

# The new Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement

## Serving the needs of rural West Sussex?

### Introduction

This briefing is intended to help those involved in developing the new Local Area Agreements in Sussex to identify specific rural objectives for incorporation within them. It highlights the areas of support to rural communities that have up to now been covered by 'rural specific' government funding programmes and sets these alongside the LAA themes into which government now sees all activity being 'mainstreamed'.

### The table

The table at the centre of the briefing relates the current LAAs to both the new indicator sets and the needs of rural communities. It should be read across from the left hand side starting with the current LAA blocks as they have been implemented in West Sussex. The new sets of LAA indicators have then been grouped next to these. The new LAA, and the new Sustainable Community Strategy, will have an initial narrative, or 'story of place', so some key issues for rural communities have been included next. Many of these issues are currently being tackled by 'rural specific' programmes funded usually by DEFRA. These are, in the main, being wound up in anticipation of their objectives being met by mainstream service delivery. The details are set out here and a green, amber, red coding used to highlight the status from 2008 of these programmes. Finally, the last column of the tables indicate AirS proposals for building on the rural specific programmes of the last few years in order to bring them into mainstream provision.

### Taking rural issues into account

We are very grateful for permission from the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) to reproduce a shortened version of their guidance on Local Area Agreements. The CRC is the government's principle advisor on rural issues. It has been working with Communities and Local Government and DEFRA to ensure that as the new national indicator set is developed for use in the new Local Area Agreements the needs of rural areas are taken into account.

The new West Sussex Sustainable Communities Strategy and new LAA are being drawn up over the next few months by West Sussex County Council working with its partners. Action in rural Sussex is working with the Rural Partnership and wider Rural Forum to ensure rural communities are fully taken into account as it is developed.

### AirS programmes

On the back of the briefing there is a brief summary of data on specific needs in rural communities and some examples of the programmes AirS currently runs in relation to the key areas covered by the new LAAs.

### Contact

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**Further copies of this briefing can be obtained from Action in rural Sussex:**

**Tel: 01273 473422**

# Rural areas and Local Area Agreements (LAAs)

**This article is produced with the permission of the Commission for Rural Communities. It has been drawn up primarily to inform those involved in developing Sustainable Community Strategies and the new Local Area Agreements.**

- 1 LAAs are the primary agreements between central and local government (and partners) on local delivery of both national and local priorities. They have the ambition of guiding the totality of local public expenditure towards the aims of both central and local government.
- 2 The Government has made it clear that one of its guiding principles for service delivery is that "no-one should be disadvantaged by where they live". The Government also wants to see greater participation, engagement and control of services within local neighbourhoods.
- 3 The Commission for Rural Communities has prepared these commentary notes to help all those involved in preparing, negotiating, influencing, delivering and monitoring LAAs, to consider the implications for rural places, their communities and economies .
- 4 LAAs are all about improving social, economic and environmental conditions at the local level. Yet LAAs are based on county, unitary and metropolitan local authority boundaries. These are administrative boundaries that do not necessarily reflect people's daily lives, based on their neighbourhoods and localities and daily travel patterns. So, within these authority areas there are many different places. Those negotiating and delivering LAAs need to beware any assumptions of homogeneity. They need to consider carefully the different needs of neighbourhoods and other communities within their area. They need to ensure that targets reflect differing geographical needs within the LAA area, where necessary.
- 5 This emphasis on the differences between and within areas leads, amongst other things, to a need to 'think rural' and to 'rural proof' plans, targets and actions. Thinking rural in relation to LAAs, and the priorities and improvement targets they contain, means considering the case for:
  - equitable delivery between urban and rural areas;
  - closing any gaps between rural and urban areas;
  - meeting specific rural priorities.
- 6 This may then lead to:
  - Area-wide targets, but with rural proofing to ensure equitable delivery and involving monitoring impacts, using the ONS urban/rural definition. This may be the most common approach to rural proofing, one of 'mainstreaming' rural into an authority's various delivery plans;
  - Dedicated rural issue targets, where there is a distinct rural issue across an authority;
  - Dedicated rural area targets, where there is a distinct rural area within the authority that has a particular need for improvement.
- 7 But neither the CRC, Defra nor any other national organisation can tell regional and local bodies exactly what should be in a LAA to show that it successfully addresses those rural agendas and issues that need to be addressed. This is only a process that can be achieved by those working on the LAAs at regional and local levels.
- 8 This will include rural local authorities, rural councillors at all levels, parish and town councils, Rural Community Councils, and a wide range of other rural organisations.

- 9 However, we can advise on some of the issues and questions that may need to be addressed to help make this Rural Proofing happen. We want all interested parties to:
- Encourage the asking of the right type of rural proofing questions (see **Appendix A**);
  - Support the collection and dissemination of practice and good practice ;
  - Promote the role and value and support for the urban rural definition, particularly in deploying the indicator set for the Performance Framework for Local Authorities (see **Appendix B**);
  - Monitor the LAA process and its sensitivity to rural circumstances. Again, this will require extensive use of the urban rural definition.
- 10 It is also of note that Defra, as the 'rural' department of state, has a Departmental Strategic Objective to support 'strong rural communities'. How Defra decide to define and measure this ought to be of importance and use to those involved in Rural Proofing LAAs.
- 11 Those interested in the Rural Proofing of LAAs need to engage effectively in the LAA process. This means being involved in early discussions and consultations. It means having a clear view, supported by evidence, about the local priorities and needs of rural people and places. This might be based on statistics but it might also be based on data from parish plans and market town plans. It means engaging with some of the technical issues around the indicators and targets. It means asking questions.
- 12 Finally, we note and support the strong principles of local democracy embedded within the process. Circumstances, needs and priorities, and their delivery, are different between different areas. This reality will rightly continue to be reflected in different LAAs for different localities.
- 13 The CRC is interested in any feedback to this paper.  
Feedback can be sent to: Crispin Moor  
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**CRC, October 2007**

***Two technical appendices to this article are included on pages 6 and 7***

**Feeling safer...**

Fear of crime, especially amongst older people, despite relatively low crime rates  
Polarisation between older and young people especially in relation to antisocial behaviour  
Fear of speeding traffic that affects older people and young families

**Safer Communities (SaC)**

? Small number of inter-generational initiatives in specific areas.

A programme designed to provide re-assurance and support as well as intergenerational links could help both to meet 'Safer community' objective and other LAA priorities.

SaC: 17, 21, 22, 23, 27, 37, 49  
StC 14

**Better skills and a better future...**

Restricted access to after school activities for those reliant on school transport.  
Sustainability of rural childcare and extended services at risk  
Restricted access to out of school social and youth provision and support away from main centres  
Difficult access to post-16 education in a number of rural areas in the county

**Children and Young People (CYP)**

! DFES' Local Network Fund has contributed over £1.5m over the last three years to locally generated initiatives and has been very effective in rural communities. Fund has now closed.  
! The DEFRA Rural Social and Community (RSCP) has supported initiatives to promote healthy eating and local produce. This programme ends in March '08.

Outreach and mobile provision to deliver advice and support on health and lifestyle choices and provide a focus for developing voluntary, village level, CYP services and facilities. Would also meet Safer Communities objectives.  
Specific preventative family support services aimed at isolated rural families and designed to catch issues early before higher tier/specialist intervention becomes necessary.  
Grants programme coupled with developmental support for small and evolving rural CYPF groups meeting local needs

SC: 38, 39, 41  
CYP: 50, 51, 110, 115

**Better health**

Rising age profile of rural communities  
Declining access to local services required by older and vulnerable people  
Decline in local GP branch surgeries  
Increasing fragility of community based services and facilities

**Adult health and wellbeing (AHW)**

! The DEFRA Rural Social and Community (RSCP) Programme has provided extra help for village community buildings and helped them to widen the range of services provided. Programme ends in March '08.

Integrated programme to increase health promotion action in villages, support informal care services and develop local facilities to provide local services.

AHW: 119, 124, 127, 130, 131, 138, 139  
TEPE: 140, 131, 142, StC 14  
Close links to SaC NIs

**Sustainable Communities**

Potential development of strong governance through Parish Councils and local action groups  
Community lead action planning has potential to contribute to solutions on other issues linking with District LSPs and Sustainable Community Strategies at both levels  
'Volunteering' in the form of widespread informal community activity

**Stronger Communities (STC)**

! The DEFRA Rural Social and Community Programme has provided the means to support more Local Councils to become Quality Councils and increased the number of Village Action Plans. The programme ends in March '08.  
! Current LAA's stretch target on Quality Councils runs to April 2009 action to achieve it will be curtailed due to loss of RSCP in the final year.

Long term programme to bring together County, District and Local Councils to continue to support the implementation of Community lead planning and encourage Local Councils to raise professional standards.  
Long term support, training and development for rural communities to make the most of community owned assets in order to meet all other objectives.

StC: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 14  
LE: 154, 155, 156, 175,

Access to services confined to those with ease of access to private transport  
Relatively limited access to services designed for the most vulnerable people  
Communities are becoming more homogeneous and risk becoming both less tolerant and lacking capacity to tackle change

**Tackling Exclusion and Promoting Equality (TEPE)**

! The Countryside Agency remit to support local transport and access initiatives have been wound up and its responsibility for rural access to services passed to SEEDA. A number of local transport initiatives have come to an end as a result.  
✓ A new Rural Access to Services Programme is scheduled to start in '08 but is limited in scale and its scope is linked to the Regional Economic Strategy.

Integrated programme to develop local facilities to provide local services developed in close co-operation with developments for vulnerable people.  
Development of transport services for rural communities through improved partnership arrangements with community and private providers and integration with the public sector

AHW: 119, 124, 127, 130, 131, 138, 139  
TEPE: 140, 131, 142, StC 14  
LE: 177, 178

Chronic gap between local wages and lower quartile housing costs  
Numbers of people with long term limiting illness and on incapacity benefit  
Declining public transport provision  
Declining access to essential small and home based business infrastructure – eg Post Offices

**Local Economy (LE)**

! The DEFRA Rural Social and Community Programme has supported pre-development assistance to villages in order to quantify local housing needs and help identify sites. The programme ends in March '08.  
✓ SEEDA's Small Rural Town Programme has provided support to a limited number of towns and is currently subject to a mid term evaluation.  
? LEADER programme funding has not been available in West Sussex to date but this may change in '09 bringing resources for locally lead, primarily economic land based initiatives. May change in 2008.

Long term independent advice, support and brokerage for rural communities to ensure provision of local affordable housing schemes.  
Support service for community-led planning to incorporate support for market towns as economically interdependent with their surrounding areas.  
Business Link support to rural business better integrated with other support provided from the public sector  
Support service for social enterprise implemented as a specific sector to meet market failure in rural areas.

LE: 154, 155, 156, 159, 170, 172,

Fuel poverty linked both to poor access to mains gas and older housing stock  
Opportunities to reduce waste and CO2 emissions through local initiatives  
Very high landscape value brings both opportunity for the economy but also significant planning constraint to enable the local population's needs to be met

**Environmental Sustainability (ES)**

\* For information on National Indicators, go to: [www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performance/frameworkpartnerships](http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performance/frameworkpartnerships)

! The DEFRA Rural Social and Community Programme has increased the number of Village Action Plans many of which are actively pursuing sustainable development objectives. The programme ends in March '08.  
✓ Countryside Agency and English Nature programmes have been transferred to Natural England.

Long term programme to bring together County, District and Local Councils to continue to support implementation of Community led planning incorporating local initiatives to bring about behavioural change.  
Long term support, training and development for rural communities to maximise community owned assets to meet all objectives and minimise unnecessary travel.

ES: 186, 187, 188, 191, 192, 197

## Appendix A

### LAAs – rural proofing questions for local and regional rural stakeholders to ask

To what extent is your LSP capable of addressing rural issues, either through the research and support available to it and/or through its membership?

Research by the (then) Countryside Agency, indicated that LSPs faced some particular challenges in ensuring a representative voice for rural voluntary and community sector bodies, for the parish and town council sector and for the rural private sector.

In two tier areas part of the local improvement agenda must be to integrate district level Sustainable Community Strategies and LSPs into the county level LAA. District level LSPs will also be an important delivery and monitoring mechanism for the LAA.. Is this happening in your LAA?

Across rural England there will continue to be a need to ensure that very local community level plans, such as parish plans and market town plans, are used to inform and influence LAAs. Is this happening in your LAA? The action groups and partnerships, and the parish and town councils that implement such community level plans, may also be a useful vehicle for delivering and/or monitoring aspects of the LAA.

To what extent are your local authorities consulting with, and being responsive to, the expressed views of rural people and groups (when they consult on their Sustainable Community Strategy targets and in preparing material for discussion of new LAAs with Government Offices)?

Is there a case for the preamble to signed LAA agreements to make reference to the consideration and reflection of cross cutting themes, including Rural, within the LAA (as appropriate) and as reflecting the content of Sustainable Community Strategies?

CLG's 'Developing the future arrangements for LAAs' report (February 2007) refers to the ability to establish neighbourhood level targets that can be used in the development of new LAA targets (paragraph 18). How will these work to ensure that proposed improvements for both urban and rural neighbourhoods are identified, delivered, reviewed and measured?

Researchers have reflected on the experience of Local Public Service Agreements and concluded that despite rural issues being high profile during the period 2000/2003, "in the low profile and arcane world of LPSAs agenda setting was heavily influenced by the technical criteria negotiated between central and local government officials". If this criticism has validity, how will the LAA negotiators avoid this danger this time around? How will you help to ensure that they avoid it?

How are you intending to use the urban rural definition to support the LAA process and the measurement of its delivery achievements?

Will local authority scrutiny processes help improve the effectiveness of LAAs? How will such scrutiny work? Will there be any specific guidance to help scrutiny work well? Can cross cutting issues such as Rural be integrated into such guidance?

## Appendix B

### Commentary on the national indicator set for the performance framework for local authorities

There are 198 national indicators. Each indicator is cross referenced to relevant national PSA targets and Departmental Strategic Objectives (DSOs). However, Defra's rural DSO for 'strong rural communities' is not referenced. This is because, along with other cross cutting types of DSOs, it is potentially relevant to many if not most of the national indicators. Defra are keen to see the rural dimension being reflected, where appropriate, through the use of the urban rural definition.

A critical question for those working with these indicators will be, for each indicator, at what geographical levels are they analysable. Can they be analysed at the national level, at the local authority level and at the neighbourhood level (using the urban / rural definition) down to the smallest spatial scale available? We will be working with Defra and the DCLG to encourage the use of the urban/rural definition, and the use of neighbourhood level data, wherever this makes sense.

It is likely that the DCLG will be undertaking further consultations on some of the technical matters involved in using the national indicator set.

The national indicators are divided into the following categories.

#### ● **Stronger communities – 14 indicators**

There will be demands from stakeholders for many of the indicators in this category to be analysable at the neighbourhood level.

Those representing and serving rural communities may be particularly keen to see LAAs rural proofing the use of these indicators as the basis for improvement targets.

This would mean that the design, management and monitoring of improvement targets would be at neighbourhood level as much as at authority level.

#### ● **Safer communities – 34 indicators**

Same comments as above

#### ● **Children and Young People – 68 indicators**

Many of these indicators will be based on data collected at the level of the school.

Those representing and serving rural communities may be interested in the geography of school location (e.g. to compare improvement in rural schools as compared to urban schools).

They may also be interested in the home address of pupils (e.g. to compare improvement rates between rural and urban pupils).

#### ● **Adult health and wellbeing – 20 indicators**

Again, there may well be demands for many of the indicators in this category to be analysable at the neighbourhood level.

Those representing and serving rural communities may be particularly keen to see LAAs rural proofing the use of these indicators as the basis for improvement targets.

#### ● **Tackling exclusion and promoting equality – 10 indicators**

There will be demands from stakeholders for some of the indicators in this category to be analysable at the neighbourhood level.

#### ● **Local economy – 33 indicators**

This category includes a number of housing related indicators.

There may be demands for many of the indicators in this category to be analysable at the neighbourhood level and at other geographical levels.

Those representing and serving rural communities may be particularly keen to see LAAs rural proofing the use of these indicators as the basis for improvement targets.

#### ● **Environmental sustainability – 13 indicators**

Again, there may be demands for some of these indicators to be analysable at the neighbourhood level and at other geographical levels.

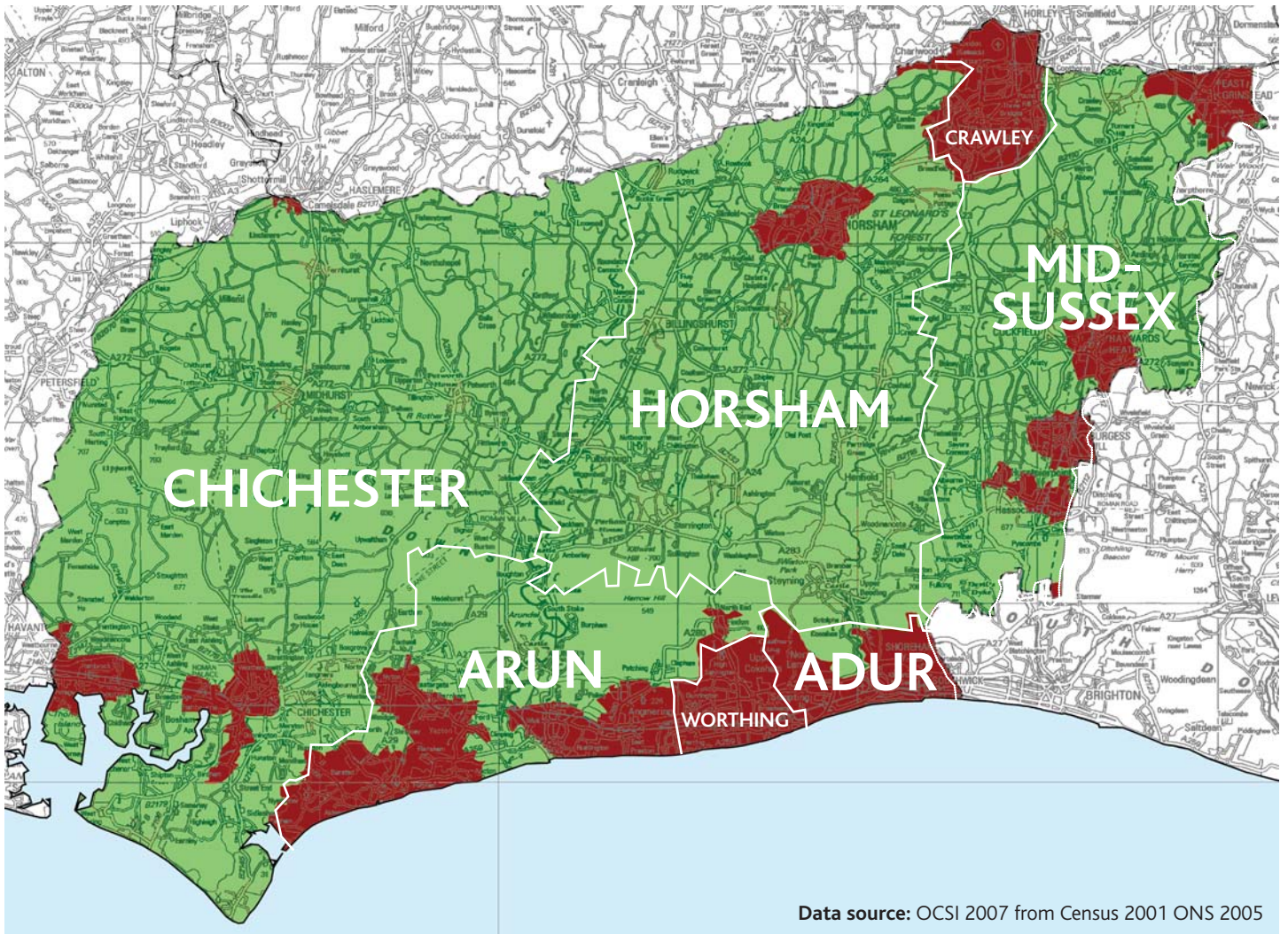
Rural interests may be keen to see LAAs rural proofing the use of some of these indicators as the basis for improvement targets.

The National Indicator set is available at [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/local-government/nationalindicator](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/local-government/nationalindicator)

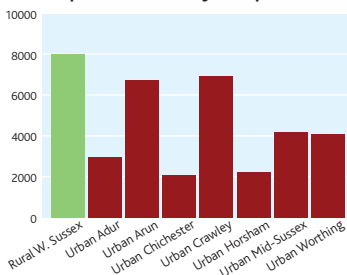
In addition the government is also consulting on the precise definitions of these indicators and the level of detail at which these indicators will be set and monitored.

This is available at:

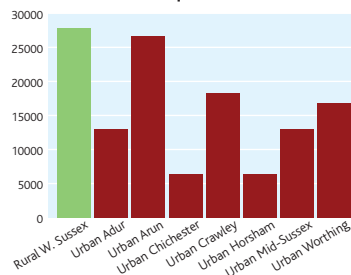
[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/local-government/indicatorsdefinitions](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/local-government/indicatorsdefinitions)



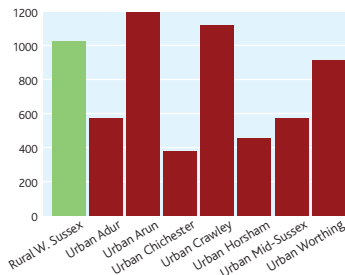
People in elementary occupations



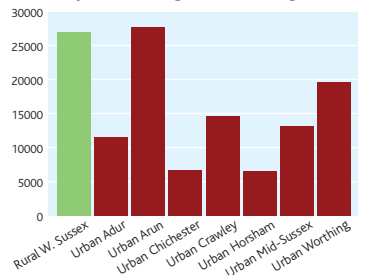
Adults with no qualifications



Jobseekers allowance



People with long-term limiting illness



The graphs and map above give a flavour of some of the many measures of need that are used to identify priority use of resources. These are seldom looked at in terms of the real number of people affected and as a result the needs of rural communities are often overlooked. In future when resource decisions are made over the delivery of mainstream programmes, rural people must not come a poor second. Instead real thought needs to be given to finding intelligent ways of reaching them in both efficient and effective ways.

Action in rural Sussex has been in the business of supporting rural communities since the 1930s. In recent years a great deal of experience has been developed in finding solutions to the issues that affect rural communities and, most importantly, finding those solutions alongside rural communities themselves.

Action in rural Sussex is a registered charity, number 1035401

**Our expertise is particularly strong in the areas of:**

- Managing community assets
- Outreach support to rural children, young people and their families
- Village and neighbourhood level, community-led action planning
- Supporting village level activity through tailored grants schemes
- Supporting communities through development of affordable housing schemes
- Inspiring local behavioural change to meet climate change objectives.

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