Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Guide to Rural Proofing

National guidelines

July 2013

Contents

Foreword

I am pleased to present Defra's new rural proofing guidelines, which are designed to help government departments rural proof their policies and programmes.

Rural areas are home to one-fifth of England's population (nearly 10 million people) and make up 86% of the land mass, and with more than 505,000 businesses, or 28% of England's total, they are great places to do business as well as live.

Rural England is made up of thousands of different communities located in widely varying parts of the country, from Cornish coastal villages to remote Cumbrian farming hamlets; and from prosperous market towns to disadvantaged post industrial communities.

Rural areas are doing as well if not better than the national average. However, poverty and deprivation exist in rural communities and there are crucial economic, geographic, and demographic factors that can significantly impact on people's lives; for example distance to services, population sparsity, ageing, social isolation and market structure. Meeting these needs and circumstance affordably and fairly is of fundamental importance to the government.

Defra, of course, has an important role to play in championing rural issues across government. But it is the responsibility of all departments to rural proof their policies and programmes. These guidelines are designed to assist national policy makers with their decision taking and to address the needs and interests of rural communities and businesses in England.

This new package is designed to present clear principles of rural proofing in a straightforward manner, and emphasises practical examples of good practice. It is supported by Defra's Rural Communities Policy Unit (RCPU), the government's centre of rural expertise.

Rural proofing is not a one-size fits all – nor should it be. This guidance is designed to underpin the creativity and expertise of policy makers across government to fully assess the evidence available to them and to make positive adjustments that take into account the needs of rural communities and businesses. I recommend this guidance to all departments and anyone interested in making a difference to rural communities.

Richard Benyon
Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Natural Environment, Water and Rural Affairs

Introducing rural proofing

Why rural proof?

- ❑ Because this government wants to be sure rural areas get a fair deal from all government policy (*Rural Statement 2012*) ;

- ❑ because HM Treasury's **Green Book** explicitly refers to rural proofing;

- ❑ because rural proofing is required when departments prepare policy **Impact Assessments**;

- ❑ and this year departments' rural proofing practice is being scrutinised by the Efra Select Committee. Lord Ewen Cameron will also report to government in 2014, on how well we do.

What is rural proofing?

- ❑ For central government, rural proofing means assessing policy options to be sure we get the fairest solutions in rural areas.

- ❑ It should be applied at all stages of policy development:
    - o assessing the evidence of rural need and circumstance at the start of designing a policy;
    - o considering the options for fair impacts on the ground in rural areas; and,
    - o where appropriate, adjusting policies or delivery**.**

Rural proofing is...

- ❑ simple
- ❑ necessary even when a policy is intended to apply equally everywhere
- ❑ about equity, not equality

Rural proofing isn't...

- ❑ optional
- ❑ complicated
- ❑ about special pleading for rural communities
- ❑ a significant burden

What does rural England look like?

Rural areas are broadly defined as settlements with populations of fewer than 10,000 people.
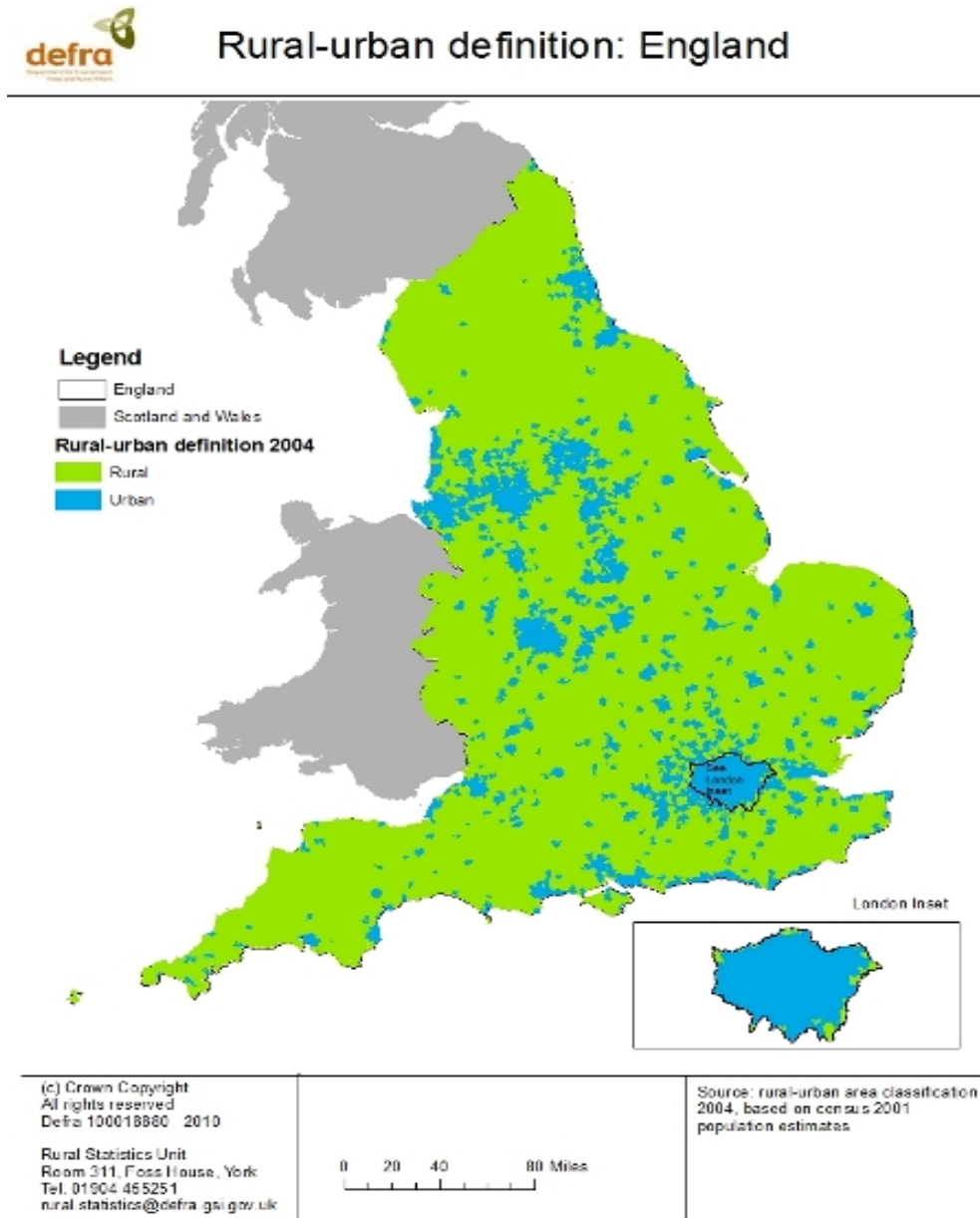
They make up 86% of England's land, and are home to one-fifth of the English population (nearly 10 million people).

There is an official rural definition available on Defra website.

Rural areas are not all the same

Rural England is made up of different types of place:

Open countryside with a scattering of small towns and villages, like Norfolk or Kent;

Sparsely populated upland areas; such as the Yorkshire Dales or Lake District;

Coastal communities in places like Cornwall or Northumberland, dependent on fishing or tourism;

Deprived former mining areas in places like Derbyshire or Durham;

Commuter villages on the periphery of large towns & cities

Rural economy: some key facts

The rural economy:

Is as diverse as the urban one and is worth £211bn p.a. (19% of national GVA) in 2010 in Predominantly Rural areas.

Key sectors:

❑ Tourism is a significant sector in English rural areas making up 13% of employment in 2011/12.

❑ Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) comprised 68% of employees in rural areas in 2011/12, compared with 37% in urban areas.

❑ Agriculture contributes only 2% to the rural economy, (2010) although underpins the more significant agri-food sector (GVA 13%). Farmers manage 75% of England's landscape.

Barriers to rural growth

❑ Lack of access to markets due to distance and costs.

❑ The average broadband speeds in rural areas are considerably lower than speeds in urban areas (4.4. Mbit/s in sparse rural hamlet and isolated dwellings compared with 14.8 Mbit/s in less sparse urban areas in 2012).

❑ Mobile phone services can be highly variable, with frequent "not spots".

❑ Lack of access to business skills development and training opportunities.

❑ Lack of access to hubs of relevant innovation (e.g. R&D) due to distance and poor connectivity.

❑ Lack of access to finance, similar to urban businesses.

Challenges for service delivery

- ❑ Public transport is more limited, with fewer regular bus services in the most rural areas.

- ❑ In 2011 20.5% of rural households had to travel 4km or more to access their nearest GP surgery compared with 0% of urban households.

- ❑ There are proportionally more older people living in rural areas – in 2011 50% of the population in Rural-80 areas were aged 45 and above, compared with 36% in major urban areas.

- ❑ Other services like waste collection are also more expensive to deliver.

- ❑ However, some are cheaper e.g. policing, as crime rates are lower.

Quality of life challenges

- ❑ Rural households can face fuel poverty owing to not only their levels of income, but more costly fuels, and the energy efficiency of their homes.

- ❑ In 2010/11, 16% of households in rural areas were below the poverty threshold after housing costs, compared with 23% in urban areas. Rural areas tend to have smaller pockets of deprivation which are harder to identify.

- ❑ Household incomes can be lower due to part time or seasonal working, leading to pockets of deprivation. The Job Centre can be many miles away, and lack of public transport makes it difficult for the un-employed to access new jobs.

- ❑ House prices tend to be higher in rural areas. The average rural sale price is £254,000, compared with £241,000, in urban (Q1 2013).
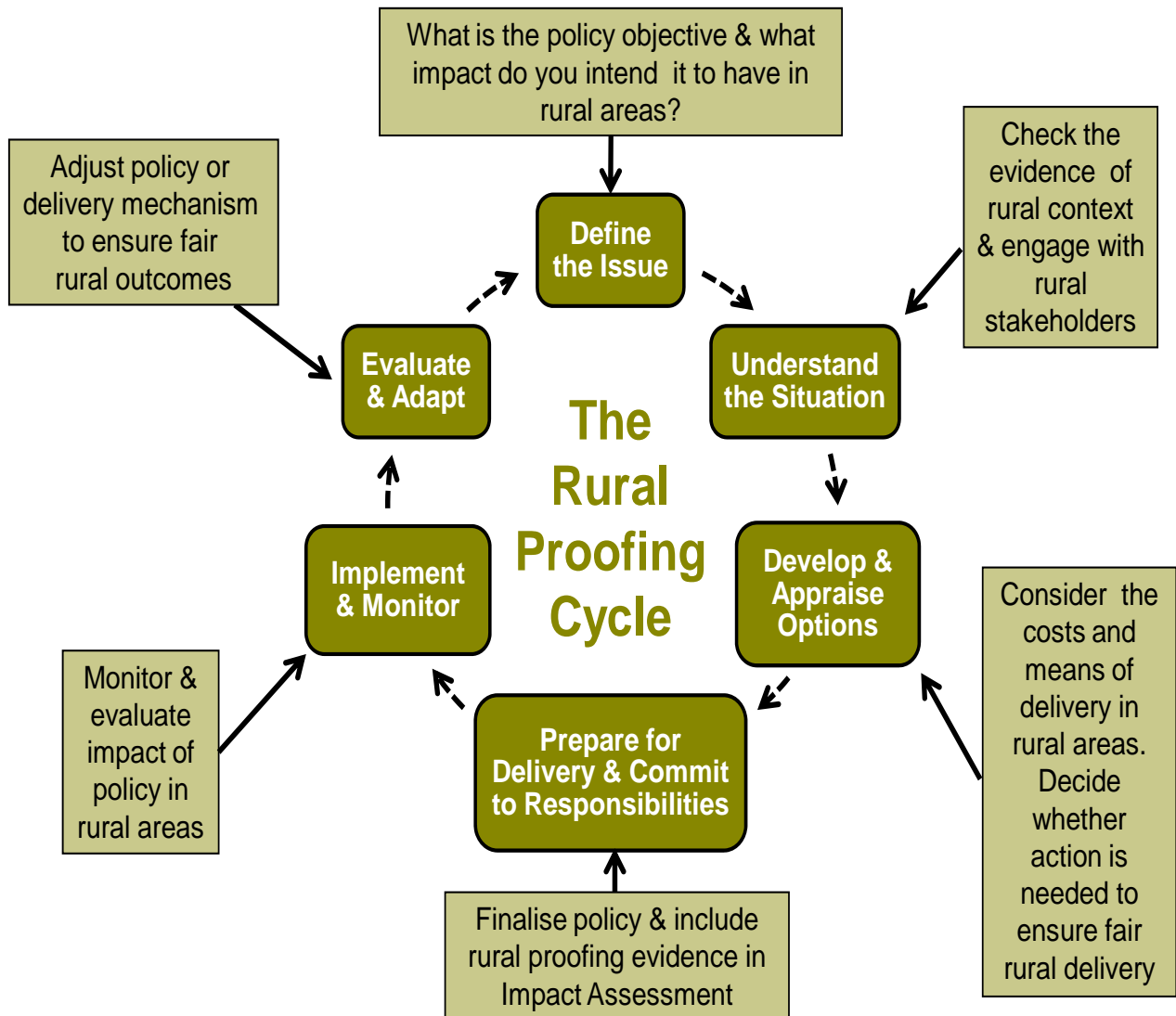
Why is rural proofing important?

Virtually all policies impact upon rural communities. Rural proofing helps achieve good economic, environmental and social solutions, to contribute to growth.

Avoiding unintended consequences

- A policy giving local communities the right to decide their own spending priorities can be discriminatory, if the preferences of the urban majority overrule the rural minority. Smaller communities' views need to be heard.

- Efficiency and cost reduction measures like closing distant outstations may badly affect rural communities. Poorer rural citizens may not be able to access online alternatives, and outreach or other means of delivery may be needed.

- A policy for tackling deprivation using the standard Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) will miss poorer people in rural areas, as rural deprivation is scattered. Alternative methods of identifying deprivation may be needed, or the IMD data could be supplemented with rurally-focused data.

- Policies for reducing household carbon emissions need to account for off gas grid households. Targeted support to mitigate rural impacts may be needed.

- A policy to encourage more people to participate in sport, by promising new sports facilities in *every* community can fail when the full cost of providing these facilities in the widely dispersed rural communities is understood.

How to rural proof policy?

Rural proofing policy cycle

What is the policy objective & what impact do you intend it to have in rural areas?

Check the evidence of rural context & engage with rural stakeholders

Adjust policy or delivery mechanism to ensure fair rural outcomes

Define the Issue

The Rural Proofing Cycle

Evaluate & Adapt

Understand the Situation

Implement & Monitor

Develop & Appraise Options

Consider the costs and means of delivery in rural areas. Decide whether action is needed to ensure fair rural delivery

Monitor & evaluate impact of policy in rural areas

Prepare for Delivery & Commit to Responsibilities

Finalise policy & include rural proofing evidence in Impact Assessment

Rural proofing before and during policy development

1. Rural proofing before and during policy development	
1. Define the issue	❑ What is the policy objective in terms of problem to be solved or outcome to be achieved? ❑ What impact do you intend it to have in rural areas? ❑ What constitutes fair rural outcomes in this case?
2. Understand the situation	❑ What is the current situation in rural areas? ❑ Do you have the necessary evidence about the position in rural areas? ❑ Do you have access to the views of rural stakeholders about the likely impact of the policy?
3. Develop and appraise options	❑ Is action needed to ensure fair rural outcomes? ❑ Will it cost more to deliver the policy in rural areas? ❑ Do the necessary delivery mechanisms exist in rural areas? ❑ What steps can be taken to achieve fair rural outcomes?

Sources of evidence: The Statistical Digest of Rural England provides a wide range of useful statistical data on the issues affecting rural England, with the Rural/Urban Definition (England and Wales) and Local authority rural - urban classification to help examine the differences and similarities of rural and urban areas.

Rural proofing during and after implementation

2. Rural proofing during and after implementation	
1. Prepare for delivery	❑ What action has been taken to ensure fair rural outcomes? ❑ Have these actions been recorded? ❑ Have they been adequately reflected in the Impact Assessment?
2. Implement and monitor	❑ What action has been taken to monitor rural outcomes? ❑ What mechanisms exist for taking further action if problems arise?
3. Evaluate and adjust where required	❑ Have rural impacts been included in the evaluation process? ❑ How will lessons learned in relation to rural outcomes be used to inform future policy making and delivery?

Sources of evidence: The Statistical Digest of Rural England provides a wide range of useful statistical data on the issues affecting rural England, with the Rural/Urban Definition (England and Wales) and Local authority rural - urban classification to help examine the differences and similarities of rural and urban areas.

Rural proofing actions

Possible actions to take

- ❑ Allow local delivery bodies flexibility to find the best local solution(s); avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

- ❑ Use the rural networks and meeting points that do exist, for example post offices, village halls, parish notice boards.

- ❑ Ensure the needs of smaller businesses are specifically addressed.

- ❑ Use small area based data to identify social, economic and environmental differences that need to be accounted for in the policy.

- ❑ Engage with rural stakeholders and their networks so you can gather evidence and test your proposals.

You can raise any questions about rural proofing with Defra's Rural Communities Policy Unit by contacting: ***rural.communities@defra.gsi.gov.uk***

Some successful case studies

Case study: ECO

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) has worked with Defra's Rural Communities Policy Unit throughout the development of the Green Deal. Early examples of successful rural proofing in the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) included a recognition of the carbon saving potential of insulating solid walled houses, which are widely represented in rural areas.

In addition, the area-based element of the ECO was developed by DECC to focus resources on poorer communities, with the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) to be used to identify the communities. However, the IMD operates at a fairly high level and tends to miss the smaller, but no less deprived, pockets of poverty existing in rural areas. Recognising that poorer rural communities would miss out, DECC developed a new condition, requiring suppliers to deliver the £28.5m available (15% of the area based element) to households in rural areas.

Case study: Community learning

In assessing how its annual £210m Community Learning budget should be spent, the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) recognised that rural as well as urban learners benefited from this budget, and they wanted to ensure that the needs and interests of rural learners were appropriately addressed.

BIS identified an evidence gap and commissioned, with Defra, a research project to assess the state of Community Learning in rural areas. This provided a wealth of information on the status of community learning in rural communities and highlighted a number of good practice examples.

As a result, BIS has committed to disseminating the lessons learned from the Community Learning Trust pilots in rural areas, so that the needs of rural learners could be reflected in the wider roll out of the initiative.

What support is available?

Defra's Rural Communities Policy Unit (RCPU)

The unit has been established as the centre of rural expertise within government, and is able to advise policy-makers within Whitehall departments on the likelihood and possible scale of rural impacts, and to suggest actions that might be taken to mitigate these.

The Rural Communities Policy Unit offers up-to-date information on rural areas and key rural stakeholders. It offers links to other support and information and you can raise any questions about rural proofing with your regular RCPU policy contacts. Alternatively, you can contact **rural.communities@defra.gsi.gov.uk** .

Local level rural proofing

A separate research report has been produced on the good practice principles underpinning **Local Level Rural Proofing Work** . This provides useful insights into the issues affecting the local delivery of policy.

The Office of Fair Trading report on **Price and Choice in Remote Communities** (June 2012) also offers a valuable insight in the issues affecting the most remote rural communities.

Statistical support

❑ For help with rural evidence and statistics, the RCPU's economists, statisticians and research experts are available to help.

❑ The **Statistical Digest of Rural England** provides a wide range of useful statistical data on the issues affecting rural England.

❑ The **Rural/Urban Definition (England and Wales)** and **Local authority rural - urban classification** available to help examine the differences and similarities of rural and urban areas.

❑ **Neighbourhood statistics** enable you to explore a range of social, economic and geographical indicators in different localities.

❑ **NOMIS**- is a service provided by the Office for National Statistics to give you free access to the most detailed and up-to-date UK labour market statistics from official sources.

❑ More small scale, spatial data is available from other government departments and web-sites. Some of the following links below may be useful: **The Department for Transport; The Department for Communities and Local Government; The Department for Work and Pensions; Department of Health**