes from overwhelming visitor pressure was brought into sharp relief by the pandemic. Some councils and National Park Authorities, were obliged to look again at visitor facilities, instigate new traffic and parking management strategies, and think about the sorts of sustainable transport strategies that might be able to support higher visitor numbers in the future. The goal is to facilitate access to nature in a sustainable way. Case study 9 again explores one way to do this in the context of a National Park.

The Social and Cultural Rural

On the one hand, the pandemic revealed shortcomings in service and accessibility in many rural areas. Perhaps due to lower population densities, the vulnerability of rural places was initially under-reported. However, emerging evidence suggests that many rural places are among the most vulnerable to Covid-19 health risks, often related to the underlying health characteristics of rural populations, including an older population with more underlying health conditions and fewer economic resources (Gkartzios et al., 2022). Also, a high share of the rural labour force is in essential jobs (e.g. agriculture, food processing) coupled with a limited capability to undertake these jobs from home (OECD, 2020). Moreover, Covid-19 vulnerability intersects with longstanding socio-spatial inequalities between rural and urban places in relation to more limited access to healthcare services and health facilities in rural places. For example, a report by the Nuffield Trust reveals that in the UK, Covid-19 has had a more detrimental effect on rural and remote health trusts than in trusts in more urban areas, related to hospital waiting times, more severe cuts to non-Covid treatments, greater staff shortages and more limited financial resources to cope with additional demand (Palmer and Rolewicz, 2020). Poor broadband connectivity made it difficult, in some areas, to replace face-to-face services (and teaching) with online substitutes. Yet, on the other hand, the lower densities of villages and small towns (replete with gardens and open spaces) helped to maintain community cohesion through the pandemic. The problems of disconnection experienced in some remoter areas were magnified by Covid-19, whilst the 'social capital' of other areas was not noticeably diminished by the pandemic. Research by the Place Alliance (2021: 4) found that 'rural is better for community', with 'rural areas' exhibiting a 'significantly stronger sense of community', largely because of a 'deepening of community support' through the pandemic.

The countryside as a site for adaptation

The final ‘force for change’ is in fact an aspiration: that rural areas will play a crucial role in adapting to broader societal and environmental challenges. The inference is that ‘the countryside’ hosts opportunity sites where, by embracing new possibilities and doing things differently, society will be able to confront whatever comes over the horizon, be it political (e.g. Brexit), economic (e.g. the cost of living crisis) or environmental (e.g. the climate emergency and the responses it necessitates). The evidence presented below highlights challenges and opportunities in relation to adaptation.

The Built Rural

A very significant issue in parts of the UK, particularly Wales and England, is the moratoria in place on new development due to phosphate/nitrate pollution. To be clear, this relates to the position taken by government agencies such as Natural England and Natural Resources Wales that no development should be permitted in areas where rivers and wetlands are sensitive to additional nutrient contributions, unless it can be demonstrated the development will be ‘nutrient neutral’. The net effect of this, we were told, is that parts of some local authorities (for example, Kent, Herefordshire, Carmarthenshire and Powys) have suspended the granting of permissions for new housing development. This creates a serious challenge for these local authorities in meeting their housing need, and of course for rural communities in those areas. It was argued in our roundtables that new housing developments make a relatively small contribution to such pollution, in contrast to intensive agriculture, and therefore the logic for focusing on housing was questioned. However, it is ostensibly easier to put a sudden brake on new residential development, or refocus it away from particular river catchments, than effect overnight change in farming practice. The RTPI is working with local and national authorities to resolve this problem.

But in the meantime, high phosphate / nitrate levels, remain a serious challenge in some rural areas, with authorities stuck between the legacy of intensive farming and the need to increase the pace of development. The ‘phosphate trap’ illustrates the adaptive challenge facing rural areas, which will need to be addressed on several fronts: a significant shift in farming practice, housing solutions with a lighter environmental footprint, and a transition to green economic opportunities.

The further issue of high levels of vacancy within villages and rural towns was identified as a critical issue in the roundtable for Ireland, particularly in relation to commercial properties. ‘High streets’ outside of Ireland’s cities have struggled to maintain vibrancy over the last decade or more, with increasing vacancy rates impacting on their vitality. This is of course a long-term issue in other places too. Reimaging town centre vitality in rural places is an opportunity to rethink how the rural built environment can be more adaptative to changing needs, including the monitoring of town centre vitality, incentives for the adaptive reuse of built environment assets, alternative forms of property/land ownership, and capturing the benefits of new remote working patterns (e.g. establishing rural remote working hubs).

The Economic Rural

The principal forces for change – Brexit, Covid-19 and the ongoing climate crisis – all point to the need for a diversified, green rural economy, which increases resilience to future shocks whilst contributing to the achievement of net zero. Diversification can be seeded from within, through social enterprise or private entrepreneurship, or through external investments that support significant transitions towards renewable energy or new farming models. The combination of local action and external support, which links communities to mobile capital and leads to 'just transitions' is now viewed as vital to the achievement of sustainable development pathways. Roundtable participants noted some of the existing challenges for rural areas: too much emphasis on the private capture of mobile capital, without considering wider community needs, has meant too many small businesses lost to residential conversion. This has left communities bereft of not only economic activity but also the spaces that could otherwise have been put to new economic uses. This has been a long-term trend: villages with 'nothing but housing' and therefore a loss of community wealth-building infrastructure – i.e. small businesses employing local people, recycling spending within the community.

We often heard that planning is not doing enough to nurture and expand this 'wealth-building infrastructure', placing insufficient weight on business support and diversification. Scotland's draft NPF4[4] was held up as a 'missed opportunity' to encourage locally-based smaller scale development that can contribute towards place sustainability, but includes a universal policy relating to community wealth building. On the other hand, the example of a hub for 'community-led sustainability action' in Northumberland (Case study 16: The Haltwhistle Partnership and Our Future Towns) was presented as a good example of what can be achieved by proactive partners, with or without the support of a planning authority.

The Land-based Rural

Land, comprising a physical space and also natural resources above or below the soil, has long been viewed as a crucial 'factor of production'. It is an equally crucial 'factor of adaptation', providing the means and resources needed to adapt to urgent challenges, including climate change. One clear opportunity for such land-based adaptation in rural areas is provided by regenerative agriculture, which works to cut carbon emission via sequestration and can deliver a broad range of environmental and social benefits. Roundtable participants argued that planning should play an active role in supporting *agricultural self-sufficiency* and enhancing *biodiversity* (and sequestration benefits). In order to do this, it needs to shoulder broader land management responsibilities, seeking greater influence over agricultural activity through stronger partnerships with public and private partners. In the UK, farming has generally been outside the purview of planning since the passing of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, and its equivalents, but given the importance of farming as a key land use, it makes sense for planning authorities to exert greater influence over the sector – to achieve greater coordination in rural land-use rather than assume wider regulatory responsibilities. Land-use management is similarly fragmented in Ireland. Case Study 12 (The Food, Farming and Countryside Commission Land Use Framework), and work by the RTPI and others on Local Environmental Planning[5] offer glimpses of how farming,

[4] https://www.transformingplanning.scot/national-planning-framework/
[5] https://www.rtpi.org.uk/policy-and-research/planning-for-a-better-future/#M-4.3

biodiversity and broader land use considerations might be better integrated.

In terms of conceptualising this integration, and the multiple benefits of better land management, the *ecosystem services* approach, which is essentially concerned with the inter-dependencies between people and 'nature', was viewed by roundtable participants as a critically important idea. But depending on how it is used, it can introduce unnecessary scientific complexity into policy discussions or in conversations with non-expert groups and partners. Other labels were preferred, including 'nature benefits', which denote the same basic idea. Whatever its title, this approach is now referenced in policy frameworks across the UK and Ireland. Examples of best practice include the Natural Capital Asset Index[6] in Scotland and Ireland's National Biodiversity Strategy, which seek to mainstream biodiversity into decision-making across all sectors.

But the separation of policy responsibilities and competencies – into 'land use planning', 'nature or landscape conservation', 'land management' and so on – continues to restrict professionals' and communities' capacity to realise the potential of rural areas as sites of adaptation. For many roundtable participants, there was considerable truth in the cliché that rural areas are held back by a lack of joined-up thinking. Farming, housing, rural services, renewables and carbon or bio-diversity offsetting remain compartmentalised issues, with no-one looking at these issues 'in the round', seeing the linkages and taking coordinating actions. Whilst the case studies are unable to capture examples of this 'holy grail', they give some insights into areas of good practice. Well-coordinated offsetting activities (that are not merely exercises in greenwashing) and the pursuit of net gain are likely to become more important in the future as natural capital takes centre stage in rural policy (Case Study 14: Bristol Avon Catchment Market).

The Social and Cultural Rural

Adaptation is dependent on local leadership and on the existence of local networks able to connect to extra-local resources and thereafter retain development benefits for rural places. Green businesses and renewable energy can be part of a community's wealth-building infrastructure, contributing equally to local development and to the achievement of planetary goals. Some of our case studies touch upon issues of soft infrastructure – local networks forming to capture new opportunities or promote new ways of living in rural areas and managing rural resources:

- Case study 1 (Greenprint) provides an example of working across urban/rural and local authority boundaries to deliver on various environmental aims including net-zero, and also adapting to climate change.
- Case study 3 (Lammas) and the One Planet Development thinkpiece illustrate a re-conceptualised relationship between people and nature, and community-based approaches to delivering sustainable development.
- Case Study 7 (Brecon Beacons) highlights the 'doughnut model', a different way to make decisions, including on development proposals, emphasising social value rather than profit as a key measure of success.

These case studies point to possibilities that are rooted in new ways of thinking and attempts to forge different relationships with nature, adapting to planetary challenges through local actions.

[6] https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/social-and-economic-benefits-nature/natural-capital/natural-capital-asset-index

Planning has a role in supporting new ways of living in rural areas, through the sorts of frameworks and flexibilities flagged in the cases. Communities, for their part, have a central role to play in innovating local responses to the various challenges, rooted in the forces for change, discussed above.

Whilst roundtable participants confirmed the importance of Brexit, climate change and the pandemic as forces for change affecting rural areas across the UK and Ireland, two other change drivers emerged from the twelve roundtables: changing demographics and public sector resourcing. We view these as secondary drivers, rooted in economic change and in shifting political priorities. However, they have important implications for planning and are therefore briefly discussed here.

Changing demographics

Demographic change, and especially population ageing, was flagged as a key challenge for most rural areas. Its impacts can be tracked across our rural place elements.

The Built Rural

For the last half century, there has been a roughly 20:80 split between the rural and urban population in the UK, with Ireland at roughly 40:60. This varies between nations, with England being the most urbanised. Counter-urbanisation has been a constant trend during this period, but the continuing concentration of growth in cities has maintained the overall split, despite some life-stage based loss of population to the countryside (the ageing of the rural population means lower in-situ growth – the natural rate of population increase in urban areas is therefore higher). However, remoter rural areas have been gaining population at a faster rate in recent years. Faster counter-urbanisation has impacted on some rural housing markets, with this issue explored in greater depth on Technical Report 2. Local authorities have responded to this pressure by working with partners to deliver more affordable housing. Communities in England have prioritised housing when formulating neighbourhood development plans, and some have formed land trusts with a view to contributing new homes for local need. Registered providers, for their part, have developed bespoke rural programmes and have become adept at delivering on exception sites. But demographic change risks overwhelming these efforts. Counter-urbanisation, especially post-pandemic, is viewed as a major challenge going forward. In Ireland, rural housing growth has generally been accommodated through self-build, single houses in the open countryside, reflecting traditionally dispersed rural settlement patterns. Recent policy approaches signal a shift to rebalancing the settlement system towards plan-led approaches to accommodating new housing development within existing villages and rural towns through a town centre first emphasis.

Ageing rural places also raise critical issues in relation to the adaptation of the rural built environment, particularly in the context of healthy ageing. This includes the nature of housing provision related to later life transitions; availability of care homes in rural contexts; the cost of social care provision delivered ‘in home’ within highly dispersed rural geographies; and rural mobilities and inclusion, for example, how do older people adapt when they give up driving? How we plan for the ageing of our population, how we choose to address the challenges and maximise the opportunities, will determine whether rural society can reap the benefits of the so-called

'longevity dividend'.

The Economic Rural

The population ageing noted above has a significant impact on economic productivity, especially if working people find themselves locked out of housing markets and displaced from rural communities. Housing-related displacement is not the only driver of population change. Younger people leave rural areas for a variety of reasons. However, a faster rate of counter-urbanisation can mean that housing-related displacement becomes *relatively* more important. A loss of younger people and young families has an economic effect, as businesses struggle to fill posts (especially in the service sector, but also in emergent business sectors). At the same time, an increase in older residents drastically alters the 'needs profile' of rural areas. Older residents rely on (now displaced) younger residents to work in the shops and care-services that are vital to ageing populations. Older people, particularly those with more limited means and fewer local family connections, can become the most vociferous advocates of more additional affordable housing for young families, as their lives become affected by loneliness, isolation and an inability to access services. The demographic imbalance, rather than just ageing, is a drag on rural economies and a blight on communities. It disrupts the way communities work, affecting economies and key service sectors including schools. Population loss and ageing is a problem in many remoter rural areas, across the UK and Ireland. But imbalance is a risk almost everywhere as housing market processes, combined with constraints on the supply of affordable homes, risk the displacement of younger households who are reliant on local jobs and earnings and who struggle to compete with counterurbanising and retiring households for a limited housing resource.

The Land-based Rural

A wider process of occupation-linked demographic ageing, not related to counterurbanisation, has implications for the farming sector. The Agricultural Transitions review (Technical Report 1), observed that the average age of farmers in the UK has risen to 59 years. Whilst age is no barrier to innovation, the lack of young people choosing to take up careers in agriculture was flagged as a challenge for the sector by roundtable participants. No distinction was made between family farms and larger commercial operations. The latter might offer more structured career pathways (with opportunities to move, progress, get promoted etc.) and be less stressful than the struggle of running a marginal hill farm. But irrespective of these differences, ageing is a critical problem for more traditional farms and is likely to further undermine the viability of the sector in the years ahead.

The Social and Cultural Rural

Demography has a huge impact on the functioning and wellbeing of rural places: as well as changing the needs profile and impacting on local economies, it affects the sense of community. These demographic changes can also have far more significant implications where they have impacts on languages spoken with rural communities, including in rural parts of Wales. Ageing populations need fewer rural schools and a narrower set of services overall. Primary schools are an important hub for communities, a bridge between families with different backgrounds. The deadening effect of losing schools, and the social cohesion they incubate, has been noted in past research. These things can seem initially unimportant to retiring households, but the lack of young

people may become increasingly significant in later retirement as individuals' health and mobility declines. Challenges around the provision of rural transport infrastructure, as well as the other services noted above, may have greater consequences for an ageing, less mobile population. Although older residents may support the provision of more affordable and more mixed housing, the lack of *in situ* downsizing opportunities for older people is another reason why it can be difficult for young people to move (back) to villages. This challenge has been recognised by CLTs and housing associations, some of which have focused their activities on 'downsizer housing' for older residents, which free up bigger homes for families.

Resource constraints

Resource constraints affecting rural planning authorities were highlighted in the majority of roundtable discussions. They limit the capacity of planners to not only engage in the 'extended' activities discussed in this report but also perform basic statutory duties. The purpose of this section is to report what we heard in the roundtables and reflect briefly on its implications.

Rural authorities were said to be short-staffed and struggling to fill posts. This makes it difficult to extend the scope of their activity, to engage in more imaginative place-making, or to work with partners on new projects. Some councils are having to pay supplements in order to attract new staff. The caseload of rural authorities is sometimes unattractive to new graduates, who wish to work on a range of project types and scales, and/or may initially prefer to work closer to the place they studied – which, as noted below, is nearly always in an urban location. Some of them see local authority practice as a stepping stone to careers in the private sector and are concerned that prospective employers, located in large cities, will not value the sorts of experience gained in a small rural authority. And even where this is not the intended career trajectory, working in a rural authority is not seen as 'cool enough'. Many of the factors leading young people to leave rural areas also deter young planners from rural jobs. We were told that graduates view the countryside as a 'retirement retreat' and not a first destination after university. These negative perceptions are further compounded by the insecurity of fixed-term contracts, which are a consequence or resource issues.

In short, rural authorities are outcompeted by their urban counterparts for new graduates. Resource constraints are common across the UK and Irish public sectors, but rural areas find it particularly difficult to recruit staff. An added problem in England is the move to unitary authorities. Big rural unitaries (by area) served by small planning teams (because of their small populations) are difficult working environments. It can take hours to reach a site. Small enforcement teams, often comprising a single officer, with huge case loads can become demoralised. Similarly small teams need to produce local plans, but can lack breadth of expertise and experience and the opportunity to share skills. Workloads soar when a member of staff is on leave, or during those periods when the authority struggles to fill a vacant post.

The picture is sometimes a bleak one: overworked officers trying to cover a large area and also dealing with a huge diversity of rural challenges. The remit of the planning system is being constantly widened, with new responsibilities and new considerations added to every iteration of planning policy. The issues encountered in rural areas differ from those that are commonplace in cities, but the curricula of planning schools have an urban bias and a rural blindspot. It takes time

and resources to induct new officers into the complexities of rural practice. And sometimes, general skills cannot cover specialist areas. Roundtable participants drew attention to a number of expertise gaps in rural areas, relating to climate change, natural capital, design and ecology.

All of this makes it difficult for rural planners to be proactive place-shapers. Rather, they are stuck in a ‘reactive mode’, dealing with planning applications as they come in. But even the development control function is slowed by resource constraints. Participants reported approval delays across many authorities, which have a knock-on effect for businesses and for local economies. Planning aims to support communities and the development sector, but it sometimes struggles to provide this support. Resourcing, and the recruitment challenges affecting authorities, was cited as a factor limiting rural areas’ capacity to become sites for adaptation.

Key debates, ideas and propositions

In this final section, we draw together some of the key issues facing rural places, identify good practice that might be usefully replicated elsewhere, and report on areas of consensus emerging from our roundtables and wider research: ideas relating to future planning policy and practice designed to better support rural communities, economies and places in the 2020s and beyond. Whilst the last section focused on roundtable discussions, the emphasis here is on what can be learnt from our case studies.

Broader ideas and propositions relate to capacity; rural economies; rurally distinctive and people-centred planning; connecting communities; and climate change, agriculture and the natural environment.

Capacity

It was noted in the last section that rural planning capacity is hindered by a combination of resource constraint and low interest in rural practice. More is required to promote the importance of planning for rural areas, including whether the skills and knowledge currently developed during initial planning education is fit for purpose or if there needs to be more consideration of the dynamics of rural areas and urban-rural interaction. It was suggested by some that the urban location, and curricula of most Planning Schools, may lead to a rural blind-spot. It will not be the right focus for all planning schools, but the creation of more rural pathways or specialisms, at some universities, might help alleviate the shortage of rural planning capacity. Encouraging colleges to develop related courses that could be accredited by the RTPI is another possibility.

We heard from multiple sources at our roundtables that in many areas planners lack a broad appreciation of the many pressures facing rural areas, cutting across traditional land use and including issues relating to the farming sector and biodiversity. This lack of appreciation has been worsened by the loss of experienced public sector staff over the last decade, reducing the opportunity for junior staff to learn from more senior colleagues. Many of the Case Studies contained in Technical Report 5 report on strong local planning leadership across a number of projects. Planners have been instrumental in leading change. We do not wish to imply that the whole sector lacks enthusiastic and skilled practitioners. However, there is a palpable fear that capacity is being lost – that a new generation of rural planners is not ‘coming through’ as quickly as necessary. A focus on training is part of the answer to this challenge, whether through traditional routes or alternatives such as those noted above and (degree) apprenticeships, which the RTPI has been championing.

The other part is making sure that local authorities are sufficiently resourced. This is of course a challenge across the public sector, making it difficult for planners to ‘get out more’ and work with partners on projects that can really make a difference. Governments across the UK and Ireland have emphasised the importance of green transitions to energy and food security and to future economic prosperity. These transitions will largely happen in rural areas, which should now become a focus for greater resourcing.

Rural economies

Some of the Forces for Change discussed in this report, notably the COVID-19 pandemic, have accentuated pre-existing trends. Many rural areas looked very much like 'playgrounds' for wealthier visitors and investors during the pandemic. House prices and rents rose and economies adjusted to capture visitor spending, often by transferring long-term rented housing to short-term letting. The displacement of local people and the transfer to rentierism does not suggest that economies were moving to a more sustainable footing. Resilience in rural economies is achieved through greater diversity of activity, of which sustainable tourism is likely to be an important component.

Case Study 9 (Snowdonia National Park/Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri) shows an area acknowledging the importance of tourism to a local economy, but seeking to actively and effectively manage its social and environmental impacts, ensuing that local communities, landscapes and biodiversity are not negatively impacted by high visitor numbers. Economies support local livelihoods and therefore need to be managed in ways that do not cause local harm.

Brexit was not the main talking point in any of the roundtables, but its local impacts were occasionally flagged. It has clearly disrupted the UK-Ireland political relationship and also affected the movement of goods – notably the agri-food sector – between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and also Great Britain and Ireland. Supply chain issues have emerged, causing friction and costs for rural businesses. Proponents of Brexit promised a more 'global Britain' – outward looking and forging new relations with nations outside of the EU. The reality has been a reshoring of supply chains, with businesses attempting to avoid border costs by sourcing materials locally. This could be a good thing, reducing carbon emissions and building stronger local economies. But our roundtable participants told us that if supply chains are to be shortened, planning must support a wider range of business activities (and land use changes) in rural areas, which would require a modification to national planning policy – aimed at building mixed-activity economies.

Rurally Distinctive and People-Centred Planning

People – as individuals, or within groups or communities – are the essential concern of planning everywhere. Many roundtable participants, invariably from outside local authorities, argued that planning policy and practice is not sufficiently cognisant of the needs of people. This charge has been levelled at planning for years: the bureaucracy, the evidence gathering, and so forth, does not reflect lived realities. Planning adopts a stylised or aggregate view of how people live and what they need, because people are not sufficiently central to policy or project design, or to evidence gathering. The criticism is seldom entirely fair, but the complexities of steering or managing change can lead to the side-lining of people's needs. This is true in urban as well as rural areas, but our roundtables flagged very specific rural challenges.

First, a lot of what happens in the countryside is beyond the control of local planning. The farming economy, for example, has limited interactions with the planning system, and national and international designations (such as National Parks, Green Belt, SPAs and SACs) set rules that authorities must abide by, but which they have little control over. The net result is that people exert less influence over place in rural areas that in urban ones. Second, the planning system is imbued with principles rooted in urban practice – for example, discourage car use and concentrate

development in service centres.

The first challenge is difficult resolve, beyond saying that ‘progressive planning’ should be flexible in the face of local need and despite national edict. The second is potentially easier to answer, but requires a culture shift in policy. Rural places are not urban places and the countryside is a distinct and special context for planning. Echoing the 2008 Taylor Review (of the rural economy and affordable housing in England) we heard that many rural communities find themselves in a ‘sustainability trap’ and denied the development they desperately need. Smaller villages are viewed as unsuitable locations for new housing or services, with planning deciding that these things should be concentrated in service centres. The sustainability trap is a legacy of Structure Planning, which sought to maintain the medieval settlement hierarchy with market towns at the top. This is a particular challenge in the UK, where many villages are redlined against development. Ireland has taken a more permissive approach, allowing the development of self-build homes in open countryside, which express the rights of rural people to set up home in and around their own communities. Each of these two extremes creates its own problems.

A more ‘balanced approach’ would start with an assessment of particular circumstances and needs, and consider the merits and contribution of development either in a smaller settlement or in open countryside. This is already happening in some parts of the UK. Roundtable participants cited Wales’s One Planet Development approach and its Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) as a framework for rural development that breaks out of the ‘one-size fits all’ mindset. Likewise, Scotland’s recent land reforms and its focus on delivering sustainable development through community acquisition of land and built assets, was viewed as a model for protecting the needs of excluded and marginalised groups and communities. These models are explored in Technical Report 5, with some of the cases summarised below.

Case study 3 and a commissioned think-piece reflect on the operation and merits of Wales’s One Planet Development policy. The policy seeks to promote a new balance between people and nature, protecting biodiversity and restoring landscapes. It creates a new opportunity for people to live in a different way in rural areas, supporting a less intensive pattern of settlement. The policy was welcomed by roundtable participants, who nevertheless felt that the general focus of Planning Policy Wales remained ‘too urban’, with an emphasis on ‘towns and cities’. The contention that there is insufficient focus on rural areas in national frameworks was commonplace: the zoning of land uses in Ireland remains too ‘broad brush’ and ignores the nuance of rural needs. Northern Ireland was argued to have an almost ‘anti-rural’ skew, with its Housing Growth Indicators being less about where growth should go and more about steering it away from rural communities, undermining their future viability. And despite Scotland’s progressive land reforms, it was suggested that the draft NPF4 could do much more to support and revitalise rural communities. English planning, likewise, has long been accused of an urban-centric approach, whether through the existing NPPF or the emerging Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

Whilst some good things are happening, and often breaking from the policy straitjacket that rural areas have found themselves in in recent decades, national planning approaches remain urban-biased. That said, some specifically rural concerns have emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic. Counter-urbanisation and its impact on housing markets was flagged in the last section. In Wales, this has prompted debate around possible revision of the Use Classes Order, as a means of regulating the transfer of permanent residences to second home use or to holiday letting. The proposal is that new use classes are created for secondary homes (C5) and short-term holiday lets

(C6). Under normal circumstances, the transfer between uses classes will be permitted development. But where second homes or AirBnB-style letting are having detrimental community impacts, local authorities will be able to designate a protection zone and suspend permitted development rights by issuing an Article 4 Directive. This is being presented as a tactical response to be deployed in special circumstances. There are of course concerns over its implementation and enforcement, and over its impacts on the housing market and development activity. However, none of these things have been researched as the potential change to secondary legislation is yet to be enacted. In Scotland, the new Short-term Letting controls offer local authorities the chance to restrict such changes to housing tenure where they can demonstrate impact on local communities. In the meantime, rural authorities continue to respond to local housing need through more conventional means.

Case study 6 (Derbyshire Dales) illustrates what can be done within existing planning policy. The local authority in this case has prioritised affordable housing delivery for more than a decade, and delivers on this by exceeding national targets for housebuilding and maximising rural affordable housing through an active programme of enabling activity. This has meant that some sites viewed as unviable by the private sector have been developed, providing important new homes in some small communities. There is little to prevent other local authorities being more positive in their planning approach, except perhaps the resource constraints noted above.

Case study 2 (land reform in Colonsay) references the Land Reform (Scotland) Acts of 2003 and 2016 and provides a powerful example of prioritising community rights and needs over those of private landowners. The ability of communities to buy land to further sustainable development is having significant positive impacts in places such as Colonsay, and such benefits could be extended beyond Scotland if there were the political will to do so. Land reform in Scotland expresses a particular balance between private and community rights, which is not the same in other parts of the UK.

Indeed, we were told that elsewhere in the UK community activism is often undertaken without significant public sector support. Case study 13 (Bridport Cohousing Microgrid), which bears some resemblance to the One Planet Development approach, is an example of lower-impact community-led development in the South West of England. A Community Land Trust, with a focus on sustainable housing, developed homes at close to Passivhaus standards. At the same time, a community energy company has been established to pool and share energy through a ‘microgrid’ that connects the solar panels on individual homes. Low levels of car ownership (and therefore parking) is another feature of the scheme.

Planning can be slow to adjust to these sorts of innovation, often insisting on minimum parking provision even when the proponents of projects, along with those wanting to live in new homes, are seeking to reduce car use – as noted above, not always commonplace in rural areas. The Marmalade Lane development in Cambridge, situated in a rural local authority that is part of the city region, was another example mentioned in the roundtables. It delivers on many aspects of sustainable development but the planning authority was slow to give approval as it clearly deviated from the standard housing model. There are many other examples of sustainable development, using unconventional materials and building methods, that have been slowed by local planning. Some groups have given up and walked away from projects, disheartened by the planning response. National policy and local practice may need to be more flexible, in terms of the judgments it makes over the merits of proposals, such as their form and location, in instances

where they clearly deliver wider public benefit.

Two further examples address the relationship between regulatory response and community-led innovation. Case Study 10 (Talking about our Place, Scotland) that cuts across several of the themes discussed in this section. It describes an attempt by NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage) to empower (rural) communities to better represent their needs and preferences in landscape planning, seeking to balance expert-driven approaches to ecosystem services with community input. This case shows the value of a tool which supports the need for planners and politicians to reflect on power imbalances within the planning system – empowering communities must, in most cases, mean a reduction in power held by experts and elected representatives. There also needs to be greater trust in community-led projects to deliver wider benefit.

Case study 16 (the Haltwhistle Partnership and Our Future Towns) is an example of both good practice in community-led planning and the scope for partnerships between local authorities, community organisations and others to deliver real benefits for communities. These benefits, in the Haltwhistle case, range from the re-use of redundant station buildings to increased recycling and a switch to green mobility – in the form of shared e-bikes, installed at the station. Northumberland County Council is involved in the Haltwhistle Partnership, but this large unitary authority has stretched resources. Much of the impetus for the project's success has come from the community itself, whose energy has been harnessed for public benefit – compensating, to a degree, for a lack of planning capacity.

Connecting communities

Fast, well covered, and reliable broadband connectivity is crucial to sustainable, economically-diverse, rural futures. The roundtable suggests that some headway was made during the pandemic to increase connectivity, but the evidence on that is unclear. What is clear is that local projects have been a significant contribution to connecting communities.

Case study 8 (Dingle/*Daingean Uí Chúis*) illustrates what is possible in relation to connectivity and 'smart' activity in an area that has a vibrant tourism sector but a declining population due to out-migration. The *Corca Dhuibhne* 2030/Dingle Peninsula 2030 partnership goes beyond broadband connectivity to consider the potential of, and embrace, a wide range of 'smart' technologies. The partnership is also underpinned by a strategy that can be held up as good practice in 'bottom-up' planning, rooted in local people's aspirations and needs. Through the project, housing has been retrofitted, technology has been used to manage community transport, and remote working hubs have been established in support of a transition to new ways of working. The strategy has been developed outside of the formal planning system, but demonstrates the value of close partnership working. It also demonstrates a clear alternative to those planning orthodoxies which concentrate services and consign small settlements to slow decline: a focus on social and ICT infrastructure offers a route to revitalising villages, enhancing rural living, and fostering a new entrepreneurial buzz.

Case Study 11 (Parish Online) is a very different example of digital connectivity, allowing parish and town councils in England to access and map significant datasets. It helps them visualise the spatial impacts of planning and empower communities to use data in support of their own objectives. This is a cross-cutting case, linking not only to connectivity but also local action on the climate front. Parish Online supports the production of community-focused climate plans. The tool

is arguably not a finished project. Data are not always consistent, but the potential of Parish Online will grow as the availability of diverse open data sets widens.

In the 1970s, Malcolm Moseley – a rural planning academic working in Gloucester – called ‘accessibility’ the defining rural challenge. Thirty years later, he baulked at the suggestion that the accessibility challenge would be ended by new technology – that people would simply live and interact on their computers (later to be substituted by smart phones). Physical connectivity, and accessibility, remains important. It is widely understood that rural areas, particularly those which are more remote, will never have the same level of access to public transport. But we heard, in the roundtables, about a range of ways in which reliance on conventional private cars can be reduced. The three cases summarised below highlight recent innovations.

Case Study 4 (the Greenway Network) shows how communities can be connected across national borders, with a modal shift away from the private car the aim of this strategy, focussing upon greenways and cycle lanes. Rural towns and villages are linked to each other but, importantly, also to the regional city of Derry. The specifics of the scheme, discussed in detail in the case study, are important, as is the cross-border and cross-local authority working which enabled it. The latter illustrates the importance of strategic thinking to underpin more local action. Derry’s experience contrasts with that of rural areas in England, where joint working between authorities is made more difficult by the lack of a strategic planning framework.

Case study 5 (Cornwall) focuses on a development plan document (DPD) addressing the ‘climate emergency’. One of its foci is future transport and facilitating integration between different travel modes. The plan has guided significant efforts to integrate public transport ticketing and timetabling across modes, supported by capital and revenue investment in new trains and buses. Reduced bus fares are being piloted and it is hoped that these will result in a sustained increase in public transport use by residents and visitors. The case illustrates the importance of long term investment in rural transport systems, which need to work with the reality of population dispersion and lower levels of ridership.

Case Study 9 (Snowdonia National Park/Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri) is focused on reducing the impact on tourist travel in a National Park. Inspired by the ‘Alpine Pearls’ approach in Austria, the case also shows the value of trans-national learning. Snowdonia has been a location under intense pressure from visitors for some years, with that pressure amplified by the ‘urban flight’ triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Ninety-eight per cent of visitors to the Park arrive by private car, with many heading to an inner core area. The Snowdonia Partnership is seeking to reduce the congregation of vehicles in the core area by encouraging people to park in less pressured areas and travel in by bus. The idea has potential but will require investment in new infrastructure and in sustained bus services.

Similar schemes in other amenity areas have had positive impacts but have been reliant on short-term funding. We heard in the roundtables that the GoLakes integrated travel scheme in the Lake District was a huge success, reducing car travel and increasing public transport use. But the scheme ended when the funding stopped. Year round or even seasonal schemes do not have the same viability as urban ‘park and ride’ schemes. Visitors will choose to drive all the way to their final destination if fares are too high, something which is often impossible to do when visiting a city such as Oxford or Cambridge (where parking is scarce, highly-regulated and very expensive). Again, alternatives to the private car in rural areas are highly dependent on sustained funding,

which can be used to sustain greener transport options for residents as well as visitors.

Climate change, agriculture and the natural environment

These different topics are brought together here because the effective management of each is dependent on the same integrated policy approach, which moves beyond the policy, governance and planning fragmentation of the past. Such fragmentation was identified in our roundtables as a concern in all jurisdictions. Given the interconnectedness and complexity of policy concerns that play out in rural areas, and which fall to different government departments to lead on, it is of course understandable policy sometimes 'muddles through' in a pragmatic but not always an integrated way. But examples exist of areas, plans and projects building the necessary 'vertical' and 'lateral' linkages needed to deal with cross-cutting issues. Technical Report 5 gives a number of case study examples. The most salient are summarised below.

Case Study 1 (Greenprint for South Hampshire) is an integrated plan which aims to ensure that the sub-region makes a strong contribution to achieving climate resilience. The emphasis is on joint working, bringing collaborations and partnerships to bear on a series of priorities and objectives, many related to climate change and sustainable development. Greenprint is a good example of different partners, operating at different levels, agreeing practical ways to work together in pursuit of a green recovery. Indeed, the lead partners argue that Greenprint shows how local actions can respond to 'abstract' and 'macro' challenges, which can otherwise seem too big and overwhelming. It also shows how rural planning professionals are well-placed to lead on integrating action at scale. The National Park Authority in the area is a key partner, perhaps less affected by capacity issues than many local authorities (although other NPAs, in other parts of the UK, experience the same challenges linked to the stretching of resources). Capacity issues, discussed above, can limit the scope for replication of the Greenprint approach in other places.

Renewable energy is a sector directly affected by fragmentation. Bold national targets are out of sync with the grid connectivity issues that limit the potential of this sector. There are clearly also tensions in areas deemed to be of high landscape value, with local communities, elected members and planning policy not always in alignment. The roundtable participants regularly noted these issues, and especially their impact on renewable energy roll-out in England.

The fragmentation centred on agriculture was examined in the last section, where it was contended that planning needs to do more to align with the changing needs of agricultural businesses and understand the huge contribution regenerative agriculture can make to tackling climate change and delivering on biodiversity commitments. Some participants in the roundtables argued that the Town and Country Planning Act, and equivalents, needed to be torn up – that planning should assume a role in the regulation of farming as a key land use in rural areas. Others were more circumspect, arguing that there is scope within existing frameworks for planning to work more closely with the agricultural sector. Examples cited included Case Study 7's 'doughnut' approach in the Brecon Beacons National Park. The case focuses on achieving 'socially just transitions' away from carbon-intensive land-uses, in partnership with the farm sector.

Case Study 15 (ELMS trials in the North of England), also looks at the interaction with farming and explores the replacement of the EU-level payments to farmers in England, post-Brexit. Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) are an antidote to uncertainty and provide

payments for farming that improves the environment and mitigates climate change. The North Cumbria Farmers Group was the subject of one particular trial, with farmers in this area often using more traditional methods than other parts of the country, keeping alive old farming practices that have a cultural value, a potentially regenerative effect on land resources, and may help achieve bio-diversity goals. ELMS, in this case, helped preserve these benefits.

There are many examples of good practice, or things that work well given the pairing of a particular intervention and a particular context. Saying which should be mainstreamed or which offers a 'winning formula' for rural areas is difficult. But it is clear that the capacity to experiment, monitor, evaluate and learn, is important in rural planning given the diversity of challenges and contexts. Roundtable participants were clear that good planning positively affects a place's capacity to adapt and transform. It is the combination of place attributes and supportive planning rules that aids adaptation.

However, planning needs to balance a myriad of competing claims in rural space, from housing through habitat protection, flood management, biodiversity net gain and tree planting, to the effective management of landscape designations and the promotion of economic diversity. We heard that many rural areas need to urgently transition from where they are *now* – from locked-in carbon dependency and unsustainable patterns of development and energy use – to where they need to be *very soon* – places of economic diversity and adaptation. A framework is needed in which to make sense of competing needs and land-uses, and in which to rebalance sustainability's 'wobbly stool'. The idea of *just transitions* seems to offer a way forward, as it argues that local people's livelihoods, and their future prospects and prosperity, cannot be secondary to the achievement of global goals. There is inherent injustice is asking rural populations to foot the bill for society's wider environmental agenda.

Ideas on how local populations share in the benefits of just transitions emerge from a number of case studies. The 'Talking about our Place' toolkit, for example, illustrates the central role of communities in identifying the values and benefits arising from key assets. The danger with the ecosystem services approach is that it can be dominated by experts, whose assessment of key benefits (and therefore how assets should be managed) can differ from those of local people. Local leadership and broad input is essential to just transitions. But other groups also have key roles to play. Case Study 14 (Bristol Avon Catchment Market) is another example of the ecosystem services approach in action. In this case, a market for 'net gain' in the area connects landowners with investors via an online platform – pre-empting the Biodiversity Net Gain requirements that will come into force in England from 2023 onwards. Local authorities are able to use the platform to guide strategic decisions and coordinate with landowners. There is now a broad debate in England over the achievability of net gain through onsite actions versus strategic off-setting, or a combination of the two. There is much to learn in this area from frontrunners and existing innovations.

A final but crucial consideration is the national governance framework for all of the above. We argued in the previous section that there is some truth in the old cliché that a lack of joined-up thinking is hindering rural policy and projects. For example in England, key responsibilities sit in different departments – DLUHC and DEFRA – and their various executive agencies; likewise in Northern Ireland rural planning cuts across three departments – DAERA, DfC and DfI. In Wales, an expansive ministerial portfolio on climate change enables planning to make important connections with other dimensions of sustainability, although rural affairs remains a separate and discrete

ministerial portfolio. This separation is unlikely to change in the short term, so it is vital that bridging frameworks are developed that offer more integrative visions of rural futures across multiple domains. Case Study 12 looks at the Food, Farming & Countryside Commission's (FFCC) Land Use Framework. Recognising that England is the only part of the UK to lack an integrated framework of this type (Scotland has a Land Commission and land use strategy and Ireland a forthcoming National Land Use Strategy), the FFCC has proposed a set of principles and practices that should be owned and shared by local, regional and national organisations and that underpin the delivery of '[…] integrated, collaborative and place-based decision making' that optimises 'multifunctional benefits from our land'. The principles and general approach are being piloted in Devon and Cambridgeshire. Given the urgent need to deliver just transition in contexts of land use complexity and multiple competing interests, integrative frameworks appear essential. The FFCC approach, or Local Environmental Planning, being explored by the RTPI and others, could provide very important frameworks for future planning in rural areas. At the time this report was being finalised, the UK Government published its food strategy for England (DEFRA, 2022), which includes the commitment to "publish a land use framework in 2023", demonstrating the pertinence of these ideas.

Final thoughts

There are no silver bullets or easy prescriptions for the challenges facing rural areas. In the roundtables, we were struck by the diversity of rural situations and the vast range of issues that need to be resolved or managed. Glimpses of good practice are offered in the case studies. This main report needs to be read in conjunction with the cases, and also with the more detailed analysis offered of key themes – from housing through to farming – and of existing policy frameworks across the UK and Ireland. This main report only scrapes the surface of the roundtable discussions. A more detailed account of participants' views is provided in a separate report.

Planning is an intensely context-specific undertaking. The importance of place-specific planning is essential for rural planning practice, emphasising the intimate link between place and planning. People provide that link and have much to contribute to rural planning practice in the 2020s and beyond. Their knowledge and their energy are key to many of the successful initiatives reported in the case studies, and empowering communities should be an ongoing aim for planning in rural as well as urban areas.

But local energy is not a complete substitute for a well-resourced planning service. We heard that general resource constraints affecting the public sector are compounded in rural areas by recruitment challenges. There is a clear role for the RTPI and for planning schools in reinvigorating the art and science of rural planning, in nurturing new talent and helping rural authorities overcome their recruitment and skills challenge.

A recurrent problem for rural areas, which also affects the recruitment of planners, is the 'farming trope': the countryside is all about food production and its only need is to be protected from intrusive development. The farming economy is very important, but rural areas are about much more than food production and need to be supported in the transition to mixed, post-carbon economies. Planning will be central to that transition, guided by principles that are agreed but flexibly applied at all levels, and delivered by a broad partnership of community, public, voluntary and private interests.

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