

Introduction

Rural areas have an abundance of assets which can be visible such the built and natural environment, or hidden, particularly within people such as skills, gifts, passions and knowledge. Within the Community Partnership areas there are many rural communities working together to keep themselves safe, secure and well cared for without outside support, but they know where to go should they need it. Self-sufficient communities flourish; are vibrant and resilient; they should be embraced and encouraged.

Each Community Partnership area is unique with its own mix of urban and rural areas and, within those, exist vast variations in population, topography, employment, connectivity and economy. These directly impact on well-being and quality of life. Whilst unintentional, it can be easy to focus on the development of projects/services centred around market towns leaving rural areas overlooked.

Rural communities benefit from services developed, approved, commissioned and/or delivered by outside agencies who face challenges such as

- rural communities tend to be further away from urban/market town areas and more spread out across sometimes less accessible areas;
- proportionally, more older people tend to live in rural areas who may require increased levels of support and/or services;
- public transport services are less frequent and higher travelling distances leads to increased costs.

The Rural-Urban Classification defines areas as rural if they are outside settlements with more than 10,000 resident population, and as urban if inside such settlements, according to Defra. Whilst some Community Partnerships have clear urban or rural areas, others have varying levels of rurality across the area with between one and three market towns, or other larger settlement areas. For these Community Partnerships it is worth considering all areas outside of market towns as rural.

What is rural proofing?

“Rural proofing is a means to achieve equally effective and successful outcomes for communities, businesses and individuals from policy and in the design and delivery of (publicly funded) services, regardless of their size or location.” [i]

Rural proofing involves asking questions, encouraging discussions, and evidencing this has happened, and the resulting outcomes. Rural proofing is an approach that should be used at each stage of policy and project/service development as well as delivery, starting at the point of initial planning through to evaluation.

Why should Community Partnerships use a rural proofing approach?

All decisions made by the Community Partnership will have an impact on rural areas as all Community Partnerships have rural areas. It is important that these decisions impact fairly on rural areas taking into consideration the challenges they face and their unique assets. Rural proofing helps to

- enable the achievement of the Community Partnership's stated priorities through delivery of impactful projects;
- understand the scale of that direct and indirect impact and what actions need to be taken for the best outcome for rural areas;
- contribute to local growth by achieving good economic, environmental and social solutions;
- demonstrate understanding of the area, encourage collaboration and commitment to equity for all;
- provide a framework to work with which supports opportunities to discuss, reflect and evidence whether the Community Partnership's priorities and subsequent projects are equally accessible to all
- influence the development of stronger projects/services to ensure equity.

Why is rural proofing effective for Community Partnerships?

Rural proofing is effective because it

- identifies unintended gaps in service accessibility;
- identifies and encourages the best use of all available local resources and assets;
- identifies opportunities to innovate in collaboration with communities and groups;
- considers access and infrastructure, employment, economy and the environment;
- demonstrates understanding and commitment to equity to provide fair access to all;
- embeds good practice and provides evidence to demonstrate rural consideration.

When and how should Community Partnerships rural proof?

Project Initiation

- Will this be available to rural areas?
- Have rural areas contributed to the project ideas? How?
- Is there support from rural areas? What evidence is there of this?
- What direct and indirect impact will this have on rural areas? Is this fair?
- Which rural assets can be utilised?
- What will the impact be on rural areas compared with urban areas?
- Are there opportunities for collaborative working?

Project Close Down or Transfer

(through reflection & evaluation)

- What worked well for rural areas?
- How many from rural areas accessed the project/service?
- What is the impact? What evidence is there of this?
- What learning can be taken forward to other projects/services for rural areas?
- What could be amended to improve the delivery and impact in rural areas? Are there budget implications?

Community Partnership project/service

Planning

- Are there any barriers for rural areas to access this project/service? E.g. access/infrastructure
- How will this be communicated effectively?
- What adjustments (if any) can be made to ensure equity for rural areas? Are there budget implications? Is the project still viable in rural communities?
- How will this be monitored?

Delivery

(through monitoring & evaluation)

- What is working well for rural areas?
- What is delivery like on the ground in rural areas compared to urban areas?
- How many are accessing this project or service from rural areas compared to non-rural areas?
- Is the project/service effective?
- What is the impact of the delivery?
- What could be amended to improve the delivery and impact in rural areas?

How rural proofing can be embedded across the Community Partnerships

Community Partnerships (CP) should discuss the following suggestions and apply those which will help adopt a rural proofing approach.

Terms of Reference

The East Suffolk Community Partnerships and the Community Partnership Board have their own Terms of Reference that set out the rules of each partnership. These should be reviewed and perhaps updated to include a commitment to rural proofing. The following examples could be included:

- **Section 1.2 "At least one core member to be a rural champion"**
- **Section 2.0 "Consider how CP decisions impact on rural areas"**
- **Section 3.1 "Ensure all decisions have given due consideration to the direct and indirect impact on rural areas."**

Rural Representation

Each Community Partnership should review membership and attendance around the table to ensure that there is proportionate representation there for rural areas and rural communities. A CP area with a high proportion of rural area and/or population should have this reflected in its membership.

- **Does the CP know the proportion of rural/non rural residents and geographical area?**
- **Does the CP membership reflect this including all 'hats' individuals wear?**
- **Are multiple hats of members identified explicitly? E.g. A Parish Council AND a youth group**
- **Does the CP need to identify and recruit rural representation?**
- **What can the CP do to stimulate engagement with rural areas?**

Rural Champions

The role of the rural champions as part of the core partnership could be:

- To explain and help the partnerships to understand what rural proofing is;
- To remind partnership members to consider any implications on rural communities and equal accessibility;
- To question what can be done to ensure positive implications affecting rural areas;
- To ensure that any project/service developments address rural considerations throughout the decision-making processes.
- **Who are the rural champions for the CP?**
- **Does the CP need to identify and recruit this rural champion?**
- **Do they understand the role?**
- **Do they need to meet separately as a sub-group?**

Community Partnership Priorities

The priorities should be reflective of the development needed across the whole CP for both rural and non-rural areas to deliver against these priorities. There should be clear evidence to support this, subject to appropriate and regular review.

- **Do the priorities need reviewing? Do the priorities reflect the needs of rural areas?**

Budget Allocation

Consideration should be given to reviewing budget allocations to ensure that they reflect the rural/urban split of that CP, and that rural needs are being addressed. It may be necessary to consider ringfencing an appropriate proportion of the CP's budget to ensure fair allocation of monies.

- **What proportion of funding has been allocated and spent so far on rural areas and residents?**
- **How does this compare to non-rural areas?**
- **How does this compare to the rural/non-rural population and/or geographical split?**
- **What can the CP do to stimulate engagement and project ideas from rural areas?**

The Community Partnership should ensure the rural proofing approach is continued across its small grants scheme to encourage the opportunity to consider the needs of, and impact on, rural areas and residents.

- **What proportion of funding will be ringfenced for rural areas and residents?**
- **How does this compare to non-rural areas and residents?**
- **How can the CP encourage effective communication with rural communities and stimulate discussions about community led projects, making best use of local assets?**

Application notes should clearly explain the importance of rural consideration and its impact on communities.

Example wording for application notes

The Community Partnership is committed to applying a rural proofing approach to its work. This ensures that any decisions made by the Community Partnership will be made considering equity for rural areas. We would like to see this approach reflected in the community projects we support and therefore encourage applicants to tell us how they have considered rural areas and residents.

The funding application should have specific questions asking about inclusivity and accessibility for people living in rural areas.

Example questions and explanations for the application form

What can be done to encourage participation from rural residents and ensure that local assets are utilised fully? What are the barriers to participation for rural residents and how can these be overcome?

- Applicants should demonstrate they are engaged with the community and what they will contribute.
- Applicants should consider what could be done to overcome any real or perceived barriers.
- There might be cost implications to these so budgeted costs may increase.

Is your project accessible to rural residents? If so, how?

- Applicants should consider whether their project/service can be reached by rural residents particularly those who do not have access to a private car.
- The cost of transport such as a bus, community transport or taxi might be a barrier for some.
- Transport schedules may not fit with session/service times.

Will planned communication reach rural residents?

- Spreading the word in rural areas can be more difficult due to fewer lines of communication and sparser populations.
- Multiple methods of communication will have a greater impact than just one.
- Examples include local newsletters, notice boards, social media including paid for services such as Facebook boosts, posters/flyers, 1 to 1 or small group conversations at community activities, word of mouth, through schools and local organisations.

How will rural participation be monitored?

- Applicants should think about how they will monitor where participants come from to ensure fair access to rural and non-rural residents.
- Applicants may need to amend their plans at a later stage to take any rural/non-rural imbalances into consideration.

Clear application assessment criteria including those for the rural proofing approach should be in place for the assessment process.

Youth Cafe / Summer Activities for Young People

Young People in the area have voiced that they would like to have a regular drop in for young people where they can get together with others in a safe space. They would like to have a café with Wi-Fi as well as space to do activities. Suitable space has been identified in a market town.

Questions to facilitate discussion

Communication

- How will the service be promoted effectively to rural young people/residents to reach the widest audience?
- How will rural residents know about any volunteering opportunities and be encouraged to participate?
- What other methods of communication could be used?
- How could other groups/organisations/partners support with communication?

Access

- Can young people and volunteers from rural areas realistically get there?
- How will they get there? Walk? Cycle? Lift from family? Lift with others? Public or community transport?
- How will session times impact on this?
- Could session times be changed to fit in with public transport? Or when lifts are available?
- Will daylight hours impact on safe travel for those walking and cycling?
- Could transport be provided to get there?
- Could this be a mobile service so that the youth provision is delivered in more communities reducing the need to travel and enabling more people to use it? Will this have the same impact?
- Could IT solutions be used so people do not need to travel?
- Will IT solutions negatively impact on social/mental health needs of young people already living in remote rural areas?
- Are there already similar provisions running which could be expanded nearby to provide a similar facility for those who cannot get there?
- Project targets could be set for the number of young people from rural areas attending to ensure that the service provider actively promotes and encourages young people from rural areas. Consider if additional funds are required.

Assets

- Will the project make the most of local assets in rural areas? E.g. skills, connections, knowledge

Cost

- Will the cost of transport be more prohibitive for people from rural areas to get there?
- Could transport subsidies be offered to enable people to get there?
- Will rural broadband quality and cost be prohibitive?
- Will IT costs to YP be prohibitive and therefore a barrier to them accessing the service?

Monitoring

- What monitoring information could be provided to evidence engagement and participation from rural areas?
- How could any learning be used to expand the project/service into other rural areas?
- How will good news stories, impact and learning be shared and communicated?

Chat Benches

The proposal is to site a number of chat benches prominently in differently-sized communities to be used as either a stopping point or meeting point by anyone living in, or visiting the community. The benches will be marked as as intended for people who want to speak to somebody else. It is intended that usage of the benches will be encouraged and monitored.

Questions to facilitate discussions

Assets

- How are local people able to shape and influence where the benches will be located in the communities?
- How are young people able to shape and influence the location of the benches?
- What local skills and assets can be utilised? E.g. local skills, knowledge, other physical assets, existing groups, activities. How have these been identified?
- What opportunities are there for collaborative working? E.g. A walking/cycling map of local benches utilising footpaths/bridleways
- How could the benches support building upon existing local connections to increase community cohesion?
- Will the benches be located next to or near any community assets or facilities? E.g. playground, park, shops, services.
- What additional items could be added to the bench or bench area to encourage use? E.g. community flowerbeds.

Access

- Where will the bench be located? Is it easy to access?
- How far will residents need to travel to access the bench in their community?
- How will people get to the bench without access to a car? Walking? Cycling? Lift from family? Lift with others? Public or community transport?
- If walking and cycling, are the routes safe especially if travelling when it is dark? Are the roads busy?
- Will times of any activities meeting at the benches be scheduled to tie in with public transport to enable access to as many as possible?

Economy

- Will the benches create any volunteering opportunities to make use of local skills and knowledge e.g. to maintain them or encourage people to use them?
- How will the benches impact on local businesses? E.g. shops near by could benefit from extra custom?
- What other services / activities can be attracted to the hub to support the sustainability of the community?

Communications

- How will the location and intended use of the benches be communicated effectively to rural residents to ensure they are aware, especially benches located in other communities?
- What other methods of communication could be used?
- How to reach those feeling isolated? How about those who are 'hidden'?
- How could other groups/organisations/partners support with communication?

Monitoring

- What monitoring information could be provided to evidence engagement and participation from rural areas?
- How could any learning be used to expand the project/service into other rural areas?
- How will the impact of the benches be promoted? E.g. case studies, newsletter articles, community websites. Will this reach a wide audience?