RURAL PLANNING IN THE 2020S

Technical Report 3

Roundtable analysis (thematic and nation-specific)

June 2022

A project funded by the RTPI

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Acronyms

CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CFD	Contract for Differences
CLT	Community Land Trust
CO_2	Carbon Dioxide
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
ELMS	Environmental Land Management Schemes
ESS	Eco-system Services
EU	European Union
EV	Electric Vehicle
GI	Green Infrastructure
IEP	Investment Evaluation Process
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LPA	Local Planning Authority
OPD	One Planet Development
NBS	Nature-based Solutions
NDP	Neighbourhood Development Plan
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
UK	United Kingdom
VDS	Village Design Statements

Document Purpose

This Technical Report summarises the discussions arising from 12 roundtable discussions held between February – March 2022 for the Rural Planning in the 2020s project. 128 attendees came to one of the thematic or nation-specific interactive roundtable sessions, which explored various issues on how rural planning is responding to the Forces for Change identified by the project – Climate Change, the Countryside as a Site for Adaptation, COVID-19 and Brexit - and how land use planning can deliver sustainable development in rural areas in the 2020s.

It is one of five Technical Reports that accompany the main Rural Planning in the 2020s Report, available on the RTPI website:

- Technical Report 1 – Thematic Reviews
- Technical Report 2 – Housing Market Analysis
- Technical Report 3 – Roundtable Analysis
- Technical Report 4 – National Policy Assessments
- Technical Report 5 – Case Studies

Overview of Findings from the Roundtables

The Purpose and Format of Roundtables

Twelve roundtables were convened with policy experts and stakeholders between February and March 2022. These were grouped according to the topics assessed in the thematic reviews and the nations and regions under study in the Rural Planning in the 2020s project (Table 1). 128 attendees came to these different roundtables, representing different skillsets, interests and geographic representation (see Appendix 2: Thematic roundtable attendance, including nations and regions).

Table 1 List of roundtables and codes (thematic / national or regional)

Roundtable	Code
Community-led / Neighbourhood Planning	RT1
Rural Housing and Community Change	RT2
Ecosystem services, Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions	RT3
Agricultural Transitions	RT4
Tourism and the Rural Economy	RT5
Transport, Connectivity and Energy	RT6
England - SE Region	RT7
Ireland	RT8
Northern Ireland	RT9
Wales	RT10
England - NE and NW Regions	RT11
Scotland	RT12

The purpose of the roundtables was to:

1. Discuss, interrogate and extend analysis undertaken at the thematic review stage (for a detailed discussion into the thematic areas above by the project team, see Technical Report 1);
2. Enable expert policy and practitioner participants to contribute their experience to the

development of the project;

3. Clarify challenges and opportunities for rural areas, and identify solutions;

4. Gather materials for latter stages of the project, including national policy assessments (see Technical Report 4) and the selection of 16 case studies (see Technical Report 5).

A total of 271 organisations across the five nations were identified as potential participants. Each roundtable had between six and 16 attendees (see Appendix 2: Thematic roundtable attendance, including nations and regions). Chaired discussions focused on the Forces for Change (climate change, the countryside as a site of adaptation, COVID-19, and Brexit), as they affect the major topics covered in the thematic reviews, and on two broad questions:

1. What constraints does rural planning face in the different thematic areas and regional and national contexts?

2. What opportunities are there for rural planning to support sustainable rural futures and how can these be realised?

These questions helped to probe deeper into our overarching research 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?**" – by unpacking how the Forces for Change currently play out in the different nations and what opportunities there might be to ensuring that planning can better respond to the challenges of securing a more sustainable future.

Working Methods

The roundtables took the form of open discussions, but at the very beginning of each discussion, participants were asked to provide up to five words in reaction to the questions above. These questions were adjusted for each roundtable, so they addressed the topic being discussed: e.g., neighbourhood planning, affordable housing, tourism and so on. Word clouds were then generated so participants could immediately see the general shape of the group's views on the topic – what constraints or opportunities were deemed important, whether there was any consensus or a particular range of views.

Figure 1 Example of a word cloud (constraints, Community-led and Neighbourhood Planning)

Figure 2 Example of a word cloud (opportunities and suggestions, Wales)

Further analysis of constraints and opportunities was conducted after the roundtable, based on recurrence of words and the content of the discussion. In this section, we try to make sense of the discussion, pulling out and reflecting upon emergent themes. We start by looking at the broad messages arising before focusing on specific areas of concern.

NB: the views expressed in this section are the views and perspectives of the roundtable attendees, not necessarily those of the project team.

Constraints affecting Rural Planning

Table 1 summarises the constraints and challenges facing rural planning. It looks across the roundtables but also totals participants' concerns in the second column. These totals have been normalised by dividing them by the number of roundtables, to give an average score. The traffic light shading divides scores into low, medium and high.

Resources and capacity (to act) is the number 1 constraint felt to restrict effective planning (an average of more than five occurrences in each roundtable). Resourcing was an important issue for the delivery of neighbourhood planning and transport interventions. It dominated the discussion at the Scotland roundtable. It was also important for delivering agricultural transition and rural housing.

Resource issues were unpacked further in general discussion. These were said to be rooted not only in cash but also in skills, and related to overwork and burnout, to the cost of gathering necessary evidence in support of neighbourhood plans (and the over-reliance on voluntary input for those plans). More broadly, planning authorities are underfunded and this can mean that rural areas / planning lose out to more 'pressing' priorities within towns.

The second most important constraint appeared to be **sustainability and environment**, meaning that delivering sustainable outcomes proved challenging in the working context, given population dispersion (and service delivery challenges) and the continuation of farming and development practices that adversely affect soil and water quality. But these challenges were thought to relate mostly to agricultural transitions and were in part linked to resources – the perceived lack of expertise in ecology, which was making it difficult to navigate new agendas around biodiversity loss, resilience, and the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) agenda (noted in the agricultural transitions workshop).

The Ecosystem Services, Green Infrastructure and Nature-Based Solutions roundtable also probed some of the complexity around these new agendas, revealing the language of **policy** to be very technical and challenging to many audiences. Some terms – including 'nature recovery', 'Nature-Based Solutions (NBS)' and 'resilience' were thought to be reasonably well understood, whilst others – including 'Eco-System Services (ESS)', 'Natural Capital' and 'Green Infrastructure (GI)' remained opaque, and less useful in conversations between local stakeholders (Figure 3).

Generally, Table 2 below shows the cluster of more important constraints in the top half of the table and the reduced importance of others in the lower half. However, the nature of constraint differed between workshops and nations. In relation to **policy**, there was little criticism of

England's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (it was mentioned only once in relation to Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs). The major policy constraint everywhere was outdated local plans and the inflexibility of planning policy generally, which could slow innovation and prevent movement to Nature Based Solutions or energy transitions.

Scale and demographics denoted low nucleation and population sparsity. It was a major issue at the Transport, Connectivity and Energy roundtable. In Ireland, this challenge was explicitly linked to the pattern of rural housebuilding and challenges around services and crime. In Wales, the challenge was one of displacement, with young people lost (sometimes not exclusively because of housing pressures) and communities rapidly ageing. These processes also undermined engagement in community-level planning as much of the youthful energy of communities was being lost (however, communities continue to engage with planning, but often with a view to protect local character rather than grow local opportunity).

Access and connectivity also related to nucleation and dispersal and was thought to be a significant constraint in England's South East. Connectivity was generally taken to mean connectivity to services, jobs and other opportunities.

Mentions of **deliverability and supply** alluded to a reality rather than an underlying constraint: the reality was the struggle to supply affordable homes in sufficient quantity, with the actual constraint being land price rooted in land supply and adventitious demand for housing in many amenity areas (i.e., from 'incomers'). Demand-related affordability challenges were flagged as particularly important in Wales and Scotland. Another important constraint was the mismatch between the language of 'affordability' in national planning policy and the reality of genuine affordability, which is often not being delivered in rural areas because of external pressure to deliver discounted market homes rather than social renting.

Governance and **participation** were also broad descriptors rather than clear constraints. They affected the operation of NDPs in England but are broadly concerned with the capacities within and beyond local government: the extent to which agendas are understood and the willingness of volunteers to engage with planning and with different forms of community-led planning. Governance as a constraint extends to the clarity of local plans and decision-making and to relationships between authorities and their populations, including the extent to which authorities are able to work with communities and the balance between effective working and conflict. Rural housing delivery was thought to be held back by poor community relations, local opposition, and sometimes also by an over-reliance on community delivery (and not enough emphasis of local authority direct build).

At the lower end of the constraint spectrum, there was some concern for poor **transport** infrastructure in rural areas: this was usually public transport or a concern for disjointed walking

and cycling infrastructure. **Rural economy** constraints were also lower tier, seen as less of a constraint and more of a reality that needs attention: seasonality, lack of business support infrastructure, the failure to foster night-time economies (where relevant), and the double-edged sword of holiday rentals, increasing visitor spending but also affecting labour supply, were all noted as important. Perhaps the biggest surprise from the review of constraints was the low priority given to **Brexit**. This was noted as a constraint only in relation to tourism and in the Wales-focused roundtable. The wider significance of Brexit, as a Force for Change, is considered in the main report.

Table 2 Recurrence of noted constraints amongst roundtable participants (low<2.0 / Medium 2.1-4.9 / High>5.0)

Theme	Average Recurrence	Community-led / Neighbourhood Planning	Rural Housing and Community Change	Ecosystem services, Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions	Agricultural Transitions	Tourism and the Rural Economy	Transport, Connectivity and Energy	England - SE Region	England - NE and NW Regions	Ireland	Northern Ireland	Wales	Scotland
Resources and capacity	5.25	16	6	3	6	1	11	2	0	4	1	5	8
Sustainability and environment	3.17	1	2	3	6	2	1	5	3	8	1	5	1
Policy (constraints)	2.83	7	6	4	4	2	2	1	1	5	1	0	1
Scale and demographics	2.6	5	4	0	1	2	6	0	0	9	0	3	1
Access and connectivity	2.25	1	2	2	0	2	9	3	1	3	2	2	0
Deliverability and supply	2.16	2	8	1	1	2	1	6	1	1	0	3	0
Governance	2.1	7	3	1	4	0	4	1	2	3	1	0	0
Participation	1.9	6	3	0	2	2	3	4	1	2	0	0	0
Rural Economy	1.75	0	1	0	8	7	0	0	0	1	1	1	2
Transport	1.83	2	3	0	0	3	4	3	1	2	2	1	1
Affordable Housing/affordability	1.5	1	3	0	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	4	4
Climate change and energy	1.5	0	3	0	4	0	3	1	0	3	2	2	0
Infrastructure	1.42	2	3	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	3
Design and local character	0.5	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Brexit	0.33	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Agriculture	0.25	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Measurement and assessment	0.25	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

The Forces for Change and Rural Planning

The Forces for Change were a major focus within the roundtables. In the remainder of this section, we take each of those forces and consider the following two questions:

1. What challenges can we identify under each Force for Change?
2. How might planning, and policy more generally, address these challenges?

The section on adaptation has additional treatment of nation-by-nation variation. References to particular roundtables are coded as set out in Table 1.

1a. Brexit – Challenges

Brexit (the UK's decision to leave the European Union) was not considered within the roundtable discussions to be a major 'Force for Change' affecting rural areas. Perhaps the shock of the 2016 referendum has receded and other change drivers have come to the fore. The COVID-19 Pandemic (the third of our Forces for Change examined in this section) seemed to have greater immediacy, as did the cost of the living crisis and the recent war in Ukraine, which were both dominating headlines during the roundtables. It was possible to identify Brexit challenges – centred on **agriculture**, **tourism**, **enterprise and employment**, **energy**, and **replacements for EU funding streams** – but of these were major points of discussion. Each of these is discussed in turn below.

Agriculture

There has been significant focus on the possible impacts of Brexit on UK farming, not least because of the implications of new trade agreements and the form that a substitute subsidy regime might take. On the issue of trade agreements, participants noted that it is difficult to foresee the eventual balance of opportunities and risk, meaning that farming faces an uncertain period (RT4). However, the form of trade deals with New Zealand and Australia – both major meat exporters – is likely to impact on beef, lamb and dairy in the UK (RT8). Uncertainty has already taken its toll on some farms, with some land sold and some early shifts to other uses as farmers weigh up impending risks (RT7). With regards to a future subsidy regime, how farmers will be paid for the delivery of public goods is not yet clear

(RT7), but farmers remain in a transition period and are still operating under Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) rules. In Wales, a new system will not be up and running until 2024 (RT8). So, as with future trade agreements, the path ahead is not at all clear. This is causing a hiatus in new investment as farmers wait for clarity. Food security (linked to trade and subsidy) is an emergent issue and has come to the fore as the situation in Ukraine unfolds. Ireland appears more confident of its food security status as it is 60 to 80 per cent self-sufficient in terms of food production (RT4). This is greater than the UK (which, by contrast imports 48 per cent of its food (DEFRA, 2021).

Tourism

Tourism habits have been changing because of the combination of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic, with the latter arguably playing a bigger role is shaping holiday choices during the last two years. UK visitors to Europe must return home after 90 days in each 180 day period as the freedom of movement has ended. This restriction may not impact on short European breaks over the long-term, and that market may rebound as COVID-19 restrictions are discontinued. However, UK nationals with second homes in Europe will be impacted by these rules, which may cause a reshoring of second home investment and increase the volume of holiday letting opportunities in rural areas (also see the Technical Report 2, Analysis of Rural Housing Market Change and the Rural Housing Market Thematic Review in Technical Report 1). This, combined with the growth in the staycation market during the pandemic, may drive an increase in domestic rural tourism.

How Brexit will impact on European visitors is unclear. Few have second homes in the UK (and those that do tend to have them in London) and their tendency to visit for short breaks will depend on travel costs (airfares) and exchange rates. These are both uncertain given the ongoing geo-political and economic situation. Roundtable discussions shed little light on these issues, concluding simply that the impact of relations with the EU on the staycation market are hard to deduce (RT5[1]). Brexit, however, has the potential to hit rural fishing communities particularly badly (RT5) if beneficial agreements cannot be reached on the export of fish. Such communities may look to tourism, and the 'levelling up' agenda, to compensate for Brexit losses – though it is far from certain how compensation might be achieved, especially in fishing towns where infrastructure and tourism have been in decline for a hundred years.

Enterprise and employment

How Brexit might affect rural enterprise and employment (and also energy) in broader terms

1 'RT' indicates Roundtable. See Table 1.

was touched on only very lightly in the roundtables. It was noted that English language schools have closed their doors since the Brexit vote, with some foreign students now choosing to pursue their courses in Ireland, which remains part of the European Union (RT5). But the extent to which this is a rural issue was unclear.

It does appear to be the case that healthcare roles are harder to fill, post-Brexit, and staff retention has become a challenge. There was thought to be potential for a negative rural impact in this area as rural healthcare providers have long struggled to recruit staff and Brexit appears to be worsening the situation. This was reported to be an issue in the South East of England; while the region has a median average for the UK it does have some pockets of high incidences of those aged over 85 in some counties (ONS, 2020).

Other specific issues in this domain included the disruption of supply chains that previously crossed the Irish border. Small developers were said to be struggling in Ireland, having been cut off from their suppliers (RT2). This is an issue that is likely to correct itself in time, either as a cross-border solution is found or supply chains separate. Export rules will of course affect other industries. The discourse in the UK is that England, dominated by the Conservative Party, has dragged Scotland out of Europe against its will. This has magnified the focus on struggling exporters, particular whisky producers and the shellfish and aquaculture market (RT12). These industries may find a way to live with Brexit but the biggest effect, over the medium to long-term, could be felt in the strength of the Union. The prospect of further referenda adds to the uncertainty facing rural enterprise and employment.

Energy

There was a feeling in the roundtables that Brexit had been a 'home goal' for the (renewable) energy sector. The UK has no domestic wind turbine manufacturers: importing turbines and parts has now become much more complicated for wind projects, with energy developers factoring import rules and uncertainties into their assessments of risk and their contingency budgeting. Advancing wind projects is 'not as easy as it used to be' (RT6).

But an arguably bigger force for change in the energy domain is the War in Ukraine. Sanctions on the Russian Federation and the prospect of Russian oil and gas disappearing from Europe (affecting wholesale prices) has brought the question of energy self-sufficiency back onto the agenda. In the short term, there is a risk that the UK will not be able to grow its renewables sector, it may increase the extraction of North Sea gas, or build new nuclear power stations. Brexit allows the UK to deviate from rules governing European energy. There is now a real prospect that the moratorium on shale gas extraction ('fracking') may be lifted as the UK tries to counter rising energy costs (RT8). Fracking could bring landscape impacts and conflicts to rural areas or add rising emissions, which will also come from the

need to import more oil and gas from further afield, outside of the EU (RT4).

Replacements for EU funding streams

A substitute for the CAP subsidy is being rolled out across the UK, but uncertainties remain around the implications for farming. This issue was touched upon above. Roundtable discussions noted more uncertainty around EU Structural Funds, which previously flowed into a number of rural areas. A Shared Prosperity Fund is due to replace European Union (EU) monies, but participants noted that no guidance had been issued on access or use. This changed in April with the publication of a prospectus[2] (RT11). But whilst the UK faces the uncertainty of transition, funding arrangements in Ireland are of course unaffected. It can access funding in support of cultural heritage projects, well-being, town-based regeneration and landscape restoration (RT9). Ireland also continues to engage with other EU members on best practice in rural development and in the use of funding streams for optimal benefit.

1b. Brexit – Planning and Policy

Two important suggestions emerged from the roundtable discussions focused on Brexit. The first relating to supply chains and the second to emission metrics:

Despite the rhetoric of 'Open Britain', Brexit brings a degree of economic closure. This can be seen in the supply chain challenges faced in Ireland and Northern Ireland. **Localised supply chains** are not necessarily a bad thing and will support reduced emissions and local development. However, if supply chains are to be shortened, planning can help to facilitate new economic activity and take a **flexible approach to different kinds of business activities in rural areas** (RT12). Reshoring inevitably means making space for economic growth. This appears important not only because of Brexit, but because of the changing geo-political drivers of the global economy. A number of commentators have recently announced the 'end of globalisation' (see O'Sullivan, 2019), which will be marked by a reduced volume of global trade and shorter supply chains. Planning must respond to this in rural areas.

There is a danger that new support for farming will be structured in a way that increases emissions. This danger is also associated with cropping practices associated with climate change. Roundtable participants flagged the need for **improved metrics for monitoring**

2 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus

emissions from domestic agriculture and from food imports (RT4). Environmental standards need more general strengthening as the UK transitions to replacement funding streams for farming and economic development. But those standards and metrics remain important across the EU. Ways of measuring emissions, linked to domestic consumption of goods and export of domestically produced goods, remains a global challenge, tainted by the politics of ignoring the emissions that are exported (Norwegian oil being a much-discussed example).

2a. Climate Change - Challenges

Challenges linked to climate change relate to the housing stock, farming practices, energy production and infrastructure, and transport and travel.

Housing Stock

The resilience of existing rural housing stock is affected by a legacy of poor design and insulation (RT7) which is not being addressed through existing funding streams (RT2). Housing is also being built in areas of flood risk (RT8) and planners needs to urgently respond to thinking through all implications of climate change. Local authorities need to work with developers to ensure that housing built today can respond to tomorrow's challenges: this requires resources as authorities will need to guarantee that development meets basic sustainability standards. The relationship between authorities and developers is a critical one (RT10). Local areas will need to be supported as they respond to climate change. There is of course a desire to source building materials locally to shrink the carbon footprint of development. But those materials need to conform to building regulations, meaning that local suppliers (of timber, for example) need to be helped to achieved required standards.

In the past, the redlining of smaller settlements was viewed as a means of ensuring future sustainability (barring housing development that might contribute to unsustainable patterns of travel). That one-size-fits-all approach was present across the different nations, although it was pursued most doggedly in England. Wales and Scotland have been pursuing different models. Scotland's National Planning Framework (NPF4) gives encouragement to smaller scales of development (RT12) and Wales' One Planet Development (OPD) provides a framework for living differently in rural areas[3], responding to climate change not only through

3 See: http://www.oneplanetcouncil.org.uk/

low-impact housing but also through distinctively different lifestyles. There are, however, challenges in the processes devised to support such development models (RT2). See Case Study 3: Supporting Low-impact development though exceptional planning rules (Lammas One Planet Living Development, Wales) in Technical Report 5.

Farming Practices

A tenth of UK emissions are from the farming sector (RT3). Ireland faces critical challenges from the loss of peatlands, which are important carbon sinks (RT9). There are some issues arising from existing metrics, with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), for example, at odds with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the measurement of emissions[4].

Climate change is affecting growing seasons. Farmers crop later to avoid frost damage and there is increasing use of polytunnels, which can require planning permission if they are to be in long-term use and large in scale, although they are permitted development in Ireland (RT7). As well as affecting growing seasons, climate change is affecting the types of crops grown. There has been a rise in viticulture in the south of England and a switch to different fruits. This can be a challenge for natural pest control methods, which may be unsuited to new crops and therefore present a challenge to regenerative agriculture (RT7). Livestock is also affected by climate (RT7), creating a need for new infrastructure and changing stocking levels. Shifts in farming practices have a cultural impact, not only because of shifts in daily practices, but because of difficulties and hardships that, if left unchecked, can reduce the attractiveness of farming to the next generation.

There is scope for regenerative agriculture to cut methane and CO_2 (RT4). Planning has a role in potentially increasing agricultural self-sufficiency and enhancing biodiversity through supporting new land management practices (see below). The shift to regenerative agriculture will mean more closed (fallow) seasons to allow for the recycling of nutrients, which may, however, impact on costs and prices in shops.

Energy Production and Infrastructure

Energy bills have been rising rapidly in recent months. Some new housing in rural areas benefits from air or ground source heat pumps but this technology presents its own challenges, requiring highly skilled local maintenance (RT11). Some communities (not

4 https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/transparency-and-reporting/methods-for-climate-change-transparency/common-metrics

connected to mains gas) are reliant on oil, and these will require special support to decarbonise (RT6). A bigger issue is the support needed for renewable energy infrastructure to meet net-zero carbon targets (which, as discussed above, has now become arguably more urgent because of ongoing geo-political challenges and ensuing questions of energy security). UK energy infrastructure is not a devolved responsibility (RT6) and there are no regional targets for renewable energy production: some participants argued for energy production targets to match those for housing (RT7). At the same time, consideration needs to be given to the merits of different renewable options. Solar energy infrastructure is itself more energy intensive than on-shore wind (RT2). The UK government has been reluctant to commit to the latter, with Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) struggling to bring forward additional wind power in local plans, often because of objections on landscape impact grounds (RT7). The NPPF was said to be responsible for a policy lacuna, with neither local plans nor NDPs typically pursuing onshore wind (RT11). This is in part due to government's ending of support for onshore wind in 2015, which had involved protection for developers against high up-front costs and for consumers from volatile wholesale prices under the Contract for Differences (CFD) arrangement[5] (RT6).

The balance between wind and solar was a significant talking point in the roundtables, with solar seen as responsible for reduced agricultural productivity (RT4 & RT7). It was felt to use too much land but offers benefits to farmers who become net energy exporters, though there can be ways to 'stack' multiple carbon, wildlife and agricultural opportunities (RT8). There has been a rise in applications for renewables, and significant pre-application discussions involving town and parish councils – often contesting landscape and farmland impacts. Sometimes, local authorities lack the expertise to deal with applications, which has resulted in a slowing of delivery of renewable energy schemes in Wales (RT6).

Community leadership can be important in the delivery of renewables. It was reported in Ireland, however, that communities have been slow to involve themselves in low-carbon transitions (RT9). Micro schemes have gained some momentum elsewhere, often involving a shift to Electric Vehicles (EVs) (RT6). In Scotland, the Orkney Islands have integrated heat, transport and battery storage in a semi-autonomous system and are off the gas grid (RT12) (see also Case Study 13: Bridport Cohousing Microgrid, Hazlemead, Dorset in our Technical Report 5). Planning is not, however, supporting micro-enterprise schemes that could have a huge impact in smaller rural communities, e.g., a participant recounted one family that wanted to develop a small-scale hydro scheme, which would have created two part-time jobs in a community of six, but it took eight years to 'fight' for planning permission (RT12).

5 CDDs are a financial contract that pays the differences in the settlement price between the open and closing trades. CFDs essentially allow investors to trade the direction of securities over the very short-term and are especially popular in financial and commodities products. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/contracts-for-difference/contract-for-difference

An opening observation from one roundtable was that there are 'twice as many' sustainable transport subsidies for urban than rural areas (RT6). It was claimed that development continues to be permitted in areas not located near infrastructure (RT6), although this claim was disputed and countered by the argument that '20-minute neighbourhoods' are not feasible in rural areas because of the dispersed nature of services (RT12). That said, delivering some form of sustainable transport was described as a priority: good infrastructure is needed to ensure that school children are not reliant on private cars and that jobs and services can be accessed more easily. But some rural travel by car seems to be hardwired: Over 80 per cent of visitor trips to the Lake District are by car and there is a lack of investment in alternatives (see Lake District National Park, 2018). Relative short journeys by bus are expensive, reducing the appeal of public transport (RT6).

Good bus services, which have a chance of drawing people away from their cars, were considered a major challenge linked to climate change. Improvements in available services in Northumberland were noted (RT6) but many places are poorly and infrequently connected, and the integration of services (allowing onward connected journeys) remains a critical shortcoming (RT11).

There are also inconsistences to address: there is a strong preference for reducing the number of car-based visits to National Parks, but also a desire to see better parking facilities so that parked cars do not block and blight country lanes. Better parking will of course incentivise travel into the National Parks by car (RT5, see also Case Study 9: Moving to a more sustainable tourist economy (Snowdonia National Park/Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri, Wales) in Technical Report 5). This same issue was noted in Northern Ireland, where travel-based emissions have been increasing and where the lack of sustainable travel alternatives was viewed as undermining the nation's climate change response (RT6).

Because of the challenges around bus services in areas of dispersed settlement and population, EVs were touted as part of a sustainable travel solution (RT2). But private cars (used for shorter journeys and charged at home) were seen to be the easier part of this solution. Vans, used for distribution and delivery, were potentially more difficult to roll out owing to 'range anxiety' and the lack of charging infrastructure for larger vehicles (RT6). Northern Ireland, Ireland and Wales all shared similar concerns in terms of EV roll-out: a lack of charging infrastructure and feeling that the shift to electric was less important than the shift to demand-responsive and community-based travel. However, some rural locations are well-suited to the electric transition if the right infrastructure is made available. Rathlin Island (Northern Ireland) is exploring this possibility, which might also suit other island communities (RT6).

Demand-responsive travel has been around for a while and is working well in some locations. This is the case in the English North East, where the Tees Flex scheme has been a success[6]. Such success is dependent on seed funding (RT11), with pointers on how to make sustainable transport pilots work set in UK Government's Glover Review (RT6, see Glover, 2019). Such pilots are viewed as especially important in the context of post-COVID-19 recovery (RT5).

Demand-responsive travel that is community-based has been relatively commonplace where private provision is unprofitable and where local authorities do not have the resources to support public alternatives (RT8). Users tend to be women and children. Fares need to be affordable, but in Wales underfunding means that core costs for community transport are not being met and many services are now at risk: the budget for bus services has not changed for the last 13 years (RT8). But at the same time, the Wales Transport Strategy (Welsh Government (2021) has some potentially exciting initiatives for inclusive services and for valley communities, including a flexi-pilot dubbed 'an Uber for buses' (RT6 & 8). But such initiatives do not counter the general shortfall in funding, which has greatest effect on rural and remoter services. A 'Go Lakes' integrated transport scheme reduced car use by 25 per cent but the pilot ended when fixed term funding expired (see Cumbria Tourism, 2015). Providers scramble around for continuation funding, but this adds to the sense that rural services are uncertain and at risk (RT6).

A few comments were made about rural railways. Stations were said to be poorly maintained, because of limited revenues and subsidies (RT11). A significant change on the horizon is the replacement of Network Rail with Great British Railways. There is the potential for new delivery models (RT6) and government has signalled some interest in reopening branch lines closed following the Beeching Review more than 50 years ago. But significant reversal of 'Beeching cuts'[7] would require a radical rescaling of public subsidy for the railways and it is not clear how that might be achieved.

2b. Climate Change – Planning and Policy

The twelve roundtables heard many views on how planning might respond to the challenges of responding to climate change across the sub-themes listed in the last section. 'Future proofing' was called for, ensuring what we do today is fit for tomorrow. The following are

6 Using the Tees Flex app (iOS and Android), customers can hail a vehicle directly from their smartphone. The app's clever algorithms enable multiple passengers to seamlessly share the journey with other customers making similar trips in the area. The technology directs passengers to a nearby 'virtual bus stop' (within a short walking distance) for their pick-up and drop-off points, allowing for quick and efficient shared trips. https://www.stagecoachbus.com/promos-and-offers/north-east/tees-flex

7 Under Beeching's proposals, 2363 stations and 5000 miles of track in the UK were earmarked for closure. See: https://www.networkrail.co.uk/who-we-are/our-history/making-the-connection/dr-beechings-axe/

ideas thrown into the mix, some of which are expanded on in our sixteen more detailed case studies in Technical Report 5**.** The project team's view on these proposals are reflected on in the main Rural Planning in the 2020s report:

- What we build today must be **future proof**, with planning given the clout needed to actively promote good development and reject bad development. In relation to climate change, the location of new housing or employment uses is critical. Building in locations vulnerable to flooding or where flood risk will be increased (due to faster runoff) should stop (RT5);
- Building regulations should actively support **localised supply chains** so more materials can be sourced close to where development is happening (RT12);
- Building regulations should **combat fuel poverty and promote energy affordability** by requiring good heating design and insulation (RT12);
- Set regional and cross-boundary **renewable energy production targets** linked to the Fifth Carbon Budget[8];
- Ensure that planning has the **capacity and expertise** needed to advance and approve renewable energy projects in a timely manner (RT6)
- Ensure that planning can **work with the farming sector on approving and regulating the seasonal use of infrastructure**, including polytunnels, that will becoming increasingly important as the climate changes (RT7);
- Integrate renewable energy sites into mixed-use projects that attract visitors and raise awareness of the importance of energy transition. The Whitelee Windfarm[9] is a good example of such a project.
- Focus planning support on **medium-sized energy solutions at a community scale**, and encourage community enterprise that has an energy focus. These can range from allotments to bioenergy projects linked to new housing or focused on generating community revenues. Community ownership of such projects is a key opportunity to support community wealth-building (RT12);
- Consider introducing charging schemes that support **'Low Emission Zones' for rural areas** (RT6). But such 'sticks' need to be balanced by the 'carrot' of improved charging infrastructure;
- **Address 'final mile' distribution challenges for rural areas.** Multiple vehicles delivering Amazon packages in areas of low settlement nucleation have the potential to massively increase vehicle emissions. Smart delivery hubs, where people can collect their items or have them delivered to dispersed but close proximity rural destinations

8 The Fifth Carbon Budget covers UK emissions reductions in the period 2028 to 2032 (see CCC, 2015).
9 Whitelee is the UK's largest onshore windfarm, located on Eaglesham Moor just 20 minutes from central Glasgow. Its 215 turbines generate up to 539 megawatts of electricity, enough to power over 350,000 homes*. https://www.whiteleewindfarm.co.uk/

(e.g. the final five miles in rural areas) by an EV have clear benefits (RT6). Such hubs could be old agricultural buildings;

- Promote demand-responsive EV services whilst also promoting vehicle sharing (RT6);
- Continue to support **'Swiss style' integrated transport routes and hubs**, using a mix of new technologies (e.g., EVs) and demand-responsive approaches (RT11);
- Ensure that **rural transport pilots have long-term funding**, or options for continuity funding that will mean their closure is not inevitable. Those pilots should engage with latest technologies with funding always tied to decarbonisation.

3a. The COVID-19 Pandemic - Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected countries around the world. Despite the recent reduction in infections in Europe, where countries have adopted a strategy of 'living with COVID', the virus continues to impact on the global economy. This is largely because of China's continuation of a 'zero-COVID' approach and many of its cities, deeply connected with the global economy, remain in strict lockdown. The impact of COVID-19 on rural areas across the UK and Ireland is largely rooted in the movement of people, looking for homes with greater utility or simply for escape from the confinement that they needed to periodically endure during national lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. Those movements were said, in the roundtables, to have given new impetus to the rollout of broadband infrastructure (RT2), brought 'substantial economic, social and cultural change' to communities inundated with visitors and new residents (RT11), and consolidated and accentuated long-term trends (RT7) including counter-urbanisation. Population movements triggered by COVID-19 have revealed challenges for rural areas around **access to nature**, **housing market change**, **tourism and staycations**, **rural economic change**, and **community capacity**.

Access to nature

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 (many urban parks were packed during the lockdowns, making it difficult to follow social distancing rules). The pandemic also revealed gross inequalities in access to greenspace, spotlighting one advantage that rural people potentially enjoy over their urban counterparts. Many areas reported huge surges in visitor numbers (RT7), which sometimes led to littering and damage (RT11). The challenge of protecting sensitive landscapes from overwhelming visitor pressure was brought into sharp relief by the pandemic. Some

councils, including 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 pandemic revealed uneven access to greenspace (RT7) and a pressing challenge for rural planning: to protect nature while opening up its many benefits and continue to facilitate access to nature in a sustainable way.

Tourism and staycations

Linked to the *access to nature* theme examined above, the growth in 'staycations' (domestic rather than overseas holidays) has been an important outcome of the pandemic. Staycations were said to be a product of a recognition or realisation that amenities 'on our doorstep' compare favourably with the overseas offer at a time when travel has become more expensive and difficult (RT10). In some English regions, notably the North East and North West, demand for holiday letting 'went through the roof' (RT11). Nationally, staycations helped mitigate the loss of international tourism (RT10). However, experiences have differed across the nations of the UK. The greater difficulty of travelling to Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK mean that it saw a fall in visitor numbers and reduced demand for tourist accommodation, further compounded by a general lack of tourist accommodation and facilities serving rural areas (RT5). In Scotland, the number of staycations has increased but these have not helped many small businesses who lost local customers during the pandemic. Bankruptcies (of pubs, cafes, etc.) have reduced the availability of services for visitors (R12).

A continuing popularity of staycations evidences the increased value now attached to natural and historic amenity. This is seen as a positive outcome in many places, but it comes at a price: pressure on key facilities, such as parking provision at the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland and in the English Lake District (RT3). More space is needed for recreation, but farmers are reluctant to open new walking trails across their land. Many would rather open up land for development (RT10), capitalising on demand for new housing but at the same time denuding the amenity that is bringing more people to the countryside. The *en masse* arrival of camper vans to some beauty spots, rural and coastal, is well-documented. Poorly parked vans have sometimes blocked emergency access to jetties and piers, causing conflict with other amenity users (RT5). Planning authorities commonly 'manage' tourism pressure by refusing permission for additional infrastructure, which it is feared will further increase visitor demand (RT5), in much the same way as roadbuilding increases car use. However, this logic appears flawed where demand continues to rise irrespective of infrastructure investment, to the point of environmental collapse. COVID-19 experiences are certainly shared between planning and National Park Authorities. (See also Case Study 9: Moving to a more sustainable tourist economy (Snowdonia National Park/Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri, Wales) in Technical Report 5).

Rural Economic Change

The pandemic revealed shortcomings in service and school accessibility in many rural areas, especially where poor digital connectivity prevented the replacement of face-to-face services with online substitutes (RT7). The learning experience of children in some rural areas was inferior to that received in many towns and cities. Whilst digital poverty can adversely affect economic productivity, a more significant challenge during the pandemic has been the shortage of seasonal workers. Areas reliant on workers from Eastern Europe (especially during the harvesting of soft fruits) have faced severe challenges. Efforts were made by government to fly seasonal workers to the UK during the pandemic, but labour supply was extremely tight and led some businesses towards greater automation, which can often lead to a loss in supply chain jobs in rural communities (RT4). The pandemic impacted across the production, packing and distribution process: harvesting shifted to automation (e.g. farms needed to act quickly to honour supermarket contracts – RT7); packing required enlarged facilities to deliver social distancing (RT7); and sale and distribution shifted online.

Gig economy solutions were effective at countering some challenges in Scotland (RT12), but generally the pandemic caused uncertainty as to future practice and therefore uncertainty regarding the sorts of investments that might safeguard or grow a business in the years ahead, driving a hiatus in investment decisions. Some businesses were supported by various Government emergency grants, but struggled to survive once furlough assistance ended while others emerged from the pandemic to find that Brexit rules had kicked in, causing a continuation of labour supply challenges. At the same time, some of their new customers (who had decamped to the countryside during the pandemic) are now returning to cities as work from home practices end (RT12), though this is not yet to pre-pandemic footfall in many areas.

Community capacity

Population movements have impacted on community capacity in complicated ways. Many new residents in rural areas often like to get involved in community activities. Studies of community well-being during the pandemic has highlighted rural community spirit as something tangible and valued. But at the same time, many voluntary organisations (supported by older people) closed during the pandemic and many are struggling to reopen (RT7). Closure resulted from ‘stay at home’ messages from governments, which made the continuation of face-to-face community support very difficult. However, it is difficult to generalise the pandemic’s impact on community capacity. There is a belief that any shrinkage in that capacity will be short-lived and voluntary action is key to the many challenges faced in rural areas.

How planning should respond to the pandemic was a question that triggered fairly detailed proposals. These included:

- Broaden the interpretation of a 'prosperous rural economy' and ensure that (English) NPPF is applied more flexibly and effectively (RT5);
- Address staycation and access pressure by sharing and drawing on good practice, from across the UK and Europe: recreation management and sustainable tourism plans should seek inspiration from international guidance, including the European Travel Commission Sustainable Tourism Handbook (ETC, 2021) (RT5);
- Adopt an Investment Evaluation Process (IEP) similar to the one linked to Durham's Tourism Management Plan[10], which helps guide future investment and development (RT11);
- Maximise the potential of heritage assets in the marketing of staycations in rural areas (RT7).

The final point can be more broadly articulated as investment in community wealth building infrastructure: planning can support local spending and investment by supporting community management of key assets and prioritising local business infrastructure, including for tourism. More generally, the pandemic points to a need for greater resilience and self-sufficient against external shocks: that resilience needs to be reflected in the supply of good quality affordable homes, digital infrastructure that affords ready access to services and education, means of sustainably utilising heritage and nature assets, capturing spending locally), and institutional and community capacity that can cope with unexpected events.

4a. The Countryside as a Site for Adaptation – Challenges

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) or environmental (i.e., the climate emergency and the responses it necessitates). The first clear point from the roundtables was that planning affects a place's

10 https://www.visitcountydurham.org/durham-tourism-management-plan/

capacity to adapt and transform (RT12) through a combination of place attributes and planning rules that support adaptation. A second point from the roundtables was the adaptation potential of rural areas is obfuscated by competing and complex claims on rural spaces: there is a 'crowding' of aspirations around affordable housing, habitat protection, flood management, biodiversity net gain, tree planting, and landscape designations etc. (RT7). The pathway through this complexity to achieve **'just transitions'** requires balancing the needs of local populations with effective adaptation strategies. Realising that transition is the major challenge of rural planning in the 2020s (RT9) and will require a pivot in policy orientation towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (RT9)[11].

Planning needs to be much clearer about what it is trying to achieve (RT10): it needs to be 'visionary', articulating an ambition of the 'world we want to create', which will inevitably involve a multi-functional, rather than a homogenous, use of space (RT10). Just transitions are achievable where planning, and its partners, have the resources to offer persuasive visions of the future. But standing in the way of this vision is a modus operandi for planning that is all about sticking with the familiar rather than experimenting with new ways of thinking and working (RT12). Planning is often experienced as operating on the back foot, lacking the resources to be proactive and innovative. Innovation, it was argued, is central to adaptation (RT11). There is evidence of this innovation in some places, including in some of the identified Case Study areas which help to 'push the limits of the planning system' (RT11) and 'challenge the forces that try to keep things the same' (RT12).

Settlement Planning

Traditional views of settlement planning pervade thinking on rural land use. Rural development continues to be viewed as unsustainable unless it happens in market towns or adjoining urban areas (RT5 & RT7). Settlements with fewer than 3,000 residents, often without access to a bank, post office and regular public transport, are not earmarked for planned growth. But this view does not recognise the role of good broadband in overcoming traditional access constraints (RT5). The size of a settlement, and available face-to-face services, is important to young people and determines their propensity to stay put (RT5). But the idea that 'retention of young people' defines the prospects for a rural place is outdated. The reality is that the young leave rural places for education and the buzz of urban life, but they can be drawn back at a later stage of life if rural places offer good opportunities and high quality jobs. Opportunities for young people under the age of 18 are important, but they are only one part of a larger jigsaw of opportunity that needs to be delivered.

The concentration of development in bigger centres risks turning the countryside into a car-

11 See: https://www.rtpi.org.uk/find-your-rtpi/rtpi-nations/international/international-agreements-and-planning/

dependent urban fringe, with a lack of deliverable sites in part driven by the aspirations of landowners to capture increased land value (RT2) and restrictions in green belt protection as a brake against such development (RT4). Local authorities seek to defend high-demand villages in amenity areas from development, but this tends to concentrate housing market pressure and benefits existing homeowners through rising property values. The gentrification it produces does not serve 'rural regeneration' as there is no focus on public interest beyond the interest of property owners, and no strategic policy defining that interest (RT1).

But the real challenge is to rethink notions of sustainability, focusing less on where development should go and more on the quality of that development and how it contributes to sustainable and adaptive change. Part of the challenge is for urban authorities with rural hinterlands to adopt a clear rural focus without separating 'town from country' and therefore losing important urban/rural synergies (RT1). This was felt to be a particular challenge in England, although 'town-based' planning is pervasive in Ireland where the Town Centre First approach[12] aims to revitalise higher-tier settlements (RT5), but neglects the needs of villages which are 'disappearing before our very eyes' (RT9). There is a feeling that a village 'renaissance' is long overdue, and that this will only be delivered through a different approach to settlement planning for rural areas. Although this challenge is ubiquitous, it plays out differently depending on levels of relative nucleation and dispersion. England's reliance on key settlement policy is well documented. That reliance is weaker in Wales and Scotland, but in Northern Ireland it means a proliferation of hamlets lacking any basic services (RT5).

Urban Bias

These difficulties are rooted in urban bias, which limits the resources available for rural planning and leads urban authorities with rural hinterlands to concentrate attention on towns and edges (RT8). Urban bias is also reflected in attitudes to rural areas, to the nature of the 'rural economy' (as perceived essentially comprising farmers and farming) (RT4 & RT5), and poor understanding of rural issues by urban policy makers (RT4). The blind spot in policy-making leaves a vacuum that can be filled by wealthy landowners who pursue their own interests or adopting a paternalistic stance towards nearby communities (RT4), enforced by a lack of institutional knowledge in government. Although some minsters themselves have a background in farming, government tends to be dominated by an urban focus; the farming and rural development portfolio can be played as merely another rung on the ministerial career ladder. This was thought to be particularly the case in Whitehall (RT4).

The roundtables were replete with stinging criticisms of governments' perceived urban bias.

12 https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/473d3-town-centre-first-policy/

It was argued that rural areas are viewed as being essentially 'empty' – devoid of people and opportunity. Where emptiness has taken hold, marked by depopulation, this was attributed to the failure in Dublin, Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London to support smaller (rural) settlements (RT12). One view expressed was that 'Scotland's planning system is for the 2 per cent' of the country that is urban, and gives limited attention to the 98 per cent that is rural (RT12). The fairness and accuracy of such arguments can be disputed, but there was clearly a feeling that rural areas are the poor cousins of towns and cities when it comes to the distribution of planning's focus and resourcing, even when targeted initiatives are brought into the equation. In Scotland, for example, it was acknowledged that the Scottish Land Fund is 'supporting urban and rural communities to become more resilient and sustainable through the ownership and management of land and land assets'[13] (see Case Study 2: Supporting sustainable community development through land reform (Isle of Colonsay, Scotland) in Technical Report 5.

4b. The Countryside as a Site for Adaptation – Planning and Policy

What, broadly, is needed to support innovation and adaptation in rural areas? We start this section with some broad observations on the state of **planning and rural policy** from the roundtables before drilling into important themes including **resourcing**, **community-level planning**, the **farming sector**, enhancing **natural capital**, and **positive change in the housing market**.

Planning and Rural Policy

Whilst most parts of the UK have moved quickly on the development of planning policy, seeking greater alignment with the SDGs and greater integration between development and environmental objectives, the situation in England was said to be a complete 'mess' (RT7). Good planning in England was felt to happen despite government's planning system rather than because of it (RT5). This was seen as down to sharp political and ideological divisions and the Government's neo-liberal priorities, which too often sideline rural communities from real decision-making. But everywhere, the divide between forestry, farming and planning is visible (RT9). It is that division, often with piecemeal policy-making (RT4), which stalls innovation and prevents genuinely multi-functional visions of possible rural futures. Ambiguity in the planning system, especially in England, is an open door to abuse and poor outcomes (RT5). The news, in May 2022, that the English planning reform agenda has essentially been scrapped and replaced by local voting on planning applications is unlikely to instil great confidence in local authorities, who may likely view it as a knee jerk reaction to Conservative losses in recent local elections.

13 https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/scottish-land-fund

At a local level, plan policies for rural areas were said to be rooted in a ‘cooker cutter’ mentality, with replication between authorities (RT5). Replication is not to be confused with active ‘learning’, where planning teams review the lessons from other areas and think very carefully how such lessons might transfer to their own jurisdiction, and what the contextual challenges might be. Active learning requires leadership and resources.

Views on the visionary credentials of planning and rural policy differed between the nations. England’s planning system was thought to have lost any semblance of vision, having become bogged down in an ideological debate pitting private against public interest (RT2).

Wales’s Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) was considered a good starting point for integration of local policy goals, but Planning Policy Wales (Welsh Government, 2021b) still treats rural areas as ‘second class’, as money is ‘thrown at towns and cities’ (RT8). The zoning of land uses in Ireland was said to be too broad brush for rural areas, which need a finer grained treatment (RT9). Northern Ireland’s Housing Growth Indicators (NISRA, 2016) were perceived less about where growth could go and more about steering growth away from rural communities, undermining their future viability (RT10). While some participants felt that Scotland’s NPF4 could do much more to support and revitalise rural communities, and was said to be far too ‘conservative’ (RT12).

The major conclusion, shared by the nations, is that rural policy and planning policy for rural areas remains insufficiently ambitious, offering more a function of stability than a compelling vision of what might be possible for rural areas. This is not only because of the urban bias noted above, but also because of poor integration of agency responsibility and weak leadership on rural matters (RT10). The unfolding situation in Ukraine risks undermining environmental goals if governments flip back to fossil fuels and abandon the expansion of renewables, or at least view renewable energy as an aspiration rather that a priority (RT3).

Rural areas will play an important role in delivering well-being and Wales is actively pursuing enhanced well-being through a focus on access to nature. Scotland’s NPF4 drew on a national assessment of key challenges facing rural areas, culminating in area typologies. While it is sometimes easier to consider the ‘constraints on effective planning’ than praise good initiatives, many of which are noted in the case studies, overall, participants wanted more of such positive actions that offer an ambitious approach to rural policy to bring together planning and frameworks for farming, for nature, and for many related concerns.

Resourcing

Ambition requires resourcing – and the overarching resource constraint affecting rural planning was noted at the beginning of this section. Local authorities have few opportunities to increase revenues or pay for additional training, which is leading to a skills gap (RT11). Graduate planners were said to find jobs in rural authorities unattractive, perceiving that they would not offer the range of experience (especially on big applications) needed for career progression. The same graduates are also put off by fixed-term contracts (FT11). They would rather begin their careers in the buzz of a city, thereafter progressing into private sector jobs (RT2).

The shortfall in funding and skills leaves some authorities unable to engage proactively in place-shaping. Planners were felt to retrench into a reactive mode, dealing with application caseload, and these general problems are magnified in specific fields. There was said to be a shortage of planners able to assess the design quality of applications, or the impacts of proposals on local ecology (RT11). This was seen as a particular issue in the South East of England where there are only two ecologists working in Kent. Specialists often have to shoulder huge responsibility and are not supported by a network of peers who can offer advice (RT4). The mismatch between caseload and resource means that specialists cannot comprehensively review individual cases, but respond in a generic, non-specific way to applications (RT4). Participants questioned the feasibility of achieving the UK Government's biodiversity net gain targets, given the shortage of ecology specialists (RT3).

Faced with such constraints, local authorities struggle to work across boundaries or with integrated goals (RT4). Limited resourcing (not having specialists in multiple areas) leads to siloed thinking: the simple choice of prioritising one goal or another (RT3). Some critiques were particularly withering: planning in Northern Ireland was said to be 'a shambles […] an abject failure' that allowed sand to be extracted from lakes, trees to be felled in areas of flood risk, large-scale water infrastructure to be installed without permission, and developers given retrospective approval for developments that compromised environmental quality (RT3). Many of these problems stem from lack of local authority capacity to plan, question and enforce. Planners were said to care deeply about all these failings but were being hamstrung by the political vacuum caused by the suspension of Northern Ireland's power-sharing arrangements.

Roundtable attendees reported that homeowners are increasingly seeking permission for work-from-home adaptations. Rural planning authorities saw a surge in permitted development (PD) enquiries (RT7) from people looking to install home offices in their gardens. Key amenity areas, including the Lake District National Park, received more applications for major alterations – often from new owners (RT6). The number of home alterations and building extensions going on in rural locations was said to have been a

source of increased neighbour conflict, frequently because more people were working from home and therefore more likely to be affected by building works. Not all works were covered by PD, and some authorities found themselves stretched by an increased volume of enforcement action, which was made more complex by government relaxing rules on the expiration of planning permissions, working hours for construction work, and temporary permissions during the pandemic (RT7). Roundtable participants pointed to a 'quantum rise' in small-scale building activity and planning dispute over the last two years (RT11), which of course extended into urban areas as people tried to adapt their homes to new working patterns.

But the belief that planning is too often a political football, that the 'failings' of planning should be unpicked from failings of politics, was a recurrent theme across the nations.

Community-level Planning

Communities' engagements with planning and their responsibility for aspects of evidence-gathering, plan-making and decision-taking has become an important part of broader planning debate in recent years. There are some key differences between the nations of the UK and Ireland in relation to the framing of community-level planning. We look at these below. But in broad terms, roundtables flagged desire of communities to shape their own futures (RT1) and how the challenges they face or the attitudes they express are often more constant than the planning frameworks in which they operate (RT1). Respondents were split on the quality of tools and resources available to community-level planning. Some felt that enough was already being done: that 'available tools' exceed 'the appetite to use them' (RT1). Others felt that communities were drowning in complexity and struggling to understand the potential of the frameworks that had been created in recent years (RT8). That said, some communities were better placed than others to grasp new opportunities. This was evidenced in the formation of Community Land Trusts (CLTs) in some areas that had become de facto delivery vehicles for many of the ambitions set out in community plans (RT8). Communities are differentiated by their stock of skills and knowledge. If too much is devolved to local people, success will inevitably be fragmented and skewed towards resource-rich areas. Key differences between the nations included:

Neighbourhood Development Plans in England

These were thought to have been inspired by past community (parish) planning in rural areas, with neighbourhood planning areas easier to designate in rural parishes due to existing parish administrative boundaries (RT11). But what government really wants to achieve via NDPs was felt opaque, as the broader thrust of reform is deregulatory and appears to favour the private sector (RT11). Past community planning tools – Parish Plans

and Village Design Statements (VDS) – were considered by some to be less technical and more accessible, aiding community engagement in their compilation. This view was countered by the belief that the introduction of NDPs had made communities feel 'part of the system' (RT1), although the processes of putting together a neighbourhood plan can still feel exclusive (favouring the usual suspects) and detached from local authorities (who lack the resources to adequately engage communities), leaving a sense that planners are not genuine partners in the NDP process, and often reacted defensively to the content of neighbourhood plans where this threatened LPA agendas (RT1).

Poor alignment between NDPs and local plans appeared commonplace, which could be a source of resentment in communities and was viewed in many roundtables as evidence of failure in the Government's localism agenda, which was supposed to bring a greater degree of shared purpose to local authorities to support bottom-up planning. A schism remains between the technical language of local plans and the everyday articulation of community ambition, which again seems to point to the superiority of old-style Parish Plans (RT1). Neighbourhood plan groups were said to need their own Chartered Town Planner (RT11), but that sort of input could again result in the early translation of community ambition into technical intent. Was it the purpose of the NDP framework to turn neighbourhoods into mini authorities that contract out their planning to professionals? The technical nature of NDPs could be pushing some communities in this direction. This could certainly bring greater plan alignment, but would it deliver on the ambitions of wider communities rather than a sub-group seeking more direct input into plan making? This goes back to the uncertain goals of NDP and the frustrations this opacity generates.

Another major challenge for NDPs is the 'specialism problem' found within planning authorities, i.e. whether neighbourhood planning should be expected to contribute to multiple and complex goals, such as net-zero and rural restructuring. As planning takes on a wider remit, more responsibility may need to return to authorities, although they too may lack the requisite expertise (RT1). Debate in this area extended into a discussion of the reasonable expectation that could be placed on communities to deal with strategic issues such as transport, employment and tourism. Less emphasis could be placed on making plans and more on connecting residents with other bodies, giving them a louder voice where it matters (RT1). Again, the balance of effort between making (technical) plans that are 'sound' and simply facilitating broader engagement was questioned: NDPs should not be relied upon as the sole means of advancing a community's agenda (RT2), not least because the cut-and-paste approach to NDP-making preferred by many consultants risks undermining the distinctive approaches and policies needed by rural communities, filtering and obscuring those communities' peculiar needs.

Place Plans in Wales

Wales' Place Plans have been around since 2015 but one participant recounted that only 20 per cent of eligible communities (of 735) have seen their plans adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). Place Plans are not coming forward in many rural communities as the system favours larger towns that can draw on greater resource from higher precepts (RT1). In terms of status, Place Plans share some similarities with England's old Parish Plans. Their content is not restricted by *ultra vires* considerations, so they can articulate matters of concern to a community that are outside the purview of land-use planning. The reasons for producing plans also appear similar to the old Parish Plans: they are underpinned by evidence gathering to support the enactment of a community vision. Their success depends on community engagement and support (RT8) but their weakness stems from poor alignment with local development plans (RT1) because of their non-statutory status (a 'challenge' that the transition to NDPs tried to address in England). In England, Parish Plans sometimes became narrow lobbying tools, aimed at curbing development or promoting the re-routing of heavy traffic. In Wales, Place Plans are sometimes used almost exclusively to promote the Welsh language. This narrow, albeit very important, focus can limit their transformative capacity to shape wider rural agendas and the apparent relevance of Place Plans within the wider planning framework. Also, if the plans do not achieve their lobbying objectives, public support can often fade away (RT8).

Local Place Plans in Scotland

'Place' has become an increasingly important concept in Scotland. The Scottish Government has formulated a 'Place Standard' tool[14] that can be used to score the physical (built form, public spaces, and transport links) and social aspects of place, including political engagement. But such constructs are built on a rich tradition of community-level action and a strong focus on locality. Since the creation of the Scottish Government there has been a progressive strengthening of community rights in Scotland, especially rights over land in pursuit of community interest and sustainable development (see Case Study 2: Supporting sustainable community development through land reform (Isle of Colonsay, Scotland) in Technical Report 5). There have been a number of community buy-outs of land from aristocratic landlords and the community housing sector has flourished. The formulation of community-level plans has arguably been ancillary to direct action, although planning – in various loose forms – has played a part in articulating and advancing community interest. Scotland's National Planning Framework has established Local Place Plans (RT2), which can be deemed 'material' considerations in the decision-making of planning authorities. Applecross' Community Land Use Plan[15], produced using an independent facilitator and

14 https://www.placestandard.scot/docs/Place_Standard_Strategic_Plan.pdf
15 https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/our-work/housing-development/housing/applecross-community-land-use-plan
https://www.applecrosscommunitycompany.org/company-projects/plan-it-applecross/

now a material consideration for Highland Council, was held up as an example of a Local Place Plan that has successfully embedded itself in local decision-making (RT12).

Ireland and Northern Ireland

The practices of community-level planning in Northern Ireland were not touched upon in the roundtables. There was said to be a lack of appetite for such planning in Ireland, which was seen as an inauthentic articulation of community interest: such plans are often devices for external interests that wish to misrepresent communities and pursue private development projects that end up as 'ghost estates' (RT1). This critique was perhaps aimed at unsustainable patterns of satellite development ahead of the 2008 global financial crisis – an oversupply of new homes promoted by local developers who claimed to be working with and for local residents. Antipathy towards community-level planning is often rooted in a belief, real or imagined, that the broader public interest is lost when planning is undertaken at too low a level, where private and public interest becomes blurred. However, in Ireland local councils were also felt to be well-tuned to the needs of rural communities.

The Farming Sector

The farming sector has faced huge change during recent decades. Farming activity in the UK has dwindled (RT4) but Ireland's level of farm production remains high (RT9). With regards to adaptation and new political and environmental challenges, the question is how well farms are coping with change and the extent to which they are embracing new practices. There are certainly many components of change, ranging from climate issues through to Brexit, new government priorities for food production and the environment. Adaptation to climate change can mean reduced stocking levels to promote grassland recovery (RT4), but the promotion of more intensive livestock practices in Northern Ireland appears inconsistent with this goal (RT10). Likewise, consumers play a role in shaping farm agendas, by seeking traceability from fork to farm; but the view expressed was this traceability is becoming more difficult unless consumers pay more for farm-linked produce or farmers find profit in serving particular production philosophies (RT4). A twin track has emerged in the farming sector, separating producers engaged in and costing environmental management (RT4) and those who are tied to supermarkets' race to the bottom on price and (limited) traceability.

Planners are frequently reactive to agricultural and environmental issues (RT4) and were felt to respond to agricultural applications without understanding the intricacies of farm needs. Planners presented obstacles to farm expansion or workers' accommodation in areas of landscape designation, arguably failing to grasp critical food security concerns or balancing landscape and farm needs (RT4). Planning therefore imposes costs on farm businesses.

Recent ‘Class Q’ reforms in England are viewed as a double-edged sword for the farming sector. They might allow some diversification of buildings unsuited to modern agriculture, increasing farm income, but could also lead to a permanent loss of buildings to residential use that might have been needed in the future (RT4 & RT7).

Despite increased heterogeneity in modern rural economies, farming remains critical to the future of rural areas, not least because of its role in land management and in delivering future food security. However, the well-documented ‘trope’ of new residents objecting to farm activity and development (mud on roads or crop spraying at 4 o’clock in the morning) perhaps suggests work to be done on reconnecting communities with farming and educating on the importance of farming to rural places and society more broadly (and also, perhaps, encouraging more widespread organic practices where feasible).

Natural Capital

Engagement with natural capital is a very important aspect of adaptation. Offsetting activities (that are not merely exercises in greenwashing) and pursuit of biodiversity net gain are likely to become more important in the future as natural capital takes centre stage in rural policy (see Case Study 14: Bristol Avon Catchment Market in Technical Report 5). The first challenge for planning concerns the consistent use of environmental terminology in policy-making. Roundtable 3 (Ecosystem services, Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions) asked participants to vote on which terms were most effective to promote nature-based rural planning outcomes (see Figure 3).

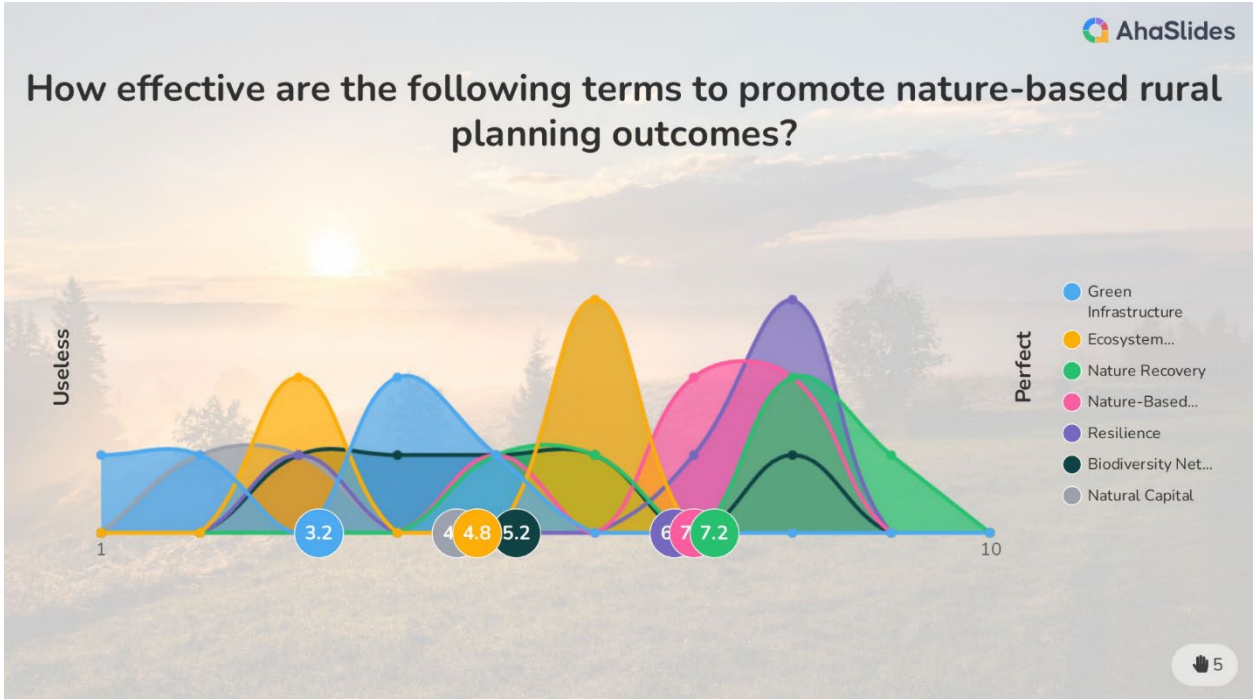

Figure 3 Participant ranking of common nature-based planning terminology

This poll revealed that complex terms can alienate non-experts (RT3) and make it difficult to engage lay partners. A preference was expressed for substituting 'ecosystem services' (perceived to be a more academic term) with 'nature recovery', 'nature-based solutions', 'resilience' or more generic 'landscape benefits' (RT3), although these are not equivalent concepts and attempts towards simplification risks losing technical precision. Interestingly, natural capital and biodiversity net gain were not deemed as helpful, at this point, in promoting nature-based outcomes. 'Nature recovery' was said to be easier to understand than 'Green Infrastructure' (GI), but these are again different things (communities warm to the idea of recovery whilst planners like the word 'infrastructure', which has a familiar ring to it) (RT3). However, a common and consistent language is vital. After the language challenge comes the complexities of environmental accounting methods: how to quantify and express ecosystem services. With their distinct policy communities, the devolved nations of the UK are doing things in subtly different ways: varying their use of language and putting trust in different methods which may lead to an array of learnings or crowd an already confusing environmental space for policy-making.

Being a planner amidst this growing complexity is a challenge in itself: how to make sense of evidence and deliver on new responsibilities? Resources for upskilling are important, but planners are not ecologists. The pursuit of meaningful and measurable net-zero goals, and other objectives arising from recent legislation such the Environment Act 2021 (which only covers England and Wales and the Office of Environmental Protection only covers England), requires that specialist skills are available to the planning service. The delivery and monitoring of natural capital goals cannot be left to developers. The onus placed on private actors may have inadvertently resulted in a bias towards on-site net gain over offsetting (RT3) or reflect the continuing challenges of cross-boundary working (RT7). Local authorities and their partners try to meet 'obligations' in the easiest way, i.e. on-site, but perhaps this is easier to monitor and mitigates the risk of poorly located offsetting schemes that are isolated from the development they claim to 'offset' (RT3).

There was some positivity around finance opportunities for integrated land management, post-CAP (RT4). The opening up of offsetting markets allow farmers and landowners to place unproductive land into environmental benefit schemes, such as the Green Offset brokerage platform[16] and Natural Capital Marketplace (currently a Devon-based pilot)[17] (RT4) (see also Case Study 14: Bristol Avon Catchment Market in Technical Report 5). New environment management schemes will need time to become established (and regulated) and could be complementary to deliver biodiversity enhancements, in addition to on-site net gain (see above). The farming sector was said to be at the beginning of its ecosystem

16 https://greenoffset.co.uk/
17 https://app.naturalcapital.market/

services journey through the transition to regenerative farming and away from intensive methods. Such a change in practices will take time (RT4) and the ecological benefits arising therein, meaning that there will be a delay before farmers capture for financial benefits. In Scotland, the Land Commission is working on carbon offsetting opportunities, but a final framework is yet to emerge. Uncertainties are perhaps inevitable. Rural areas clearly have the potential to host adaptive uses, such as offsetting or regenerative farming that optimise ecosystem services, but realising these benefits is dependent on clear policy and grant support.

The management of phosphate and nitrate loads is another important aspect of rural adaptation. The presence of phosphates, arising from farming practices and potentially mitigated by careful catchment management, is an increasingly important issue for planning (RT2). High nitrate loads were said to be linked to farming affect half of all land in England, and because of the effect on water quality, these loads can be a barrier to development until they can be reduced through investment in water treatment and changes to land management / farming practices (RT8). Phosphate and nitrate loads are considered a direct threat to natural capital in Wales (RT2), impacting on housing supply where authorities (including the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority) have suspended the granting of new planning permissions. These suspensions were thought to affect 56 per cent of the country – and there is no clarity on how the issue will be resolved (RT8).

Phosphate and nitrate loads have become big news over the last year, threatening the delivery of new homes in different parts of the UK. Housing exacerbates groundwater quality because of sewage treatment processes, hence the slowing of development needed where quality is already low. Dealing with phosphate and nitrate loads is a challenge across the European Union. Ireland is well below the EU benchmark, set out in the Water Framework Directive, for groundwater quality and significant fines are anticipated (RT2). Peatland management is a driver of this issue in Ireland and in Scotland, with neither country able to address housing supply challenges while phosphate and nitrate loads are unresolved. In Scotland, tree planting on peatland is being ended (RT3) and Ireland is rolling out its own peatland restoration programme. Northern Ireland faces the added challenge of wastewater discharge from an ageing network of pipes (RT10).

Nitrate and phosphate loads are an issue for environmental policy, for CAP's replacement, and for local planning departments trying to meet the need for development. They are perhaps an aspect of necessary adaptation rather than a barrier, with housing developments needing to be accompanied by measures and mechanisms to reduce wastewater whilst improving the treatment of sewage.

Housing market change underpinned by the pandemic is examined in the Analysis of Rural Housing Market Change in Technical Report 2, which draws on an analysis of extant datasets. The roundtables confirmed some degree of migration to rural areas (RT8) during the pandemic, drawing on anecdotal evidence. That migration has been contributed to house price increase, which has also been driven by historically low interest rates.

Affordability is clearly a ubiquitous challenge, with rural areas' capacity to embrace new opportunities constrained by the economic drag of inadequate housing supply for local needs. Pressures linked to the COVID-19 pandemic are significant, with more dwellings transferred to second home use or holiday letting (RT2). The income to house price ratio in Ireland is broadly similar to that in rural England, roughly 1:8 (RT9), and this is despite the country's permissive approach to housing development, with about 90 per cent of homes in Tipperary reported to be one-off units built via family networks. Despite rules on local housing, there is sufficient non-local demand to push prices substantially above local wage levels.

The challenges of the housing market in Wales have also received media attention during recent months: whilst there is evidence of people being 'priced out', poor services also discourage households from remaining in villages (RT8). Welsh language objectives are important in Wales and for the planning system. Northern Ireland's approach to the allocation of social housing differs from the rest of the UK; here there is an element of choice, with applicants able to specify where they would like to live. More 'points' are required to live in an urban area (RT10), which is perhaps indicative of preferences and the challenges of living in villages. Across the UK, the Right to Buy (in place since 1980) has reduced the supply of affordable homes, affecting the sustainability of communities (RT2). There was little enthusiasm for this policy or for future extensions: rural areas need more non-market housing, and what they already have needs protecting for future generations (i.e., in perpetuity).

Second homes are concentrated in amenity-rich locations that are accessible to sources of demand, via good roads. Restrictions on the occupancy of new housing is now a good way of regulating second home numbers given the preference for older property amongst second home seekers (RT8). Whilst some rural authorities focus on affordable homes, others – less amenity rich – are much more concerned with general supply and the viability of sites. So whilst some seek a reduction in external market pressures, others would welcome additional demand from outside their jurisdictions, to support the market and increase the viability of market development (RT8). The rural housing question is not only about second homes and adventitious buyers.

The pressures of high demand or low viability impact on housing availability, making it difficult to live and work in rural areas. This is an economic problem and a problem for the future of rural places. There is a need for more social housing (RT10), a greater focus on local connection in some places (but not everywhere) (RT2), and a need to involve those who need social housing in the decisions underpinning its delivery (RT2). Rural exceptions have been an important means of increasing the supply of affordable homes in villages, but it was claimed that some exception sites are now being delivered without any genuinely affordable homes on them (RT7). This challenge was picked up in the thematic review on this topic (see Technical Report 1).

Other housing issues noted in the roundtables included: a lack of decent housing for seasonal workers (RT7); planning policy struggling with high land values in the South East of England, which limits the affordability of homes (RT2); the transfer of homes to short-term platform-based letting, which has become a critical concern in some areas (RT2). CLTs were identified as a boost to capacity in some areas, but these needed greater support, including through investment in Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs) (RT2). The homogenisation of housing design risks local rejection of development proposals, and where poorly designed housing makes it through planning, the impact on rural character can be catastrophic (RT11). Finally, it was noted that a use class review is underway in Wales, which aims to distinguish between homes used as principal and secondary residences and also move short-term holiday lets into their own class. Once this distinction is in place, planning authorities would be able to use an Article 4 Direction (halting permitted development) to prevent homes that are currently occupied full-time to be transferred to second home or holiday use (RT5). Such a level of control of the private use of dwelling houses is unprecedented and could impact significantly on price. It essentially brings the private sale of second home ownership under planning control.

4c. Delivering adaptation at the local level

Finally, roundtable discussions broadened to considered local authorities' support for adaptation. One foundational issue raised was the meaning of sustainability. As planning policy discourse embraces ideas of ecology and natural capital, there is a danger of prioritising environmental agendas at the expense of socio-economic goals. Rural places are more than the environment (RT2), so the first step for planning should be to unpick sustainability and think though what a sustainable rural place looks like, across multiple functions. Single actions, such as planting more trees to offset development impact, will not deliver on the adaptive potential of rural areas. Rather, there needs to be a broadening of planning's focus at all levels, including at the level of community engagement (RT9). Participants drew attention to good practice in neighbourhood planning in England, with communities stepping out of the housing silo and focusing much more on the wider

determinants of well-being, including the quality of local green space[18]. Likewise, in Wales there is greater local engagement (via the Local Places for Nature grant scheme) on GI projects[19], which admittedly begins with trees, but then extends into biodiversity. In terms of delivering adaptation at the local level, there was concern for increasing the **connectivity** of communities and for directly linking **rural enterprise and adaptation** to new challenges. Enterprise and adaptation need to happen in tandem if rural areas are to deliver well-being for their residents and contribute to wider societal well-being.

Connectivity

Network gaps in energy and broadband are holding rural areas back (RT11). Some areas remain on dial-up internet connections or tied to oil-based heating (RT5). At the same time, they lack innovations in public transport and remain car dependent. These are some of the biggest challenges facing rural areas today and their impact will worsen as rural populations age in some areas. Return migration can help revive communities or address network issue, with younger people supporting older relatives. But the broader answer lies in plugging the network gaps. Accessibility was described as the critical challenge for rural communities 50 years ago, and this remains the case today.

But connectivity is not only about linking households with services. A healthy farming ecosystem, that supports biodiversity and access to the countryside, can help address rural health challenges including the proliferation of diabetes and obesity (RT4). There are also specific network issues in different parts of the UK, including the goal in Wales to increase the Welsh speaking population. This can only happen if Welsh-speaking communities are not isolated and if there are networks of small schools using Welsh as a mode of instruction to help bring Welsh speakers together. A danger on the horizon is that whereas the language was once perceived as part of a rural Welsh identity (in *Y Fro Gymraeg*[20]), it is now seen as something elite, associated with politics, a Welsh intelligentsia, and the educated class (RT8). Language needs to be embedded in wider focus on identity and place, supported by policy and planning.

Roundtable participants broadly agreed that pieces of rural places need to be effectively knitted together through connected approaches: this can be done through technology, infrastructure, or connected strategies which connect to social, economic and environmental networks.

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18 83 per cent of local green space (LGS) have been designated in NDPs, which together represent 30,000 acres (or 6,515 sites) of protected space since LGS were introduced in 2012, 55 per cent of which have been designated in rural areas and most have been allocated in Southern England (CPRE, 2022).
19 https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/local-places-nature
20 The term used to refer to the linguistic area in Wales where the Welsh language is used by the majority or a large part of the population.

Rural Enterprise and Adaptation

Investment is not something that is only injected from outside. It derives from effective enterprise, which can deliver the resilience of a mixed (social) economy. The conversion of 'The Old Bakehouse', 'The Old School' or 'The Smithy' to residential use over recent decades speaks to a loss of economic mix and is one of the key challenges for rural planning: to support the return of enterprise (RT5). For England, it was argued that the NPPF sends out the right signals (RT5) but the levelling up agenda is devoid of ideas for rural areas and continues to propagate an urban bias in government thinking (RT5 & RT11). Challenges are mixed: isolation negatively impacts on enterprise culture (removing agglomeration effects) and the issue needs to be afforded serious consideration. But in Ireland, there are 'shocking levels' of business closure, due to issues 'well beyond planning' (RT9) and a huge labour shortage, across urban and rural areas. Some big investments are planned in parts of northern England, but these may not aid rural communities due to connectivity issues and labour market skills (RT11). Parts of the UK have been haemorrhaging Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) since the 2008 global financial crisis, again because connectivity challenges made firms in rural areas especially vulnerable to economic shock.

Connectivity is a major factor in enterprise, business-to-business connectivity, and connectivity to skilled labour, e.g. skills shortages, vulnerability to economic shocks, seasonality, and a pressing need for responses to all of these challenges in tandem (RT5 & RT8). An enterprising countryside is one that can recognise and grasp adaptation opportunities. Besides private sector enterprise, social enterprise was said to be key to the delivery of innovative regeneration in rural areas (RT1), often focusing on the sorts of projects (e.g., setting up a community hub or taking over a community forest) that increases adaptation potential and capacity. The example of a hub for community-led sustainability action in Northumberland was held up as a good example (RT11) (see Case Study 16: The Haltwhistle Partnership and Our Future Towns in Technical Report 5).

Tourism is an important part of rural economies, but over-reliance on seasonal visitors has its own risks. It cannot deliver wider farm diversification (RT5) and impacts on the housing market may reduce labour supply and year-round demand for other goods and services. Seasonality affects the quality of jobs in the tourism sector while low pay is another factor in housing affordability. Participants agreed that every effort should be made to support tourism, to steer it in sustainable directions, mitigate impacts and maximise benefits, innovate and monitor its interactions with local housing markets (RT5). But at the end of the day, rural areas need a diversity of economic opportunity, which means supporting entrepreneurship. Such entrepreneurship was said to be significant in Northern Ireland, with

numerous home-based businesses (RT10). These can be the seeds of future enterprise and although they are not dependent on the availability of space in ‘industrial estates’ (RT10), they will need help with expansion and with connectivity through local supply chains and to other forms of entrepreneurial support.

One uncertainty faced by the UK is again the framework of business support that will replace EU funding (RT5). European Union funding tended to be stable because change needed to be agreed between all member states. This consistency led to certainty for business. Because those frameworks are now controlled by the UK government, or devolved, they tend to change with the parliamentary cycle. New governments look to sell new support packages to the electorate, promising something better. Brexit may lead to greater flux in how rural areas are supported, generating the same uncertainties that we have seen in the planning system over recent decades.

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Appendix 1: Roundtable Presentation links

Roundtable	Presentation link
Community-led / Neighbourhood planning	https://express.adobe.com/page/gJV0FA4BQ0Fan/
Rural Housing and Community Change	https://express.adobe.com/page/OZmUGppSpunyo/
Ecosystem services, Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions	https://express.adobe.com/page/icMM6LMhsy54A/
Agricultural Transitions	https://express.adobe.com/page/dwWLAmxZsd5MK/
Tourism and the Rural Economy	https://express.adobe.com/page/DhzYBZJrgGcej/
Transport, Connectivity and Energy	https://express.adobe.com/page/fNKchXO9q6HgL/

Appendix 2: Thematic roundtable attendance, including nations and regions

Theme / region / nation	Date	Attendees*
Community-led / Neighbourhood Planning	Wednesday, 2nd February	14
Rural Housing and Community Change	Friday, 4th February	16
Ecosystem services, Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions	Wednesday, 9th February	9
Agricultural Transitions	Friday, 11th February	13
Tourism and the Rural Economy	Wednesday, 16th February	11
Transport, Connectivity and Energy	Thursday, 17th February	12
England - SE Region	Thursday, 17th February	8
Ireland	Wednesday, 2nd March	15
Northern Ireland	Wednesday, 2nd March	6
Wales	Thursday, 3rd March	12
England - NE and NW Regions	Thursday, 3rd March	7
Scotland	Friday. 4th March	5
TOTAL		128

*Figures exclude representatives from the project team or the RTPI

Appendix 3: Thematic roundtable attendance summary, by nation

Country	Community-led / Neighbourhood Planning	Rural Housing and Community Change	Ecosystem services, Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions	Agricultural Transitions	Tourism and the Rural Economy	Transport, Connectivity and Energy	Total no. attendees*
England	11	10	3	8	5	4	41
Ireland	2	1	1	1	1	0	6
Northern Ireland	0	0	1	0	1	1	3
Scotland	0	2	1	0	0	3	6
Wales	1	0	2	2	2	3	10
UK-wide	0	0	1	2	0	1	4
Did not respond	0	3	0	0	2	0	5
TOTAL	14	16	9	13	11	12	75

*Figures exclude representatives from the project team or the RTPI

Appendix 4 - Evaluation of roundtables (mean feedback scores)

Theme	Community-led / Neighbourhood Planning	Rural Housing and Community Change	Ecosystem services, Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions	Agricultural Transitions	Tourism and the Rural Economy	Transport, Connectivity and Energy	England - SE Region	England - NE and NW Regions	Ireland	Northern Ireland	Wales	Scotland	Average
Enhancing your knowledge on the topic	6.3	7.1	7.4	6.5	8.3	7.1	7.5	8.7	7	8.7	7.7	7	7.4
The extent to which you could contribute your expertise	6.8	7.3	6.8	7.6	9.1	7.9	9.5	9.3	7.6	9	8.4	9.8	8.3
The range and depth of topics covered	6.1	7.1	6.4	7.4	8.4	7.7	9	9.7	7.3	9	8	8.3	7.9
Organisation and logistics	7.9	8.7	8.2	8.3	9	8.8	9.3	10	8.1	9.3	9	9.8	8.9
Average	6.8	7.6	7.2	7.5	8.7	7.9	8.8	9.4	7.5	9.0	8.3	8.7	8.1