



# Deprivation in Rural Northumberland

*Report of the 2016 Rural Northumberland Conference*

Community Action Northumberland

*UNIUN Enterprise Building, Front Street, Pegswood, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 6RG*

<http://ca-north.org.uk/>

## Background

Community Action Northumberland (CAN) is the Rural Community Council for the county. CAN was established in 1951 to provide a rural voice for Northumberland as well as to deliver a range of projects, services and activities to help meet our ambition to support rural communities in Northumberland that are vibrant, inclusive, confident, effective and capable of sustaining themselves. To find out more about CAN, please visit our website:

<http://ca-north.org.uk/>

Each year CAN hosts a spring conference to gather views, opinions and baseline information on a wide range of matters to inform both policy and action. On 14 June, the 2016 conference focused on the fundamental issue of rural deprivation asking the following question:

***Deprivation in Rural Northumberland: Does it exist and what can we do about it?***

The conference was very well attended by over 80 individuals and organisations who were treated to thought provoking presentations by Professor Mark Shucksmith of Newcastle University and Janice Rose of Northumberland County Council. Liz Chadwick (Credit Champion for Newcastle Together) and Ian McRae (Alnwick Youth Project) then explained their thoughts on rural deprivation and need in Northumberland from a more local perspective before everyone broke up into discussion groups to have their own say on the topic. Copies of the presentations from the day can be viewed on CAN's website.

This report has been produced based on the presentations and comments made during the conference. The report will now be subject to input from the 'Friends of Rural Northumberland' before a final report is completed to act as a critical input into organisational plans and, hopefully, funders' policy in relation to rural Northumberland. The final report will be available in the autumn of 2016 and will subsequently be updated and augmented as further relevant information and evidence is generated.

## National trends and the implications for rural communities

Nationally, deprivation is formally measured by the English Indices of Deprivation. This includes domains covering employment, health, education, housing & services. Crime and environment.

The indices suffers from an urban bias, picking up concentrations of deprivation in urban areas much more readily than in rural areas. For example, access and distance are excluded from the indices, unlike the Scottish equivalent – the Scotland Index of Multiple Deprivation. As a result most “deprivation” is found to be urban, as shown in Figures 1 and 2 below.

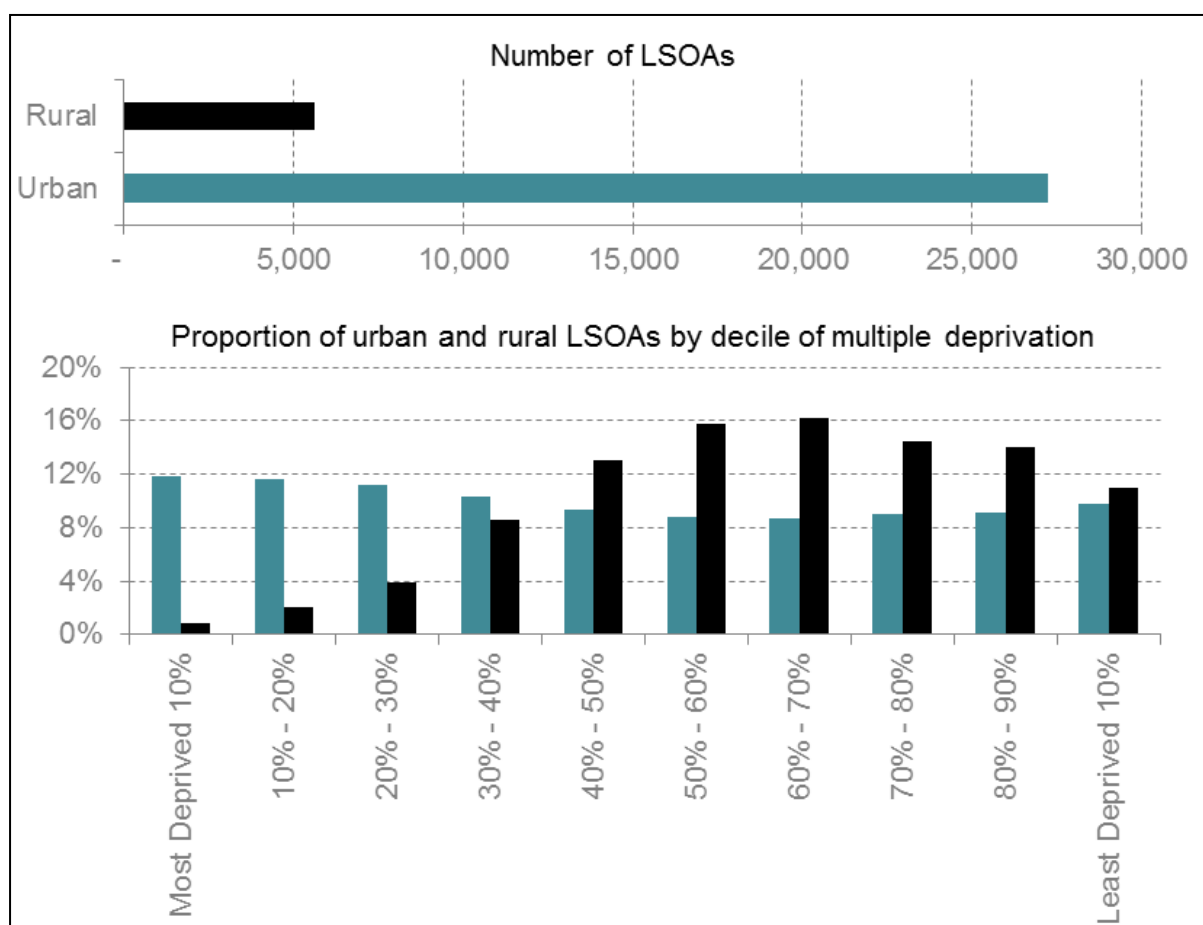


Figure 1: Number of Lower Super Output Areas by rural/urban classification and proportion decile of multiple deprivation

Source: DCLG, NLP analysis <http://nlplanning.com/blog/cities-and-deprivation/>

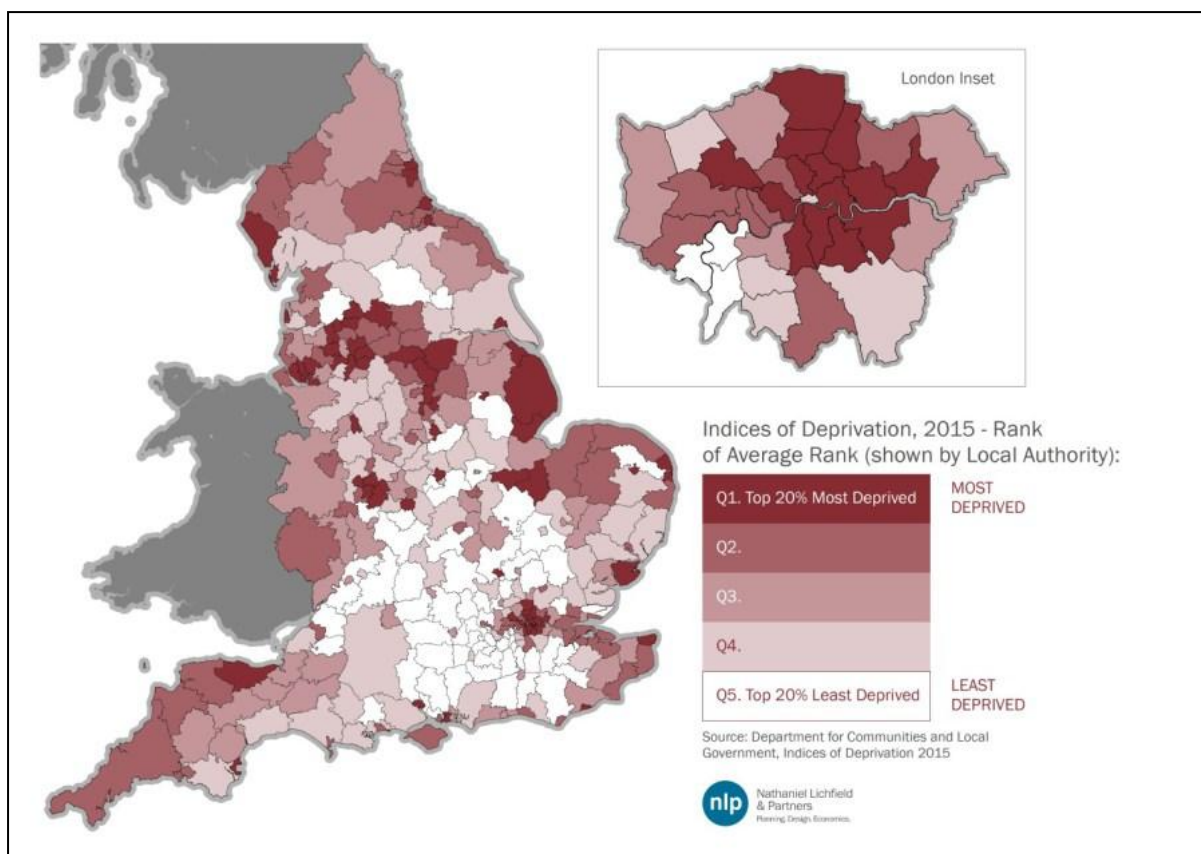


Figure 2: Indices of Deprivation by Local Authority

Source: DCLG, *English Indices of Deprivation (2015)*/ NLP analysis <http://nlplanning.com/blog/a-first-look-at-the-2015-indices-of-deprivation/>

Rural deprivation issues have been reflected in various pieces of key research and policy over many years. For example:

***The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) Action in Rural Areas research programme (2000)***

“Many rural areas are becoming increasingly exclusive, in the sense that only better-off people can afford to live there. Richer people are moving in and poorer people are moving out, so that evidence of high and rising incomes in rural areas requires careful interpretation. Similar proportions of people experience disadvantage and exclusion in rural areas, but their interests are often overlooked because inequalities are obscured by an uncritical notion of consensual, idyllic rural communities. The Foundation's Action in Rural Areas programme has explored issues of social inclusion and regeneration in a wide variety of rural areas throughout Britain, finding that rural areas are changing rapidly and unevenly under a number of pressures, with divergent consequences for different places and different social groups. These detailed findings suggest a number of specific ways in which policy can be improved.” (*Exclusive countryside? Social inclusion and regeneration in rural areas*, Mark Shucksmith/JRF, 2000)

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/exclusive-countryside-social-inclusion-and-regeneration-rural-areas>

Key issues identified included:

- Hidden and dispersed poverty in rural areas.
- Lower take-up of benefits.
- Low pay, especially in small workplaces.
- Detachment from labour markets.
- Poverty among self employed (incl. farmers).
- Lack of affordable housing.
- Lack of transport, childcare, advice and info.
- Broadband and mobile signal infrastructure.
- Out-migration of young people.

### ***Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) Rural Disadvantage reports (2006)***

“Our review of research evidence on rural disadvantage shows a significant minority of rural people facing a range of different forms of disadvantage. This will continue into the future, unless there is concerted action to address this challenge.” (*Rural Disadvantage: Priorities for Action, CRC, 2006*)

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110215111008/http://ruralcommunities.gov.uk/category/our-work/archive/disadvantage-projects-our-work/>

When the Commission was launched in March 2005, they undertook a major baseline study on rural disadvantage, producing a suite of reports. The study examined the nature of rural disadvantage, why it occurs, the policy responses and their impact. Priorities identified covered:

- Financial Poverty
  - no wages, low wages, or small pensions
  - the importance of benefit entitlements and National Minimum Wage
- Access Poverty
  - access to transport and services
  - providing services in accessible ways
- Network Poverty
  - lack of informal contact with, and help from, friends and neighbours. Public space being lost
  - family moving away as housing unaffordable
- Attitudes and Perceptions
  - Belief in rural idyll prevents recognition of others’ disadvantage. Residents critical of welfare state.

The CRC recommendations from these reports were as follows:

**People:** to help people overcome financial, access and network poverty by, for example, ensuring people take-up welfare entitlements, and retaining spaces where people meet and access services;

**Places:** improve local opportunities by improving the availability of employment, affordable housing and transport;

**Perceptions:** change attitudes and culture that lead to disadvantage being hidden, including raising awareness of the disadvantage that exists so that local actions help rather than hide the problem;

**Processes:** ensure policy is designed and implemented in ways that meet rural needs, ensuring equity for all, wherever they live – the concept of “Rural-proofing.”

### ***The government’s Rural Productivity Plan (2015)***

“England’s rural areas are a distinct part of our national character. But they also make a substantial and vitally important contribution to the economy, accounting for around £210 billion, or 16%, of England’s total output. Economic activity in rural areas is diverse, with significant manufacturing and services sectors. It is also becoming increasingly dynamic. Knowledge-based and creative industries are growing rapidly. Flexible, home-working is more prevalent in rural than in urban areas, and tends to involve higher skilled, higher wage roles. We are seeing net internal migration from urban to rural areas, including of highly skilled people attracted by the excellent quality of life on offer.

“We want to do all we can, whilst continuing on our path of fiscal responsibility, to remove barriers and put in place the best possible conditions for England’s rural areas to thrive.”  
(*Towards a one nation economy: A 10 point plan for boosting productivity in rural areas.* Defra/HM Treasury, 2015)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towards-a-one-nation-economy-a-10-point-plan-for-boosting-rural-productivity>

One of the most recent statements of government policy relating to rural areas is the Rural Productivity Plan. This focuses on economic growth and includes the following 10 priorities:

#### *Rural areas fully connected to the wider economy*

1. Extensive, fast, reliable broadband service
2. High quality, widely available mobile communications
3. Modern transport connections

#### *A highly skilled rural workforce*

4. Access to high quality education and training
5. Expanded apprenticeships in rural areas

#### *Strong conditions for rural business growth*

6. Enterprise zones in rural areas
7. Better regulation and improved planning for rural businesses

#### *Easier to live and work in rural areas*

8. More housing
9. Increased availability of affordable childcare

#### *Greater local control*

10. Devolution of power

In his presentation at the 2016 Rural Northumberland Conference, Mark Shucksmith highlighted the following areas in relation to rural deprivation, each of which is summarised below:

1. Housing affordability
2. Poverty in work
3. Young people

### **1. Housing Affordability**

Statistics over many years demonstrate the greater difficulty people on low incomes in rural areas face in finding a home they can afford compared to urban areas.

**Ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings, by Local Authority Classification, in England, 1997 to 2012**

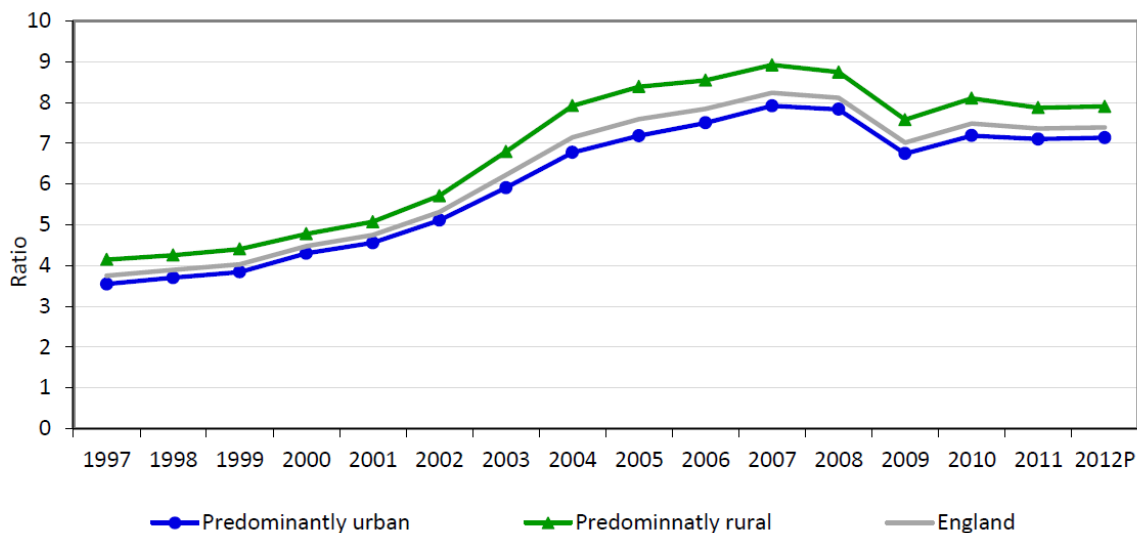


Figure 3: Ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings  
 Source: Mark Shucksmith, CAN Spring Conference 2016 (base lower quartile ratio live data is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-housing-market-and-house-prices> )

When analysing different types of urban and rural areas Figure 4 below demonstrates, as a general rule, that the more rural the community the greater the differential in earnings and house price – whether in a sparsely or less sparsely populated area.

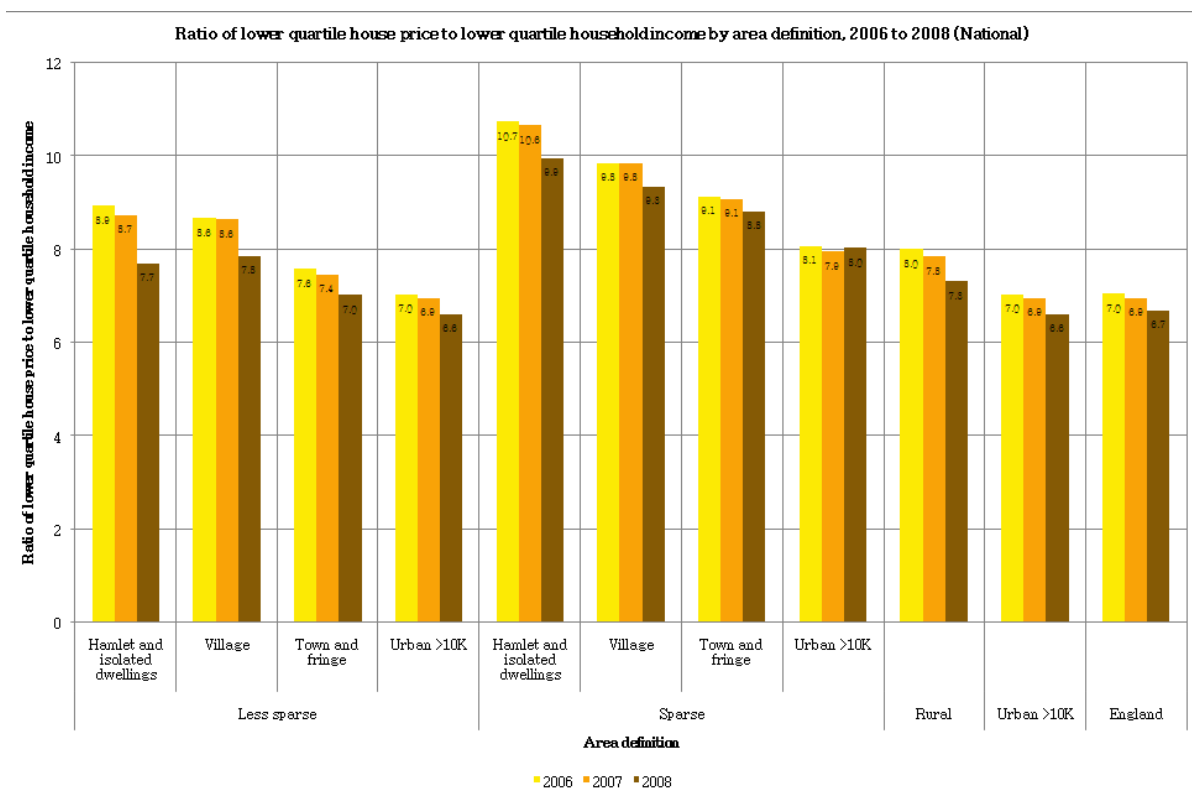


Figure 4: Ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile household income

Source: Mark Shucksmith, CAN Spring Conference 2016

Affordable homes (social rented) are also in much shorter supply in rural areas with a far higher predominance of owner occupied dwellings. For those on low incomes, this creates a double whammy whereby their ability to compete in the housing market is much more difficult and the supply of homes which they may be able to afford is much lower.

#### Percentage of households in 2011, by tenure and settlement type, England

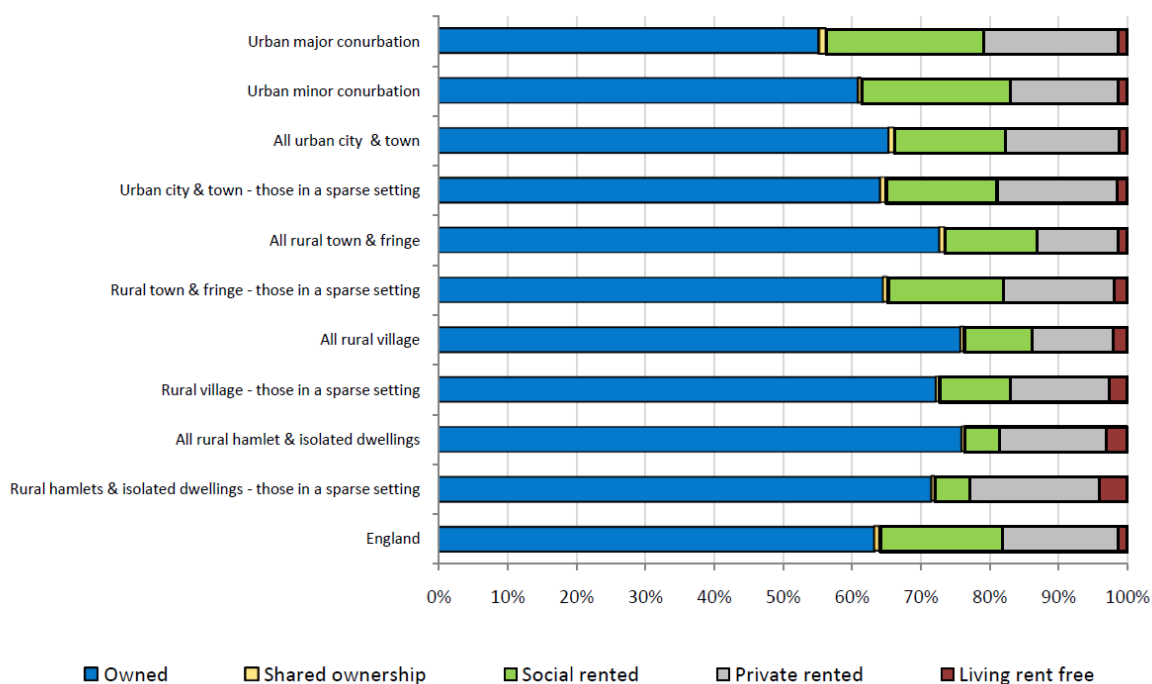


Figure 5: Percentage of households in 2011, by tenure & settlement type (England)

Source: Mark Shucksmith, CAN Spring Conference 2016

The conference was posed the following question in relation to rural housing policy:

*How will anyone but the most wealthy be able to afford to live in an ever more 'exclusive countryside?'*

It is difficult to envisage any significant development of affordable homes taking place in Northumberland, particularly in smaller communities, for a number of reasons:

- Government policy is to support home ownership. Shared ownership and starter homes are the preferred models of affordability. These will cater for an element of housing need but deeper need will not be met.
- The Right to Buy means that philanthropic landowners are now much less likely to release land at below market price in order to enable an affordable development to take place as occupiers will be able to capitalise on this philanthropy when they acquire the property.
- Communities are far less likely to accept affordable home developments when their availability in perpetuity cannot be guaranteed.



- Housing associations will not be able to deliver new affordable homes outside of government priorities and in anything other than large scale developments.
- The requirement for new housing developments below 10 units to include a proportion of affordable homes has been removed in most rural communities. This scale of development has traditionally constituted the vast majority of new home developments in rural communities.

One potential opportunity to see more affordable homes developed is the growth of community-led housing across the country. Northumberland is one of the leading lights nationally in such development (for example at Holy Island, Wooler, Amble and Stocksfield) and government policy appears to promote this approach.

## 2. Poverty in work

Nationally, poverty in work is rising. In rural areas, people with low incomes are increasingly likely to live in families where someone works as exemplified in figure 6 below. This contradicts the common perception that people living in poverty are likely to be out of work. Access to some form of employment in rural areas is not the core employment issue – the nature of the work available, wage levels and the cost of living are.

**In the more rural districts, around two-third of working-age people with low incomes live in families where someone works. Only a third live in workless families.**

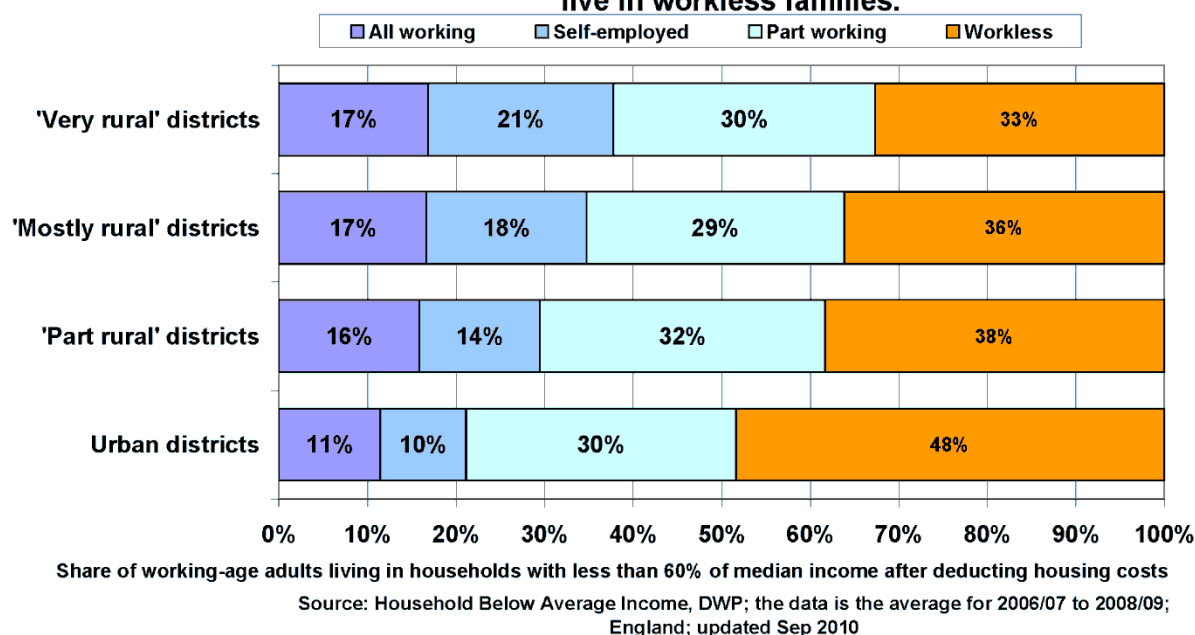


Figure 6: Share of working-age adults living in households with less than 60% of median income (after deducting housing costs)

Source: Mark Shucksmith, CAN Spring Conference 2016

## 3. Young people

Mark Shucksmith suggests that young people from rural areas are integrated through educational attainment into one of two quite separate labour markets:

- National market – characterised by being well-paid, distant from the original rural home and in an environment of career opportunities.

- Local market – characterised by being poorly paid, insecure and with fewer prospects of advancement. In addition, further education and training are much less available in a rural context.

The interplay between transport, employment and affordable housing is crucial in determining the labour markets which young people are able to access. Key issues for young people in rural areas include:

- Lack of a ‘voice’
- Poor access to transport – lack of public transport and the high cost of private transport is a major barrier to finding work
- Inadequate careers advice
- Employment and training – a predominantly low wage, low skill economy
- Lack of affordable housing – home ownership is unaffordable and very little non-profit housing to rent is available
- Traditional areas of support are disappearing – public services are being withdrawn (especially in more remote areas) and voluntary services are losing funding

In addition, rural areas in England have worse upward social mobility than urban areas – Northumberland is in the bottom 20% of local authority areas in England on this indicator.

## Loneliness

“Loneliness affects over 1 million older people in the UK, with very high associated health costs. Reducing loneliness among older people can result in fewer visits to the doctors, lower use of medication, fewer days in hospital and fewer admissions to nursing homes” (OCSI, August 2016; <http://ocsi.uk/2016/08/31/new-data-loneliness/> )

The ‘Campaign to end loneliness’ provide a summary of recent research into loneliness on their website. Did you know:

- Lacking social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day?
- Loneliness is directly linked to mental health – one study suggests that lonely people have a 64% greater chance of developing dementia?
- Loneliness increases the risk of high blood pressure, the onset of disability and depression?

More details are available on the following website including full references to the relevant research: <http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/threat-to-health/>

In addition, Age UK have produced freely available heat maps that show the risk of loneliness at neighbourhood level within each local authority area. These are available on the following website: <http://data.ageuk.org.uk/loneliness-maps/england-2016/>

In a rural context, the impact of loneliness can be significantly magnified due to the distances involved in enabling social interaction with friends, neighbours and relatives. This potentially relates to old and young people alike. In the 5 years to 2015/16 funding for supported bus services decreased by 25%, making social interaction ever more difficult for those without access to a car. Funding for adult social care decreased by 20% in just 2 years from 2011/12, once again severely exacerbating loneliness issues.

## Deprivation in a rural context

### *Definitions of poverty*

At the CAN Spring Conference, Liz Chadwick highlighted work being led by Abigail Scott Paul of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation around definitions of poverty and the need to rethink the conventional approach.

“Poverty’ as a word itself and concept is problematic. In fact it can be a barrier in attempts to build public and political support for the need to tackle it. When talking about this issue, it is not unusual to get the following reactions:

- ‘Real’ poverty does not exist in the UK; it is something that happens overseas in Africa.
- Poverty is inevitable; there are always going to be those at the top and those at the bottom.
- Poverty isn’t really an issue because even those people who experience it do not identify as being ‘poor’.
- Most people who are poor are poor because they don’t try hard enough to get themselves out of poverty – these people don’t deserve our support.

Attempts to correct these understandings with evidence, myth-busting, messaging and case studies have not led to increased public support for poverty. In fact, our recent work with FullFact shows that as we try to address these views head on, media reporting on poverty in the UK becomes more confused and distorted. This in turn leads to a politically divisive debate about the causes, measures, consequences and solutions to reduce it, and distracts from the discussion about long-term changes and solutions.”

*‘Talking about poverty – time to rethink our approach?’ Abigail Scott Paul (April 2016)*

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/talking-about-poverty-time-rethink-our-approach>

At the conference it was suggested that such reactions to the term ‘poverty’ have a particular resonance in a rural context making the need to effectively represent the issues particularly relevant and especially challenging – not least to the external audience of funders and policymakers.

### *Rural v Urban deprivation*

Urban and rural deprivation display a range of common characteristics including:

- Low levels of income
- Access to education and training
- Access to affordable housing

However, clear differences also exist linked to issues such as:

- Higher cost of living
- Accessibility and connectivity
- Fuel poverty
- Ageing population

The complex relationship between these various issues coupled with the smaller numbers involved and the dispersed nature of deprivation (as opposed to clear concentrations of significant numbers in an urban context) has the effect of hiding rural deprivation.

The ‘Indices of Deprivation’ is a local measure of deprivation in England produced by the government at a small area level with summary figures provided for local

authorities. Information, including maps of individual indices of deprivation and the broader concept of multiple deprivation (the index of multiple deprivation or IMD) are available on the [Northumberland County Council](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk) website. An interrogation of these maps clearly demonstrates that IMD is concentrated in more urban areas of Northumberland. This is the level at which the majority of funders and policymakers analyse issues in Northumberland and make decisions regarding resource allocations. However, an analysis of individual indices starts to point to some of the key issues facing rural Northumberland's communities. For example, huge swathes of rural Northumberland are in the very worst performing areas of England in relation to the 'barriers to housing and services' index.

### ***Inclusive rural growth***

Current government policy is clearly focused on promoting rural growth as the key driver to enable rural communities to thrive. At the conference, Janice Rose presented the county council perspective on rural areas as one of 'Inclusive Rural Growth' recognising the significant and critical contribution of Northumberland's rural areas to the wider growth agenda. This was demonstrated via the current Northumberland Economic Strategy, the key rural elements of which are represented in figure 7 below.

## **Northumberland Growth Network**

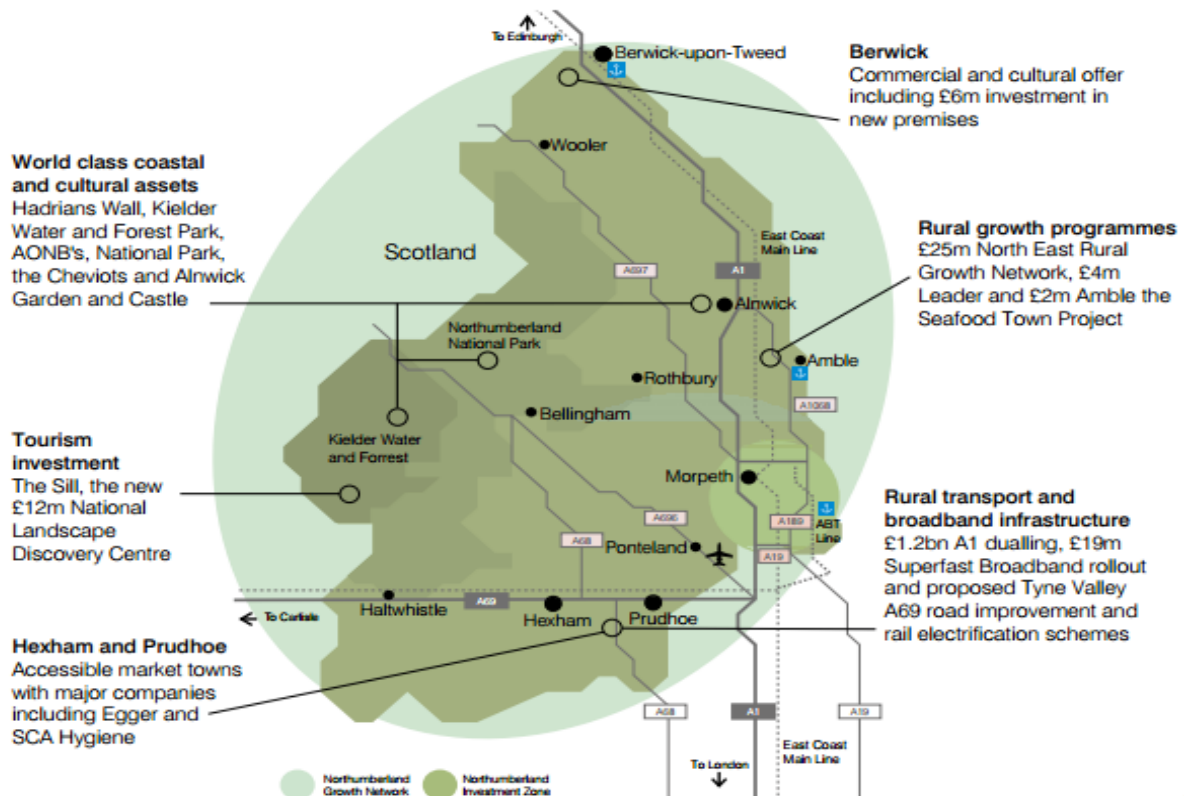


Figure 7: Northumberland Growth Network, Northumberland Economic Strategy 2015-2020  
<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Business/Growth.aspx?nccredirect=1>

As an example of the potential contribution of rural areas to economic growth, collaboration is currently taking place across Cumbria, Dumfries and Galloway, Northumberland and the Scottish Borders. A potential 'Borderlands' initiative is being led by

the local authorities concerned to build on the area's collective strengths including:

- Population of over 1 million people, with 14 million within a drive time of 2 hours
- Accounts for the equivalent GVA (£18bn) of the UK's economy as that of Tyneside (£17.1bn) or the City of Edinburgh (£18.6bn)

Janice Rose also outlined the work underway at the time in the context of the North East Combined Authority and the potential devolution agreement. Rural affairs, rural growth and rural proofing were all intrinsic elements of the work undertaken to date. The potential devolution deal has, of course, subsequently been withdrawn as a result of the collective view taken by the region's local authorities. However, the clear inclusion of rural issues within the thinking which had taken place is encouraging and potentially provides a platform on which to build greater recognition of the needs and opportunities of rural Northumberland.

## Issues raised in discussion

At the Spring Conference, small group discussion took place to complement the presentations made. A summary of the wide-ranging discussion points is outlined below.

- Fuel poverty – seen as a critical issue in rural Northumberland
- Parish councils – represent an opportunity to address a wide range of issues but are not always equipped to tackle social issues such as poverty, loneliness, mobility, Alzheimer's disease, affordable housing and accessibility to services generally, although a number of excellent examples exist. Coordinated efforts to support Parish and Town Councils to identify local issues and play a role in developing solutions was seen as a potential opportunity.
- Transport – the lack of public transport in many areas together with the sustainability of community transport solutions were identified as difficult issues to solve
- Community funds – funds available from windfarm and other developments presented an opportunity in specific locations and should be targeted at addressing local need
- Affordable housing – a range of issues were raised including the difficulty many people face in getting on the housing ladder often exacerbates issues of young people leaving areas and the rise of average age levels. Issues of long term security were also raised together with questions over the success of rural exception site policies and the impact of the sale of social housing stock
- Service availability – declining access to services located in rural communities was being made worse, it was suggested, by a tendency for service providers to be reluctant to provide outreach access in rural areas
- Dependence on voluntary action – rural solutions often depend on committed volunteer activity but this can often involve relatively small numbers of people with significant questions regarding long term sustainability
- Employment opportunities – fewer opportunities clearly exist in smaller communities compared to more built-up areas and the travel distances involved in accessing a wider variety of opportunities is significant. There is significant scope to promote and support small businesses in Northumberland.
- Access to information – knowing who, what, when and where to ask for information was seen as a significant block in enabling people to access services
- Community engagement – there is a need for different approaches to engage with rural residents (e.g. community agents, rural advocates, community champions). More emphasis could perhaps be placed on positive action
- Access to cash – the availability of funding and potential seed investment was seen as a potential issue for a number of projects, businesses and voluntary sector initiatives.

- Retaining young people – the national drift of young people away from rural areas is evident in Northumberland, potentially undermining community sustainability.
- Broadband and the mobile telephone network – despite the efforts which have taken place through iNorthumberland, there is an critical need to continue pressing for improvements to provide high speed, countywide connectivity
- Local entrepreneurs – many successful entrepreneurs live in Northumberland and there should be scope to tap into this expertise
- University research – better links are required with local universities to support understanding of rural communities and influence policy-making
- Homelessness – this issue should not be ignored in Northumberland with a need to support people across the age ranges
- Health – significant issues exist and are growing as the availability of services diminishes

## Next steps

This report is the first step in a process as follows:

1. Draft report produced based on what was said at the CAN Spring Conference, 2016.
2. 'Friends of Rural Northumberland', CAN members and other stakeholders requested to add to the report based on their own detailed knowledge.
3. Further draft report produced as a basis for wider publicity and consultation.
4. Final report available and utilised to influence policy, decision-making and funding processes.
5. Report updated as additional research and information becomes available.

For more information, enquiries or to submit additional information to inform this report please contact: [info@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:info@ca-north.org.uk)