

Rural Community Sustainability

Final Report

31st March 2008 (Revised June 2008)



SQWconsulting 

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Approved by:	Chris Green Chief Executive Officer	Date: 31 st March 2008 (revised June 2008)
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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Study

1. SQW Consulting, Land Use Consultants and the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research were jointly commissioned by Advantage West Midlands (AWM) and West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA) in January 2008 to develop a working definition of rural community sustainability, and to identify policy levers in the eight Theme-based domains of housing; employment provision; IT infrastructure; green infrastructure; critical rural services; economic inclusion; low carbon principles; and rural economy.
2. The work was commissioned to inform the development of policy options in the context of the Phase III Revision to the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS), and programmes and other interventions linked to the new West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES), published in December 2007. The intention was that it should also provide an important foundation for the move towards a Single Integrated Regional Strategy in the West Midlands, in the wider context provided by the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR).

Study approach

3. Owing in part to the timing of the Phase III Revision, the study had to be completed within a compressed timescale – less than 12 weeks in total. Over this period, the focus of the research was on the development of eight Thematic Chapters, each of which – through desk-based reviews and consultations with key stakeholders – sought to respond to specific research questions. These questions were (and are) materially significant with regard to rural community sustainability in the West Midlands and the interventions required to effect it.
4. In parallel, a wider process of stakeholder engagement and consultation was required. This sought to look across the eight Themes and consider their composite implications. Key elements of this wider process included a series of early scoping consultations with key stakeholders; a stakeholder workshop; and close working throughout with a Steering Group which included officers from AWM, WMRA and Shropshire County Council (as the WMRSS Rural Renaissance Policy lead).

Key Findings

5. From the outset, the observation was made that rural community sustainability should be treated as a *process* not a *state*. Moreover it was recognised to be *contested* insofar as interpretations of it vary; hence the settlement-level perspective is different from that of the individual. That said, our view was that the interface between housing, jobs and services was critical. This in turn had to be embedded within the wider context depicted by different outcomes linked to rural community sustainability in the region and listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Outcomes linked to rural community sustainability in the West Midlands

Economic outcomes	Social outcomes	Environmental outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flourishing local economy, providing jobs and wealth • Diverse economic base including high value and high skilled jobs in rural areas • Viable and sustainable primary sector • High rates of locally financed and initiated small enterprises • Inclusive economy providing employment and consumption opportunities to all residents • Access to and use of cutting-edge ICT • Variety and balance of land use between employment, housing and services/infrastructure • Greater local production and supply of products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed communities with a balance of ages, occupations • No extreme inequalities in wealth or opportunities • Local distinctiveness and pride of place • Safe and healthy neighbourhoods • Strong, effective and inclusive governance • Alignment between workplace-based and residence-based earnings • A range of services to meet personal, community and economic needs (including education and training, healthcare, leisure and retail) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient consumption of resources and energy • Attractive and accessible countryside • Reduced need to travel and car dependency • Greater availability of sustainable forms of travel • Space for renewable energy production and sustainable transport • Natural resources and biodiversity protected and enhanced

Source: SQW Consulting

6. From our Thematic research, it was apparent – in the round – that progress in relation to these different outcomes was both mixed and variable. In particular:

- more “accessible” rural areas tended to perform strongly on economic indicators and average levels of deprivation were low. However the performance of these areas in relation to key environmental indicators was notably weaker: per capita carbon emissions were the highest in the region. This was wholly consistent with a further observation – made on the basis of a review of market towns – that local labour markets in the more accessible areas tended to be quite fluid with high levels of both in- and out-commuting
- the rural areas we classed as “remote” generally performed less well on key economic indicators, and average earnings were well below the regional average. Within these areas, the incidence of deprivation tended to be higher. However performance on environmental indicators was better and – at the level of individual market towns – the evidence for relatively high levels of self containment was strong.

7. On the face of it then, the distinction between remote and accessible areas appeared to be useful, for it captured some of the key contrasts in progress towards different aspects of rural community sustainability. However as a basis for policy, we cautioned against taking this argument too far. In part this was because of the complexity of its practical application. But – more fundamentally – it reflected a concern that processes ought to be addressed and that these rarely assumed a straightforwardly spatial form. In this context, the contrast was drawn between the “*economy of places*” (which is characteristically (and, to some extent, traditionally) rural with reasonably self contained local labour markets, a low wage/low skills equilibrium, a continuing land-based sector, and an environmental performance (on CO₂ emissions indicators) which is relatively favourable) and the “*economy of flows*” (which is premised on a strong model of mobility and interdependence). Typically, the balance between the “*economy of places*” and the “*economy of flows*” differed between remote and

accessible areas, but in neither case was it entirely absent. This second “cut” allowed the remote/accessible distinction to be nuanced.

Interventions to effect sustainable rural communities

8. Based on the arguments set out in the Thematic Chapters, it was clear that – in the main – interventions with regard to one Theme area ought to be capable of being advanced in a manner which effected positive outcomes with regard to a second. On the face of it, then, the scope for ‘win-win’ situations appeared to be substantial. However the fact remained that – in practice – outcomes were, if anything, deteriorating.
9. An assessment of why this should be the case required consideration of the rationale for public sector intervention. Three different rationales were identified: *market failure*, concerns about *equity* (of outcome and/or opportunity) and, increasingly, concerns with regard to *environmental impact*. In different circumstances, the rationale for intervention would vary.
10. In terms of the critical relationship between housing, jobs and services, we were drawn back to one key indicator: earnings. For the working age population, earnings effectively defined the relationship between jobs and housing and they also provided a fair insight into the issues surrounding access to services¹. Yet in terms of earnings, the study suggested that there were two different – but equally challenging – concerns:
 - in more accessible rural areas, the principal problem was the differential between residence-based and workplace-based earnings which was approaching 10% (approximately £2,000). It was intimately bound up with issues of housing affordability and was determined by – and determining of – *patterns of commuting to work*
 - in more remote areas, there was also an earnings problem, but it was different. Mean annual workplace-based earnings in remote rural Districts of the West Midlands were 17% (£6,000) lower than the English average. This differential – and everything it signalled in terms of aspiration and opportunity – was bound up with *patterns of migration*; the study found ample evidence of younger adults moving out of remote rural areas as retirees moved in, and this resulted in upward pressures on house prices and increasing affordability concerns.
11. The processes underpinning the earnings data provided a crucial insight in terms of the sustainability of rural communities. They also provided clear and multiple rationales for policy intervention that touched on many of the Themes that provided the focus for the study. For example:
 - *Market failures*: In more accessible areas, highly skilled people are not able to find jobs that use their skills to the full while in more remote areas, rural businesses are less likely to benefit from positive externalities (linked, for example, to specialist business support). Another key market failure was associated with the management

¹ It is also worth noting, however, that individuals and households with higher earnings tend to have the highest carbon footprints

of the landscape; it is a classic “public good”, which everyone wishes to “consume” but few are prepared to pay for

- *Equity issues:* Issues around rural housing affordability – which are acute in the West Midlands – pointed to communities that are increasingly polarised. The underlying issues were earning differentials in more accessible areas and wealth differentials in more remote ones. Additionally, as the demographic structure of remote rural communities shifted rapidly towards older age groups, demand for people to work in health and social care – intrinsically low paid sectors – was growing, exacerbating some of the underlying problems and challenges
 - *Environmental impacts:* Particularly in the more accessible areas, the environmental performance of rural communities (as measured by CO₂ emissions) appeared quite concerning and this was – very largely – a reflection of travel to work patterns and modes. Additionally, whilst homeworking – facilitated by the IT infrastructure – may reduce the need to travel, there was evidence that it could actually increase carbon footprints as large, old and poorly insulated rural dwellings are heated during the working day.
12. The study concluded that if something could be done about the “earnings problems” – absolute levels in more remote areas, and the differentials within more accessible ones – then progress ought to be possible across many aspects of rural community sustainability, recognising still that it is a *process* which exists both at the individual level, and at the scale of the communities/settlements/places as a whole.
13. Within this overall context, the study found that much could be (and, indeed, was being) done at a Theme-based level; this was reported in detail. In addition, it examined the scope of eight more generic levers. The study recognised that some were easier to control and influence than others. At a regional scale, the *degree of influence* declines, in broad terms, from discretionary programme spend (where the degree of autonomy ought to be high) to fiscal and regulatory policy and public opinion (where regional influence is limited). The *degree of impact* in effecting more sustainable rural communities also varied, but (in general) in the opposite direction. However, the study argued that changes needed to be brought to bear across all eight levers in effecting a sustained transition to more sustainable rural communities; additionally, strong rural proofing will be critical throughout.

Implications

14. In the context of these different arguments, the study then considered the implications for the implementation of both the West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy (and programmes linked to it) and policies set out in the Phase II Revision to the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. It also sought to provide advice with regard to the formulation of key policies as part of the Phase III Revision.
15. Finally, consideration was given to how the findings of the study might be used directly to effect more sustainable rural communities. The observation was made that – with further development – the outcomes identified in Table 1 ought to provide a robust basis for regular monitoring at both regional and local scales. Additionally, the case study examples of good

and best practice identified through the Thematic research could be disseminated, particularly in those areas – and/or with regard to those outcomes – in which progress appeared to be difficult. Finally, the point was made that the study findings ought to equip partners to lobby central government more effectively, recognising that many of the levers that might effect a transition to more sustainable rural communities exist outside the ambit of either regional or local partners.

1: Introduction and context

- 1.1 SQW Consulting, Land Use Consultants and the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research were jointly commissioned by Advantage West Midlands (AWM) and West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA) in January 2008 to develop a working definition of rural community sustainability, and to identify policy levers in eight Theme-based domains of housing; employment provision; IT infrastructure; green infrastructure; critical rural services; economic inclusion; low carbon principles; and rural economy.

Purpose of the Study

- 1.2 The work was commissioned to inform the development of policy options in the context of the Phase III revision to the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS), and programmes and other interventions linked to the new West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES), published in December 2007. The intention was that it should also provide an important foundation for the move towards a Single Integrated Regional Strategy in the West Midlands, in the wider context provided by the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR).
- 1.3 Against this overall backdrop, key elements of the Brief for the study are summarised below:

*The purpose of the study is to build on our existing knowledge base to establish a comprehensive and well consulted understanding of the **ways in which regional, sub-regional and local policy and practice can best promote rural community sustainability in the West Midlands**. This will provide a basis for helping to shape more effective rural development programmes and contribute to on-going policy development at all levels, in particular work in implementing the West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES) and the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) Phase Three Revision.*

*The study is essentially a **future proofing exercise**, based on a **synthesis of the data and conclusions set out in a number of recent studies (set out at paragraphs 24 & 25)**. The study is a forward look set within the parameters already established in West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES), the Regional Housing Strategy and West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS). It will bring together a **robust set of conclusions regarding the ingredients of rural community sustainability and the actions which will need to be taken for its longer term achievement and maintenance**.*

(Source: Consultants' Brief; emphasis added)

- 1.4 In addition to researching issues relating to eight key Themes² which were – individually – considered to be critical in relation to the sustainability of rural communities, the study therefore also needed to look holistically across these different domains, and draw out the composite implications, both substantively and in terms of shaping future policy.

² Housing; employment provision; IT infrastructure; green infrastructure; critical rural services; economic inclusion; low carbon principles; and rural economy

Study Method

- 1.5 Owing in part to the timing of the Phase III Revision to RSS, the study had to be completed within a compressed timescale – less than 12 weeks in total. This had to include a process of stakeholder engagement and consultation as well as the technical work demanded by the Brief. Over this period, the focus of the research effort was on the development of eight Thematic Chapters, each of which – through desk-based reviews and consultations with key stakeholders – sought to respond to specific research questions. These questions were (and are) materially significant with regard to the Sustainable Rural Communities in the West Midlands and the interventions required to effect them.
- 1.6 In addition, however, a wider process of stakeholder engagement and consultation was required. This sought to look across the eight Themes and consider their composite implications for rural community sustainability in the West Midlands and the interventions required in response. Key elements of this wider process included:
- a series of early scoping consultations with key stakeholders drawn, *inter alia*, from the West Midlands Regional Assembly, the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum, the Rural Renaissance Working Group, Advantage West Midlands, the West Midlands Regional Observatory, and local authorities within the region
 - a stakeholder workshop, which was held on 7th March 2008 and attended by over 20 partners from across the region. The purpose of this was to consider the findings from the Theme-based research, and to work through the implications – in the round – for rural community sustainability
 - close working throughout with a Steering Group which included officers from AWM, WMRA and Shropshire County Council (as the WMRSS Rural Renaissance Policy lead).

Study Outputs and Structure of this Report

- 1.7 There are two principal outputs from this study:
- a substantive volume of Thematic Chapters, each of which provides analysis and insight into the key dimensions of rural community sustainability from the perspective of the particular Theme. The Thematic Chapters encompass a strong evidence base as well as insights into the Theme-specific implications for policy within the West Midlands
 - a final report (i.e. this document) which attempts to look across the eight Thematic Chapters and summarise the evidence and implications, particularly with regard to the development of policy across the West Midlands in the run-up to the first Single Integrated Regional Strategy (SIRS).
- 1.8 This final report is structured into six further chapters, which are structured as follows:
- *Chapter 2* sets out the analytical framework through which the study has been advanced and it sets out some key definitional issues and working assumptions

- *Chapter 3* attempts to present – in highly summarised form – the key findings from the eight Theme-based analyses, and it does so using the framework set out in Chapter 2
- looking across the Theme-based analyses, *Chapter 4* attempts to synthesise the findings and to understand the current condition – and, to a degree, the future prospects – of the West Midlands region in relation to key aspects of rural community sustainability
- *Chapter 5* then considers the nature, extent and implications of key spatial variations across the different findings
- drawing together the insights and arguments from the two preceding chapters, *Chapter 6* attempts to set out some of the key policy implications, both in an immediate sense and in the context of early thinking with regard to the Single Integrated Regional Strategy
- finally, *Chapter 7* sets out some conclusions, focusing particularly on how the findings from the study ought now to be used.

2: Approaching the study: Challenges and issues in defining Rural Community Sustainability

- 2.1 In launching the research process, the consultancy team needed a working definition of “rural community sustainability”.
- 2.2 The working definition needed to function as a “meta research frame” for the study as a whole: our work within the individual Themes had to focus on detailed questions but these needed to be examined in a manner that was informed by – and informing of – a common understanding of rural community sustainability, and the processes linked to it. Hence the initial frame of reference needed to be clear and simple. But it also needed to be sufficiently tangible to provide real traction such that it could be tested, refined and developed during the course of the study in a way which provided real insights in relation to the West Midlands’ rural areas.

Existing definitions and challenges in their practical application

- 2.3 During the early stages of the study, we examined a number of existing definitions, all of which have a bearing on rural community sustainability. Of these, three were taken from Planning Policy Statements^{3,4,5} (some were specific to rural areas and others were more general); one was taken from CLG’s Sustainable Communities Plan⁶ (which ought to apply equally to rural and urban areas); and two came from explicitly rural interests – one from the Commission for Rural Communities^{7,8} and a second from the Carnegie Trust⁹.
- 2.4 Although the sources varied in terms of focus and purpose, all six had been distilled from substantial research and analysis. Hence they needed to be taken seriously.
- 2.5 However, looking across the piece, there was some risk that the definitions were so broad and generic that they failed to provide the traction we really needed. Equally, while as outcomes, the principles/indicators/characteristics identified in relation to rural community sustainability were very difficult to dispute, they provided no real clue in terms of the challenges linked to achieving them, particularly when these were defined
- in combination; and
 - across spatially differentiated territories; and

³ DCLG (2005) *Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development*

⁴ DCLG (2007) *Consultation paper on a new Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for sustainable economic development*

⁵ DCLG (2004) *Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*

⁶ DCLG (2003) *Sustainable communities: building for the future*

⁷ Commission for Rural Communities (2007) *What is meant by ‘sustainable rural communities’ How can we achieve them? A discussion paper*

⁸ Commission for Rural Communities (2007) *Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities: A New Agenda?*

⁹ Carnegie UK Trust (2007) *A Charter for Rural Communities*

- in the context of a market economy.

2.6 With regard to our study and from the vantage point of the eight Themes, the challenge was how to effect change that moves towards greater rural community sustainability in a manner that is cognisant of – and informed by – the underlying spatial and economic complexity that defines rural areas within the West Midlands.

2.7 Against this backdrop, we made a number of observations:

- first, rural community sustainability needs to be understood as a *process*, not as a *static condition*; it is about the behaviour of individuals, households and communities on an on-going basis
- second, there is a *multiplicity of different outcome indicators* linked to this process. Frequently cited indicators include effective engagement and participation; housing mix; flourishing local economy, etc.
- however, third, *progress towards any one of the identified outcomes could well conflict with progress towards a second*. For example – using indicators from the CRC’s definition of sustainable rural communities – securing a diversified economic base may cause some tension in relation to the performance of indigenous enterprise. Equally, access to a clean and attractive environment may not always sit easily with the business imperatives of the primary sector
- fourth, *the way in which potentially conflicting outcomes are best resolved is absolutely critical*. However this is extremely complicated and, in practice, it will vary depending, *inter alia*, on:
 - scale/vantage point – whether the individual, the household, the community/settlement/place, or the wider society
 - particular circumstances – e.g. the best outcome from the point of view of a young person who lives in a rural community could well be different from that of an in-moving retiree whilst that of a migrant worker will be different again
 - geography –including settlement size and situation in relation to other settlements
- fifth, at the same time, however, *there is a need to guard against the conclusion that the unique character of every situation completely obviates any attempt to make observations at a regional or sub-regional scale*. Whilst this might be true in the purest sense, it is not helpful for those engaged in the development and delivery of regional policy; there is therefore a need for some pragmatism in approach.

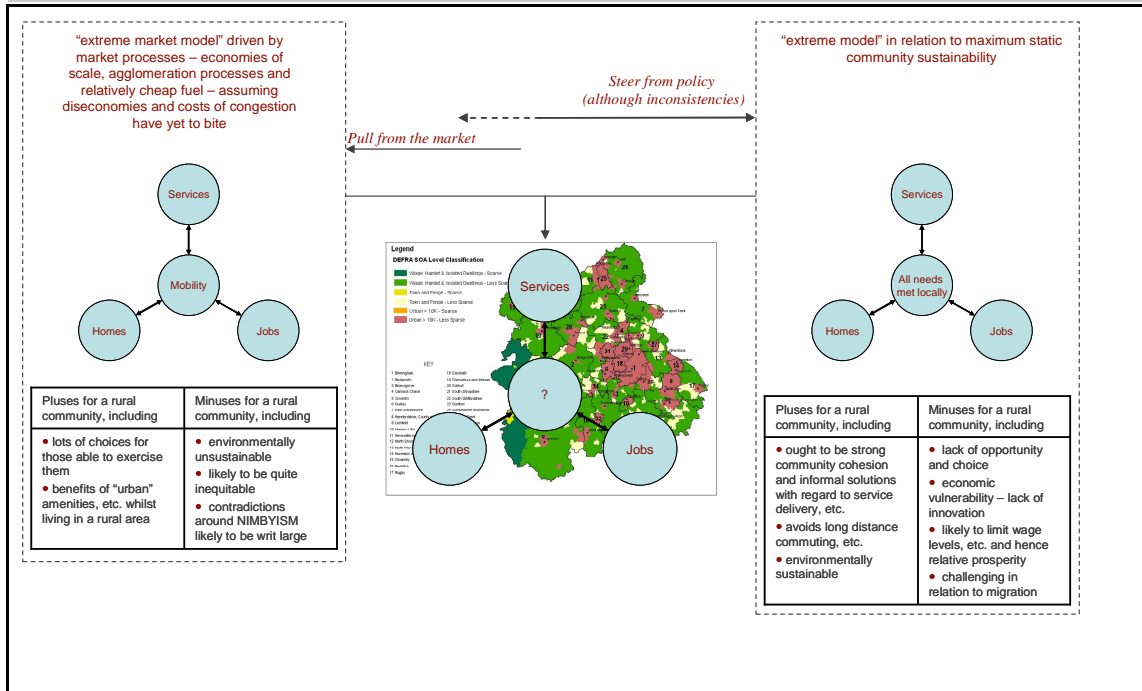
Framing the study

2.8 In seeking to ensure rural community sustainability in a context which is defined primarily against the backdrop of the WMES and WMRSS, and ultimately the SIRS, the domains of housing, jobs and services seemed to be absolutely critical. The question that needed to be

considered was how the needs and wants of individuals, households and communities (and, arguably, society writ large) should be expressed and resolved across these three domains (see Figure 2-1).

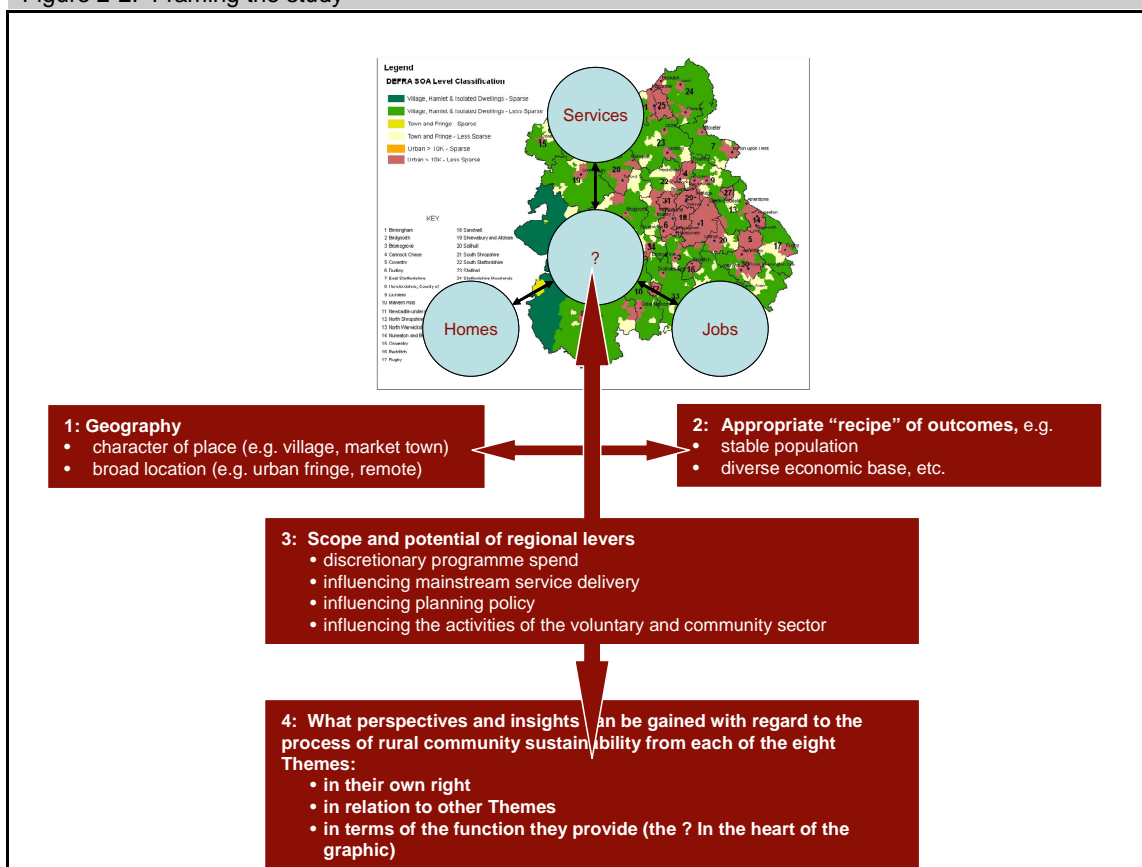
- 2.9 One solution – *in extremis* – is premised on perfect mobility. A second – the binary opposite – assumes complete self containment, which becomes more and more challenging as settlement size diminishes. From the vantage point of rural communities, both have some merits. However, neither is wholly feasible. Equally, neither is wholly desirable.

Figure 2-1: Articulating needs and demands for jobs, services and homes – extreme positions with regard to rural communities



- the levers available to regional agencies and through regional processes, recognising that these are in fact quite limited: regional agencies could do a great deal more if they had fiscal and regulatory powers, but they do not
- the vantage points provided by the eight Themes that constituted the substantive focus for this study, recognising that these need to be interpreted at three different levels:
 - as Themes in their own right
 - in terms of their read-across to other Themes
 - as perspectives on the critical set of inter-relationships that define the core of the graphic.

Figure 2-2: Framing the study



Source: SQW Consulting

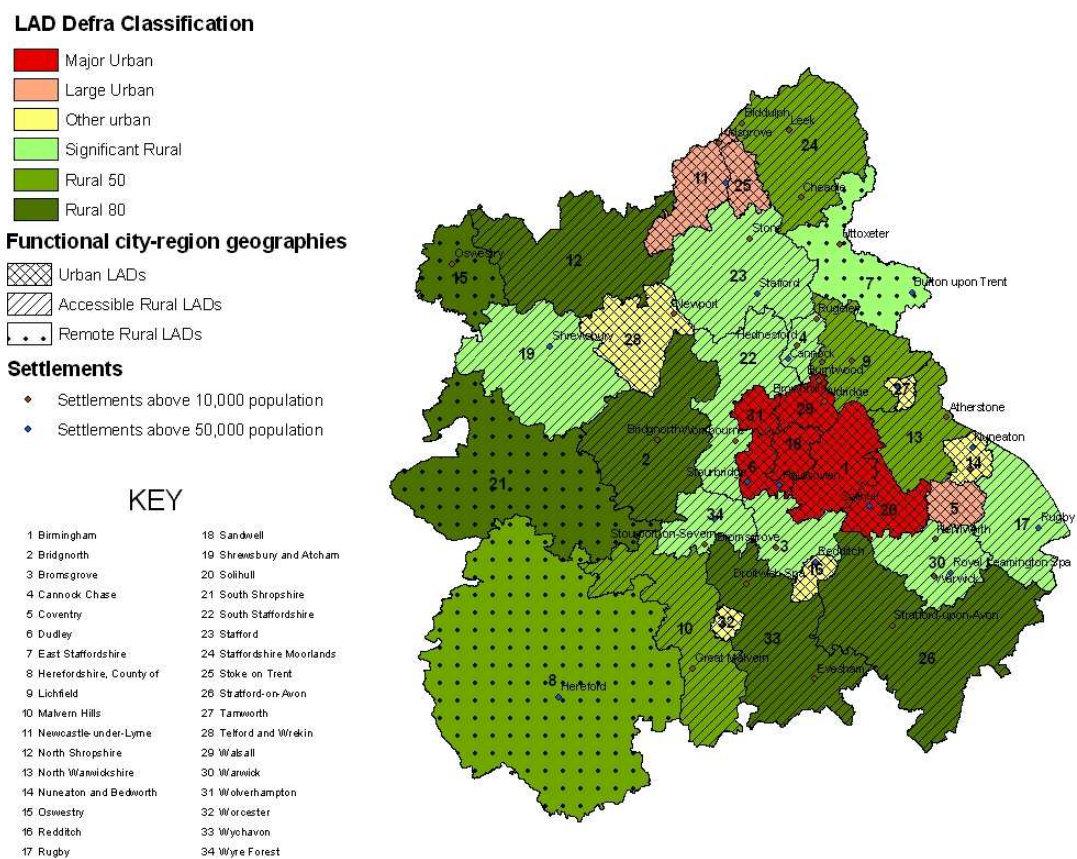
Populating the Framework

- 2.12 In order to advance the different strands of Theme-based research on a consistent basis, the Framework needed populating. The key decisions made by the Steering Group in this context are summarised below; these were important in steering the study as a whole.

Geography

- 2.13 In order to account for the degree of rurality (defined in terms of settlement morphology and population density) *and* relative location/functional geographies, it was agreed that we should use Defra’s definition of rural areas (i.e. Significant Rural, Rural-50 and Rural-80 Local Authority Districts (LAD), or the equivalent at Super Output Area (SOA) level), overlaid with a definition of ‘accessible rural LADs’ and ‘remote rural LADs’ (outside/inside city-regions) which had been developed by SQW and Cambridge Econometrics in an earlier study for Defra¹⁰. The maps below illustrate these geographical definitions at LAD and SOA level¹¹.

Figure 2-3 : LADs coded on the Defra classification and functional city-region “split”

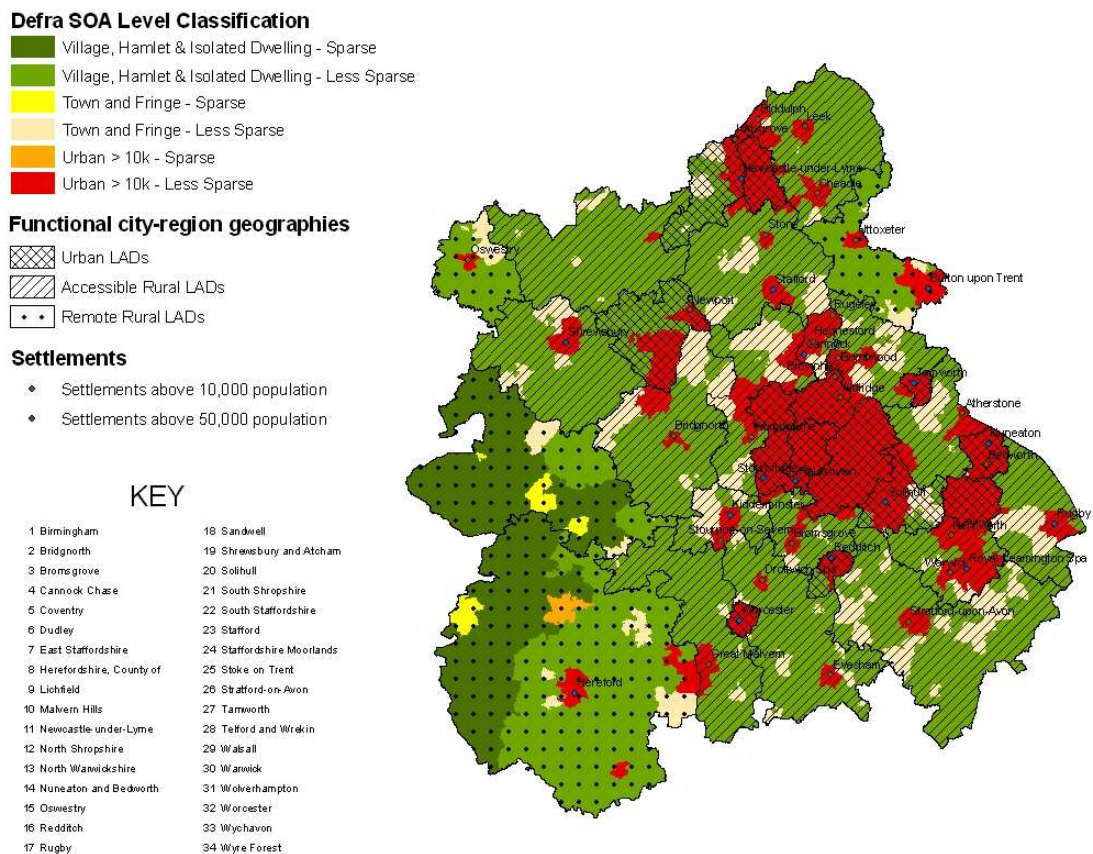


Source: SQW Consulting

¹⁰ See *Economic performance of rural areas inside and outside of City-Regions*, Report to Defra by SQW and Cambridge Econometrics, September 2006, for a full definition and a full explanation of how this was derived. Note that the reference to city-regions here, and throughout this report, is a technical one, not a political or policy-based one

¹¹ Particularly in relation to the LAD-level map, it is important to recognise that LADs categorised as “Other Urban” contain significant rural areas, as – to a lesser extent – do those described “Large Urban”. Hence the LAD-level map understates the scale of the geography of rural areas within the West Midlands

Figure 2-4: SOAs coded on the Defra classification of urban/rural and functional city-region “split”



Source: SQW Consulting

Outcomes

2.14 The Steering Group agreed to use the following outcomes (which are based on the CLG definition plus inputs from CRC’s think piece papers on sustainable rural communities) as a *starting point* for defining rural community sustainability¹²:

- maintaining a population with a viable age structure
- flourishing local economy, with a diversified economic base, providing jobs and wealth. This includes a viable and sustainable primary sector (providing local food and exports)
- strong leadership
- effective engagement and participation by local people
- safe and healthy local environment, which meets the challenges of climate change
- sufficient size, scale and density to support basic amenities
- good public transport infrastructure within the community and links to urban centres

¹² Note that these were tested and refined in the course of the study, and we present an amended list in Chapter 4

- buildings that meet needs and minimise use of resources
- well-integrated mix of homes (different types and tenures – including affordable housing)
- access to good quality local public services (including education and training opportunities, health care, leisure facilities)
- diverse, creative local culture and ‘sense of place’
- links with wider regional, national and international community (including transport and ICT).

Scope and potential of regional levers

- 2.15 The Steering Group agreed that the list of levers that ought to be considered should include discretionary programme spend, influencing mainstream service delivery, influencing planning policy, influencing the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), and influencing the business sector. This steer reflected the fact that the SIRS will need to influence public, community and private sector choices.
- 2.16 One further important point was made from the outset. Whilst it was recognised that regional and local levers could – through regional processes, partners and strategy – be the most straightforward to influence, the most effective interventions could, potentially, be those in the domain of central government: specifically, fiscal and regulatory tools and policies. While the region cannot determine these directly or unilaterally, it can – if it has the evidence – seek to lobby and influence key decision-makers. Hence it was agreed that the study should also point to situations in which the policies of central government could potentially do most to effect more sustainable rural communities, recognising – in the context of the Sub-National Review – that elements of this arsenal might, at some stage, be devolved to some degree.

3: Key findings from the Thematic Chapters

- 3.1 As set out in Chapter 1, the substantive focus of this study was on eight distinct Themes, each of which has a key role with regard to rural community sustainability:
- Housing
 - Low Carbon Principles
 - IT Infrastructure
 - Employment Provision
 - Green Infrastructure
 - Critical Rural Services
 - Economic Inclusion
 - Rural Economy.
- 3.2 Across each of these Themes, our work involved desk-based research, an analysis of secondary data and consultations with key stakeholders from around the region. The findings from this process are reported in detail in an accompanying volume of Thematic Chapters. However, using the broad structure provided by Figure 2-2, Table 3-1 (overleaf) presents some of the headline messages and findings. As an additional column in the table, we also comment on the nature of the underlying processes that underpin the evidence which is reported.

Table 3-1: Key Findings from the Theme-based review

Theme	Desirable outcomes in delivering sustainable rural communities in the West Midlands	Broad spatial contrasts between more remote and more accessible areas in the West Midlands	Region-wide issues in rural areas across the West Midlands in which there are few locational differences	Scope and potential of policy levers	Underlying causal processes
Housing	<p>Desirable outcomes with regard to housing include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a variety of appropriate housing types and tenures to accommodate mixed communities housing that can be afforded by people on local incomes using local services (consistent with the structure of the rural economy) buildings that meet needs and minimise use of resources housing that contributes to a safe and healthy local environment, and supports a 'sense of place' 	<p>Accessible areas face pressure from in-migrants of working age; more remote areas face pressures linked to the limited turnover and total stock of housing in rural areas</p> <p>The more remote rural Districts appear to be making the greatest progress with the provision of affordable housing – although the rate of affordable housing completions everywhere is slow</p> <p>In a number of Districts closer to the MUAs, levels of achieved and planned provision for affordable housing are extremely low</p>	<p>Affordability is a problem across rural areas within the West Midlands; the differential between rural and urban areas on metrics of affordability is greater in the West Midlands than in any other English region</p> <p>In general, the supply of market and affordable housing is increasing in rural areas (albeit from a low base)</p> <p>The structure of the housing stock in rural areas is weighted towards larger properties, and this may be one factor linked to the relatively poor performance of rural areas with regard to carbon emissions</p> <p>Competition between employment and housing uses for land is increasing across rural parts of the region – the economics of housing land values puts considerable pressure on employment land</p>	<p>Our Theme-based research suggested a continuing need to accelerate the delivery of affordable housing in rural parts of the West Midlands. Our suggestions with regard to interventions which could effect improved outcomes linked to rural housing include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> disseminating more effectively existing guidance with regard to the delivery of affordable housing; a key resource in this context is WMRA's Guide to the Delivery of Affordable Housing continuing support for the Rural Housing Enabler scheme, additional workers on the ground delivering affordable housing, Community Land Trusts, and the work of sub-regional Housing Market partnerships lobbying government to amend Housing Corporation grant conditions to reflect the higher cost of delivering housing in rural areas and the longer lead-in times for delivery encouraging LPAs to be clearer and more consistent in their affordable housing requirements encouraging the greater use of public land for affordable housing delivery 	<p>Affordability is an increasing problem nationally, and exacerbated in rural areas by low wages and a limited housing stock</p> <p>Second home ownership plus commuting have increased demand for housing and have pushed up house prices</p> <p>Incomes earned locally in rural areas – particularly in more remote ones – are insufficient to enter the housing market</p> <p>Huge politics around rural housing provision – NIMBY attitudes are a problem (although Rural Housing Enablers can mitigate these)</p> <p>Demand for housing is generating challenges for employment land</p> <p>Uncertainty caused by transition to Unitary Authority status in some areas – developers are waiting to see what combined housing policies will look like</p>

Theme	Desirable outcomes in delivering sustainable rural communities in the West Midlands	Broad spatial contrasts between more remote and more accessible areas in the West Midlands	Region-wide issues in rural areas across the West Midlands in which there are few locational differences	Scope and potential of policy levers	Underlying causal processes
<p>Low carbon principles</p>	<p>Desirable outcomes with regard to low carbon principles include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low carbon emissions per £10k GVA • efficient use of energy & resources – which maximises use of renewable energy/low carbon technologies • developments located in places that reduce the need to travel • increased use of sustainable forms of travel (and reduced use of transport that emits high CO₂ emissions per capita) • local production, local supply of food to meet local demand, and use of local products (e.g. in building) 	<p>CO₂ emissions from road transport are lower in remote areas. However CO₂ emissions do tend to rise with increasing rurality (i.e. R-80)</p> <p>Levels of home-working are higher in more remote and more sparsely populated areas in the West Midlands – evidence on CO₂ emissions from home-workers is mixed (but there are opportunities to reduce emissions)</p> <p>In more remote rural areas, limited connection to gas network, resulting in use of less carbon efficient forms of energy (e.g. oil)</p> <p>Region-wide, the highest CO₂ emissions per capita are in accessible rural areas, and particularly Districts which are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R-50 • close to motorways <p>In terms of sectors,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emissions from road transport are highest in accessible areas • industry & commercial sector emissions are higher in Significant Rural accessible (and remote) 	<p>Overall, CO₂ emissions per capita are higher in rural areas, compared to urban</p> <p>Emissions from domestic sector is high across all rural areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • old housing stock – difficult to incorporate energy efficiency measures • opportunities in new housing to be energy efficient <p>Reliance on – and use of – private transport is high in rural areas</p> <p>Housing cost pressures – leading to people living further away and increasing need to travel</p> <p>The first low carbon community is likely to be in a rural location</p>	<p>In the light of our Theme-based research, our suggestions with regard to interventions which could effect improved outcomes in terms of low carbon principles include:</p> <p>Nationally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achieving energy efficiency in existing building stock as well as new build • intervening in transport policy to manage demand in relation to car use and achieve a step change in the provision and attractiveness of public transport <p>Regionally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effecting a strong interventionist approach which means <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ in accessible rural areas, providing significant public transport/cycling/walking improvements ○ in more remote areas, enabling people to work from home and bringing services to the people • effecting more sustainable transport solutions (but focus on <i>existing</i> transport network in current policy) • securing energy efficiency improvements • exploiting opportunities in biomass, hydropower, wind power, decentralised energy (e.g. CHP and district heating) and other forms of renewables (including ground source heat pumps and solar) • ensuring that discretionary funding mechanisms include low carbon criteria as an integral component of funding decisions <p>Locally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting community transport solutions 	<p>Three key factors appear critical:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • level of mobility and self containment vis-à-vis local provision • character of the housing stock • sectoral composition

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		<p>areas, and R-50 accessible areas</p> <p>More opportunity for decentralised forms of energy (e.g. CHP) within accessible rural areas where population densities are also greater</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> supporting low carbon communities and energy projects encouraging the local provision of training/support/networks to address climate change challenges securing multi-use public buildings and enabling home-working (through local service delivery and IT infrastructures) instigating efficiency measures within new builds and retrofitting existing homes and business premises to reduce carbon emissions and reduce fuel poverty in homes <p>Good practice examples at the local level include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural Community Carbon Networks; Transition Towns Network (to inform, support, network and train communities as they adopt climate change initiatives; and Community Action for Energy. Note that success rates tend to be higher where local communities make the decision themselves to adopt low carbon principles 	
Employment provision	<p>Desirable outcomes with regard to employment provision include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> availability of an appropriate quantity and range of employment opportunities to support a flourishing and diversified economy employment provision that ensures a 	<p>Greater dependence on a balance of employment to provide job opportunities for local people in more remote areas. Also, demand for employment space is more localised</p> <p>Levels of home-working and self employment are higher in remote rural areas</p> <p>Employment and demand for employment provision is higher in accessible areas –</p>	<p>Provision for rural employment must meet the needs of non-business uses as well as conventional business uses (in land based industries, local services and the wider shift to services)</p> <p>There is strong pressure to change employment land allocations from employment to housing across rural areas</p> <p>Evidence of supply-side responses to increases in</p>	<p>Our Theme-based research pointed to the need for flexibility with regard to the application of planning policies which in turn need to be informed by good local intelligence. Within this overall context, suggestions with regard to interventions which could effect improved outcomes linked to rural employment provision include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> evolving spatial planning policies to reflect a changing balance between employment, housing and local services in remote and accessible rural areas focusing funding support and other interventions in areas of market failure to provide general and specialist employment space (i.e. in most areas, the 	<p>Economics of employment land use vis-à-vis the use of land for housing are really problematic</p> <p>The changing nature of work, and the changing relationship between home and work, are key underlying processes, and IT is intrinsic to both</p>

Theme	Desirable outcomes in delivering sustainable rural communities in the West Midlands	Broad spatial contrasts between more remote and more accessible areas in the West Midlands	Region-wide issues in rural areas across the West Midlands in which there are few locational differences	Scope and potential of policy levers	Underlying causal processes
	<p>continued supply of local employment opportunities (which broadly match the skills of the resident workforce)</p>	<p>this spatial trend is likely to continue towards 2020</p> <p>Accessible rural areas account for a high proportion of employment in some of the WMES priority clusters – the implication is that growth in these clusters (and the places in which they are based) ought to be relatively strong</p>	<p>homeworking, including proposals for live-work developments in Herefordshire, Stratford-on-Avon and Shropshire, and the establishment of business support services for homeworking entrepreneurs</p>	<p>private sector will not provide flexible business space with supporting services for new start firms without an initial subsidy, particularly where specialist facilities are needed)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responding to the fast changing nature of demand for employment in small (and sometimes very small) business units within specialist niches such as arts & crafts, screen & new media, ICT and environmental technologies • recognising the large space requirements of the manufacturing and land-based sectors • equipping rural areas to respond to the accommodation requirements of existing businesses operating in the WMES priority clusters (such as food and drink, business and professional services and environmental technologies) • focusing the delivery of business/employment support and training provision through market towns and through virtual networks which enable home workers and businesses in remote areas to access services on-line • providing transport services to facilitate access to jobs/employment services in remote areas and among disadvantaged groups. • securing greater co-ordination between regional and local policy/initiatives to ensure community involvement • responding to the breakdown of traditional boundaries between home, workplace and community facilities through flexible planning policies. In particular, the likely future growth in homeworking, home office, live/work and home enterprise will require flexibility in the application of planning policies (for example, a general presumption against loss of employment land 	

Theme	Desirable outcomes in delivering sustainable rural communities in the West Midlands	Broad spatial contrasts between more remote and more accessible areas in the West Midlands	Region-wide issues in rural areas across the West Midlands in which there are few locational differences	Scope and potential of policy levers	Underlying causal processes
				to housing should not prevent live work developments on some employment sites in need of regeneration) and most importantly will depend on the availability of high bandwidth broadband	
IT Infrastructure	<p>Desirable outcomes with regard to IT infrastructure include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> businesses effectively exploiting ICT to raise productivity access to broadband services comparable to those used in urban areas digital inclusion for disadvantaged groups use of ICT to enable home-working (but in conjunction with other outcomes to reduce CO₂ emissions) 	<p>Lower broadband competition (& therefore less choice), no cable coverage & only 2/38 of exchanges with local loop unbundler services in remote areas</p> <p>Rural areas – particularly those which are remote – will be amongst last to obtain 3rd Generation Broadband services</p> <p>Particularly in remote areas, businesses are potentially less exposed to ICT adoption influences and hence may be exploiting ICT somewhat less</p> <p>A future risk that is that the lack of next generation broadband availability could become a significant factor in where people decide to live; this will affect remote areas in particular</p>	<p>ICT use facilitates home-working but also means that people can live further away from their place of work (direction of travel pulling in two directions)</p>	<p>With regard to IT infrastructure, we make two overarching observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> although the extent of the challenge varies in remote and accessible areas, no difference in policy response is required it would be premature for the public sector to undertake supply-side interventions in Next Generation Broadband services at this stage of the market development <p>In the light of our Theme-based research, our suggestions with regard to interventions which could however effect improved outcomes linked to IT infrastructure include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stimulating increased take-up & exploitation of ICT (in businesses and community engagement) influencing BT's ADSL2+ roll out plans in favour of rural (remote & accessible) areas. Linking roll out to employment nodes and networks being promoted by the public sector could have the double benefit of supporting policy and accelerating viability of both ADSL2+ and the specialist premises (innovation centres, etc) and networks being supported developing mechanisms to identify unserved demand 	<p>ICT is a key enabling technology and it is changing elements of how businesses work</p> <p>It can be double-edged – stretching the urban economy does not obviate the need to restructure and regenerate the economy in rural areas</p> <p>Broadband investment entails high fixed costs. Lower demand densities in rural areas lead to lower returns for operators, and hence less competition and later investment in upgrades.</p>
Economic inclusion	<p>Desirable outcomes with regard to economic inclusion include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> residents are <i>able</i> to 	<p>Higher levels of deprivation across a range of issues, including income and employment in more remote</p>	<p>Region-wide there remains the concern that rural poverty and deprivation is invisible through data – but it clearly</p>	<p>Good practice lessons identified through our work included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> interventions need to be demonstrably rooted in rural communities – need to engage over long time period 	<p>In all rural areas where communities are close knit, there may be reluctance to seek help – this barrier needs to</p>

Theme	Desirable outcomes in delivering sustainable rural communities in the West Midlands	Broad spatial contrasts between more remote and more accessible areas in the West Midlands	Region-wide issues in rural areas across the West Midlands in which there are few locational differences	Scope and potential of policy levers	Underlying causal processes
	<p>participate in the economy (as a consumer and as a producer) and society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provision of, and access to, quality and secure employment individuals are able to access services and social networks 	<p>areas</p> <p>Higher levels of people excluded from work because of long-term sickness and disability, and higher levels of people providing unpaid care in remote areas</p> <p>Greater differentials between highest and lowest paid residents – this relative poverty is exacerbated by higher costs of living in remote rural areas</p> <p>Increasing <i>relative</i> deprivation (i.e. remote areas are now ranked as more deprived relative to other areas) – largely due to increased house prices</p> <p>Age profile of some rural areas – particularly those that are more remote – is skewed towards older people; forward projections with regard to the age profile raise particular issues and concerns</p>	<p>exists</p>	<p>to build up trust and social capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> delivery should combine technology with face-to-face service (to overcome issues for those who are digitally excluded) working in partnership with other delivery and community focused organisations is essential there is a need to tailor approaches to meet the needs of particular groups in order to reach the most excluded <p>In the light of our Theme-based research, our suggestions with regard to interventions which could however effect improved outcomes linked to economic inclusion are set out below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tackling economic exclusion in remote areas through specifically designed approaches to address distinctive barriers (i.e. there is a need to recognise that interventions will be more expensive and will take longer to implement) recognising the diversity of barriers that different disadvantaged groups face – and the importance of tailoring interventions to reach different sectors of communities being careful with regard to traditional approaches (which concentrate interventions in market towns and require people to travel) which risk undermining smaller rural centres' ability to sustain themselves. (i.e. there is a need therefore to consider the issues relating to small settlements) recognising and supporting the role of the third sector in delivering local support, particularly through longer-term public sector funding in remoter areas, developing cost effective ways of 	<p>be considered in the choice of policy responses</p> <p>There is a clear and important link between economic inclusion and access to services – the demise the latter is causally related to economic exclusion</p>

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				taking support to people - through IT and existing social networks (important routes into communities).	
Green Infrastructure (GI)	<p>Desirable outcomes with regard to green infrastructure include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communities have easy access to attractive and healthy environments natural resources and biodiversity are protected and enhanced environment attracts residents, visitors, businesses and investment space is provided for renewable energy production and sustainable transport stronger local distinctiveness and pride of place strengthening of resilient ecosystem services (e.g. biodiversity; food production; flood management) 	<p>Focus on urban and peri-urban areas for current GI plans neglects potential and needs of remoter areas</p> <p>Most natural assets - AONBs, SSSIs, etc -.are located in remoter rural areas</p> <p>GI has greater potential to provide sustainable alternatives (such as cycle/footpaths) to popular commuter routes between settlements in accessible rural areas and commuter destinations</p> <p>Accessible rural areas are more likely to attract local tourism and new residents – therefore GI factors should be more of a priority in accessible areas</p>	<p>35.5% of the region’s SSSIs were classed as ‘favourable’, which is lower than the 43.0% of those in England as a whole (2003 data)</p> <p>Across all rural areas, there is high reliance on private transport and so need to promote sustainable alternatives across all areas</p> <p>Accessibility of, and access to, Green Infrastructure is an issue in many rural areas across the region</p>	<p>In the light of our Theme-based research, our suggestions with regard to interventions which could effect improved outcomes linked to green infrastructure are set out below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> developing a strategic approach to green infrastructure which is supported by robust regional policy. This should include expanding the draft RSS green infrastructure policy to include the whole of the West Midlands region planning for a vertical (hierarchical) approach to GI from strategic provision (landscape scale e.g. biodiversity enhancement areas) to local provision embedded within rural communities as part of a strategic network complementing the vertical approach with a horizontal approach that aims to establish links between green infrastructure provision and reduce fragmentation identifying the areas of the rural West Midlands where there is a need for additional access to green spaces and routes; in this context, there is a need to assess current provision effecting joint working between regional decision-makers and local authorities to apply the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to proposed development in the region embedding green infrastructure up front in those more rural parts of the region where significant development is proposed. This will be mainly focused on larger settlements, including but not restricted to regional Growth Points, and also in any Eco-Towns that may 	<p>The importance of GI in relation to community well-being (as well as environmental quality) is increasingly being recognised but the implications need to be worked through properly</p> <p>There is still a frequent misconception that access to green infrastructure is a non-issue in rural areas; policy is needed to address this</p>

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				<p>come forward in the region under this Government initiative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensuring that existing communities deficient in green infrastructure are not neglected in favour of locations where growth is planned encouraging local authorities to complete green space strategies, which assess the rural requirements for open space provision, as well as the urban need, across the sub-regions within the West Midlands mapping robust environmental information to provide the best available evidence for the location of strategic green infrastructure, using 'public benefit' criteria to guide where investment is most needed (i.e. where greatest multiple benefits of green infrastructure – social, environmental, economic – can be secured in light of available resources) making better use of existing funding mechanisms for land management (e.g. environmental stewardship; woodland grant scheme) and appraisal mechanisms (e.g. parish planning) to effect improvements in green infrastructure 	
Critical Rural Services	<p>Desirable outcomes with regard to critical rural services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a range of services to meet personal and community needs, and the needs of businesses, are accessible locally 'rural' people and people with limited mobility, low incomes 	<p>Service deprivation is more pronounced in smaller settlements and this increases with sparsity and remoteness in a consistent way</p> <p>Market towns appear to perform a stronger service role in remoter areas, while the viability of services in their more accessible counterparts appears more</p>	<p>Geographical barriers to services are pervasive throughout rural areas, whether "accessible" or "remote"</p> <p>The issues surrounding access to services are becoming more acute as service provision is eroded</p> <p>There is a need to recognise that places and communities are increasingly "unaligned" –</p>	<p>Our research pointed to elements of best practice with regard to access to services, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing a combination of ICT and face-to-face service using economic regeneration as a driver of service demand and supply the development of formal partnerships between (various levels of) government, the local community (frequently represented by voluntary agencies) and local business interests provides the best mix for sustainability of service delivery. Local ownership and 	<p>Relative economics of service provision are a critical factor</p> <p>Linked to this, whilst there is consternation when services are lost, those that are mobile often make little use of the services – vicious circle</p> <p>Lack of alignment in terms of accessing</p>

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	<p>or other disadvantages are not unduly less well served</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> patterns of service use and provision allow for more sustainable forms of transport and hence lower CO₂ impact 	<p>marginal</p> <p>The level of service deprivation in accessible small settlements is also high</p>	<p>hence the geography of service access and delivery is really complicated. It is more complex than the settlement hierarchy would imply and this has implications for policy</p>	<p>management is fundamental.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> making an early commitment to the use of community survey techniques, local consultation and open involvement in the design and implementation processes <p>In the light of our Theme-based research, our suggestions with regard to interventions which could effect improved outcomes linked to critical rural services are set out below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> establishing regular regional monitoring of important and measurable services encouraging local services assessments to complement regional monitoring adopting a broader view of key services to reflect community and rural regeneration objectives focusing strategy on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintaining the function of market towns as providers of a range of personal, community and business services improving access to critical services for disadvantaged groups by bringing services to people and improving transport. supporting the provision of a physical centre in small settlements that can be used as a multi-service outlet (including in relation to private sector services such as retail, etc.) 	<p>services is an issue – settlement hierarchy is not the whole answer</p>
Rural Economy	<p>Desirable outcomes with regard to the rural economy include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> flourishing local economy, providing 	<p>Market towns in the remoter areas are generally more self contained and economic performance is somewhat poorer</p>	<p>Investment in the rural Districts of the West Midlands was lower than the wider region and England, especially in the Rural-80</p>	<p>Overall, our work found that approaches to supporting rural economic sustainability need to reflect the underlying challenges and the expectation must be that they will vary between remote and accessible areas</p> <p>In the light of our Theme-based research, our</p>	<p>In general, agglomeration effects are a key factor – there are different dimensions to this</p>

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	<p>jobs and wealth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a diversified economic base • a viable and sustainable primary sector • high rates of locally financed and initiated new small enterprise start-ups • market towns operating effectively as economic hubs • a convergence of workplace- and residence-based incomes 	<p>Rural economies within the E³I belt are different from those in the west of the region and in the north east corner: there is more mobility and – in general – a greater differential between residence-based and workplace-based measures of economic performance</p> <p>In more accessible rural areas, the market (for skills, entrepreneurship, etc.) appears to be working well</p>	<p>LADs</p> <p>Business investment within rural areas is less than elsewhere in the region</p> <p>The highest proportion of employees in knowledge intensive businesses is found in the Rural-80 LADs</p>	<p>suggestions with regard to interventions which could effect improved outcomes linked to the rural economy include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in remote areas, retaining market towns as a central focus for policy, mainly because they constitute key economic and population hubs. In looking to support market towns, there is a need to think quite carefully about the benefits and costs of agglomeration. Particularly where earnings levels are low, there is a need to effect a managed transition to higher earning activities. This could involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ effecting knowledge transfer on a selective basis (perhaps reflecting some of the WMES cluster priorities) ○ encouraging clustering within and between small, knowledge-based businesses, many of which might be home-based • in more accessible rural areas, developing better and more effective public transport solutions, whilst also investing in the “self contained” element of local economies. 	<p>Issues relating to the quality of rural employment/economic activity are problematic in this context – a major challenge looking forward</p>

4: Performance in relation to Sustainable Rural Communities

Outcomes relating to Sustainable Rural Communities in the West Midlands

- 4.1 Based on the findings from our Theme-based research, we developed a working definition of “what rural community sustainability would look like” in terms of specific outcomes – the implication being that by moving towards these outcomes, rural community sustainability should be improved. These outcomes were informed by those identified by CLG, CRC and the Carnegie Trust (and considered in Chapter 2), but were refined through the application of our research findings (Chapter 3); they should therefore provide a more specific and relevant definition for the rural West Midlands. Our proposals for outcome-related ingredients of Sustainable Rural Communities in the West Midlands are set out in Box 4-1 below.

Box 4-1: Proposals for outcome-related ingredients of Sustainable Rural Communities in the West Midlands

Social

- Mixed communities with a balance of ages, occupations
- No extreme inequalities in wealth or opportunities
- Local distinctiveness and pride of place
- Safe and healthy neighbourhoods
- Strong, effective and inclusive governance
- Alignment between workplace-based and residence-based earnings
- A range of services to meet personal, community and economic needs (including education and training, healthcare, leisure and retail)

Economic

- Flourishing local economy, providing jobs and wealth
- Diverse economic base including high value and high skilled jobs in rural areas
- Viable and sustainable primary sector
- High rates of locally financed and initiated small enterprises
- Inclusive economy providing employment and consumption opportunities to all residents
- Access to and use of cutting-edge ICT
- Variety and balance of land use between employment, housing and services/infrastructure
- Greater local production and supply of products

Environmental

- Efficient consumption of resources and energy
- Attractive and accessible countryside
- Reduced need to travel and car dependency
- Greater availability of sustainable forms of travel
- Space for renewable energy production and sustainable transport
- Natural resources and biodiversity protected and enhanced

- 4.2 In the remainder of this Chapter – and on the basis of evidence which was assembled through the preparation of the Thematic Chapters – we comment first on the apparent overall progress of rural areas in relation to the different outcome indicators. We then attempt to dissect these observations in more detail by commenting specifically on the apparent impacts linked to the eight Themes.

Overall assessment of progress against outcomes

Social Outcomes

- 4.3 In our view – based on the evidence we were able to review – the direction of travel in the **social** block is predominantly negative; the interplay of housing, jobs and services issues plays a large hand in this. Unaffordable housing and low rural wages polarise communities in terms of wealth and opportunities, and encourage the spatial segregation of wealthy and less wealthy people. Service decline is hastened by the living and working patterns of the more wealthy, especially in the accessible rural areas, to the detriment of those with less money or mobility.
- 4.4 Our research suggested that the widening gap between resident-based and workplace-based earning is particularly striking and indicative of the underlying processes. In a nutshell, relatively wealthy commuters drive up house prices in accessible rural areas and second home owners have a similar effect in some remoter areas. The lower skilled and lower paid employment opportunities generated by rural economies creates a resident/workplace gap and the affordability problem. A proportion of the population is disadvantaged in this housing and job market and either leave, diminishing the social and occupation/age mix of the population, or remain and become part of the economic inclusion challenge. The wealth, high mobility and commuting patterns of part of the population can undermine the viability of local services, which leaves others at a greater disadvantage.
- 4.5 A less gloomy picture was painted of progress towards the safe and healthy communities outcome. This reflects the way in which housing standards are improving and new developments are planned to create safe neighbourhoods. However note that it does not take any account of health or crime trends which would bear on this indicator but which were not part of this study.

Economic outcomes

- 4.6 Our research suggested that progress towards the **economic** ingredients of rural sustainable communities is mixed, although generally more positive. Evidence reported in several of the Thematic Chapters is judged as moving against the goal of flourishing local economies, the exceptions being IT (which plays an important role in creating new work opportunities in remoter areas) and employment provision. The ‘inclusive economy’ outcome illustrated particularly well how trends in employment provision, economic inclusion, economy and services push towards an exclusive rather than inclusive economy. As the relevant Thematic Chapters showed, this is more pronounced in accessible areas where urban and rural economies interact. Although they share some of the same features of the accessible

countryside, inequalities of economic opportunity are less pronounced within the more remote areas.

- 4.7 Within the economic block there are some positive directions, particularly through IT. Also positive are some features of remoter rural economies that might achieve more of a competitive advantage in the future, particularly with high levels of home working and self-employment, the reasonably healthy size of the workforce engaged in the ‘knowledge economy’, the economic potential of renewables and the development of new markets for local produce.

Environmental outcomes

- 4.8 Our work suggested that progress towards the **environmental** ingredients of sustainable rural communities is generally quite concerning and trends in carbon emissions are moving in the wrong direction. Along with IT, green infrastructure accounts for the somewhat more positive assessments, but this refers to potential environmental benefits rather than actual. The Thematic Chapter on this topic makes it clear that there is not an evidence base on rural ‘green infrastructure’ at present, although more conventional environmental indicators, such as the condition of SSSIs, would suggest that the West Midlands is not performing particularly well.

Overall assessment of progress against outcomes for each of the eight Themes

- 4.9 The list of ‘ingredients’ or outcomes linked to rural community sustainability which was introduced in Box 4-1 is re-presented in Table 4-1. Based on both the foregoing discussion – and the evidence deriving from our Thematic Chapters – the Table reports two different sets of issues:
- first, it indicates how – in general terms – rural areas of the West Midlands are performing against each outcome indicator. For each individual Theme:
 - **green** indicates that rural areas are moving in the right direction towards sustainability, based on the evidence we have been able to review
 - **red** suggests that the direction of travel in rural areas is at odds with the desired outcome
 - **grey** indicates that although there ought, in principle, to be a relationship, our research has not provided any evidence relating to changes within it
 - second, it looks across the Theme-based perspectives, to make an overall assessment, again based on the evidence we have been able to review.

Table 4-1: Ingredients of rural community sustainability, and progress in the rural West Midlands against each Theme

Outcome-related ingredients of Sustainable Rural Communities	Emerging assessment across all eight Themes	Themes and current direction of travel							
		Housing	Low Carbon	Employment provision	IT infrastructure	Economic inclusion	Green infrastructure	Rural Services	Rural economy
Social									
Mixed communities with a balance of ages, occupations	↓	Grey	White	Grey	Green	Red	White	Red	Red
No extreme inequalities in wealth or opportunities	↓	Grey	White	Grey	Green	Red	White	Grey	Grey
Local distinctiveness and pride of place	↔	Grey	Grey	Grey	White	Grey	Grey	White	White
Safe and healthy neighbourhoods	↔	Green	Grey	White	White	Grey	Grey	Red	White
Strong, effective and inclusive governance	↓	Red	Grey	Grey	White	White	Grey	Red	White
Alignment between workplace-based and residence-based earnings	↓	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey	Red	White	Grey	Red
A range of services to meet personal, community and economic needs (including education and training, healthcare, leisure and retail)	↓	Grey	Red	Grey	Green	Grey	White	Red	Red
Economic									
Flourishing local economy, providing jobs and wealth	↔	Grey	White	Green	Green	Red	White	Red	Red
Diverse economic base including high value and high skilled jobs in rural areas	↔	White	White	Red	Green	White	White	White	Red
Viable and sustainable primary sector	↑	White	White	White	Green	Grey	Grey	White	Green
High rates of locally financed and initiated small enterprises	↑	White	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	White	Grey	Green
Inclusive economy providing employment and consumption opportunities to all residents	↓	Grey	Grey	Red	Green	Red	White	Red	Red
Access to and use of cutting-edge ICT	↑	White	Grey	Grey	Green	White	White	Green	Green
Variety and balance of land use between employment, housing and services/infrastructure	↓	Grey	Red	Green	White	White	Grey	Grey	Grey
Greater local production and supply of products	↑	White	White	White	Green	White	Grey	Grey	Green
Environmental									
Efficient consumption of resources and energy	↔	Green	Red	Grey	Green	White	Grey	Grey	Red

Outcome-related ingredients of Sustainable Rural Communities	Emerging assessment across all eight Themes	Themes and current direction of travel							
		Housing	Low Carbon	Employment provision	IT infrastructure	Economic inclusion	Green Infrastructure	Rural Services	Rural economy
Attractive and accessible countryside	↔								
Reduced need to travel and car dependency	↓								
Greater availability of sustainable forms of travel	↓								
Space for renewable energy production and sustainable transport	↔								
Natural resources and biodiversity protected and enhanced	↓								

Source: SQW Consulting

- 4.10 The colours are of course a rather crude assessment. Within each cell there are typically a number of interacting factors which sometimes pull in opposite directions. And in most cases, the evidence on impacts and trends is limited or inconclusive. Nonetheless, it is still valuable to attempt an assessment of the direction of travel in relation to the different outcomes and for each Theme.

Housing

- 4.11 Based on the evidence, our assessment is that the region’s performance with regard to housing is quite weak on most of the *social* ingredients of sustainability, mainly because of rising house prices and the growing affordability problem highlighted in our Thematic Chapter. High prices relative to local wages, coupled with the shortage of affordable housing, are tending to exclude those on lower incomes and this runs contrary to the goal of mixed communities. Likewise, high prices are creating the large differentials in wealth levels that are seen, especially, in accessible rural areas. The green score against ‘healthy and safe communities’ however reflects the view that new housing is planned with health and safety in mind, to a greater extent than would be the case for previous housing, and that modern building standards provide better security and living conditions.
- 4.12 On the *environmental* side, new housing performs better in terms of energy and resource efficiency than old stock, hence the green score, although construction is obviously resource consuming and can be expected to have a negative impact on the conservation of habitats and landscapes.

Low carbon principles

- 4.13 Low carbon impacts on social and economic ingredients are hard to judge, except to say that the trend of growing emissions, and the consequences for climate change, are unlikely to be positive for healthy and safe communities. Unsurprisingly, the effect on a number of

environmental ingredients can be judged as red in that the trends are towards a greater consumption of resources, greater travel and an increase in carbon fuel use, all of which is likely to have a negative impact on the natural environment.

Employment provision

- 4.14 The evidence suggests that the overall quantity of provision in rural areas is sufficient, and the distribution of quantities and sizes of site between the more and less accessible rural areas is broadly appropriate. However, the nature of demand is changing rapidly: rural areas are experiencing relatively high rates of business formation and most of the growth in employment and number of businesses is in the services sector. In the context of these changes, it is much more questionable whether the type of land and premises that are available is appropriate. In particular, there appears to be very limited provision of specialist business space for new and small firms, although there is evidence of some interesting new initiatives, for example involving virtual networks. Provision for homeworking is also growing, although there is still very little purpose-designed live/work space and most people are adapting existing residences, which inevitably vary greatly in their suitability for mixed residential and business use.
- 4.15 Arguably, therefore, in terms of the economy, the current quality of provision for employment is not sufficient to support the growth of high value jobs in rural areas, or to ensure employment opportunities for all residents, although the situation does appear to be improving. The social and environmental impacts are difficult to assess. For example, working from home is likely to reduce congestion and commuting, but if the housing is poorly insulated, the carbon impact of working from home may actually increase, despite a reduction in use of the car.

IT infrastructure

- 4.16 Based on the evidence we have been able to review, IT infrastructure is judged as making a positive contribution across social, economic and environmental ingredients. ICT plays an increasingly important role in taking services and other benefits out to people in rural settlements (as the Economic Inclusion and Critical Rural Services Thematic Chapters show), and therefore helps in making these communities ones in which a mix of people with a variety of service and other needs can live. Arguably, ICT also makes a positive contribution to the desirable outcome of closing the gap between workplace and residence-based earnings in that it underpins the relatively high levels of homeworking and self-employment (described in the Employment Provision and Rural Economy Thematic Chapters), some of which is in higher-value knowledge-based sectors. For the same reasons, it makes a positive contribution to the economic ingredients of flourishing, diverse and inclusive local economies. On the environmental side, it reduces the need to travel and thereby leads to more efficient consumption of resources and energy.
- 4.17 However, within this positive view of the contribution of ICT there are some counter-currents or caveats to note. By facilitating homeworking, ICT encourages long-distance commuting and the negative social and environmental effects associated with that. There are also some constraints to the contribution in that ICT/Broadband availability is fairly universal (with the

exception of some ‘not-spots’) but the take up and productive use of that appears to be lagging in remoter rural areas. Most critically, there is the possibility, flagged up in the IT Thematic Chapter, that rural areas will not benefit from next generation technologies; in the future, this is likely to mean that the relative progress of rural areas towards desired outcomes will turn from green to red.

Economic inclusion

- 4.18 The high levels of deprivation seen in rural West Midlands and especially some remoter areas are evidence of trends that run against the desired sustainability outcomes. It constrains the contribution that people can make towards the social and economic life of communities and it widens the gap in wealth and opportunities. The problem of economic exclusion is associated with lower paid and lower skilled jobs in the local economy and the consequent widening of the gap in wealth and opportunities. The effect on services is judged as negative, although this is hard to substantiate with the evidence available. On the one hand, deprivation generates demands for certain social services, but the prevailing effect is likely to be the suppression of service demand, especially for private sector services.

Green Infrastructure

- 4.19 Green Infrastructure is a relatively new concept and one that, so far, has been associated with urban development only. For those reasons, our assessment based on actual data has relatively little to report.
- 4.20 Looking ahead, however, the *potential* contribution to rural community sustainability could be substantial. Convincing arguments are made for the contribution that Green Infrastructure can make to the social goals of local distinctiveness, pride of place, and safe and healthy neighbourhoods. On the economic ingredients, Green Infrastructure may contribute to the viability of the primary sector and it may provide sites and resources for the local production of food and other land-based goods and services. Space for renewable energy production in particular is identified in the Thematic Chapter, which also suggests that Green Infrastructure can make a positive contribution towards sustainable transport by providing corridors for ‘green’ modes of travel such as cycling. Lastly, Green Infrastructure potentially can make a direct contribution to the goals of attractive and accessible countryside (which, as the Thematic Chapter notes, should not necessarily be taken for granted in rural areas) and protecting natural resources and biodiversity.

Critical Rural Services

- 4.21 Critical rural services are judged to be moving away from desired outcomes on almost all criteria because of the relatively poor availability of services across rural parts of the region, compared to elsewhere. Service deprivation increases with ‘rurality’ in terms of remoteness and smaller settlements, although remoter market towns tend to buck this trend by being more self-sufficient in service terms. The one sustainability outcome where services scores positively is in access to and use of ICT, because of the growing use of ICT-based forms of service delivery. The decline of services runs contrary to the economic goal of inclusive and

flourishing local economies and it is also at odds with the environmental goal of reducing the need to travel.

Rural economy

- 4.22 Rural economies particularly in remoter areas, are performing relatively poorly in terms of investment, business activity and earnings, and for that reason, are obstructing progress towards social ingredients of sustainability; namely mixed communities with a balance of occupations and ages, which in turn would support a wider range of services. The trend towards a rural economic profile that is increasingly similar to the urban could be argued as running contrary to local distinctiveness.
- 4.23 On the economic side, a positive contribution to several desired economic outcomes is noted: a green score is given for the high rates of locally financed and initiated small enterprise, because of the higher rates of self-employment and home-based working (although further analysis is required into whether these gains are undone by the lower investment and general level of business activity noted in the remoter rural areas). The rural economy is also assessed as moving in the right directions in terms of the goal of access to and use of ICT (with the caveat on take-up and productive use noted earlier) and on greater local production and supply of goods, noticing the growing market for locally sourced food and potentially other products such as energy.
- 4.24 The contribution to desired environmental outcomes appears less favourable, with the nature of rural economies acting against the efficient use of resources, the conservation of landscapes and biodiversity, and sustainable travel. The exception to this is the view that the direction of travel is more positive when it comes to growing opportunities for renewable energy – although this is potential rather than actual. As the Low Carbon Principles Thematic Chapter notes, the region is lagging behind in terms of the development of its renewable energy resources.

Conclusions

- 4.25 Box 4-1, Table 4-1 and the arguments summarised above represent a starting point for understanding the nature of sustainable rural communities and for judging progress towards them across a complex array of Themes. The Box, the Table, and the assessment, need to be verified and developed further as data are improved, and they would benefit from ongoing discussion amongst regional partners as part of the process of implementing the WMRSS and WMES. They could also become useful monitoring tools in charting progress towards rural community sustainability in the round.
- 4.26 As it stands, the Table would suggest that, overall:
- the performance of rural areas appears, generally, to be improving on outcomes linked to some *Themes* – most notably IT infrastructure. Conversely, performance linked to the low carbon Theme appears to be deteriorating. In other Theme areas, there is a mixed assessment of progress against specific outcomes

- turning to focus on the *outcomes* (i.e. looking across the rows within Table 4-1), it is clear that – in most cases – there is a mix of green and red assessments. This suggests either trade-offs or potential conflicts. But either way, it suggests a complicated backdrop in which the WMRSS and WMES – and in the future, the SIRS – might need to operate.

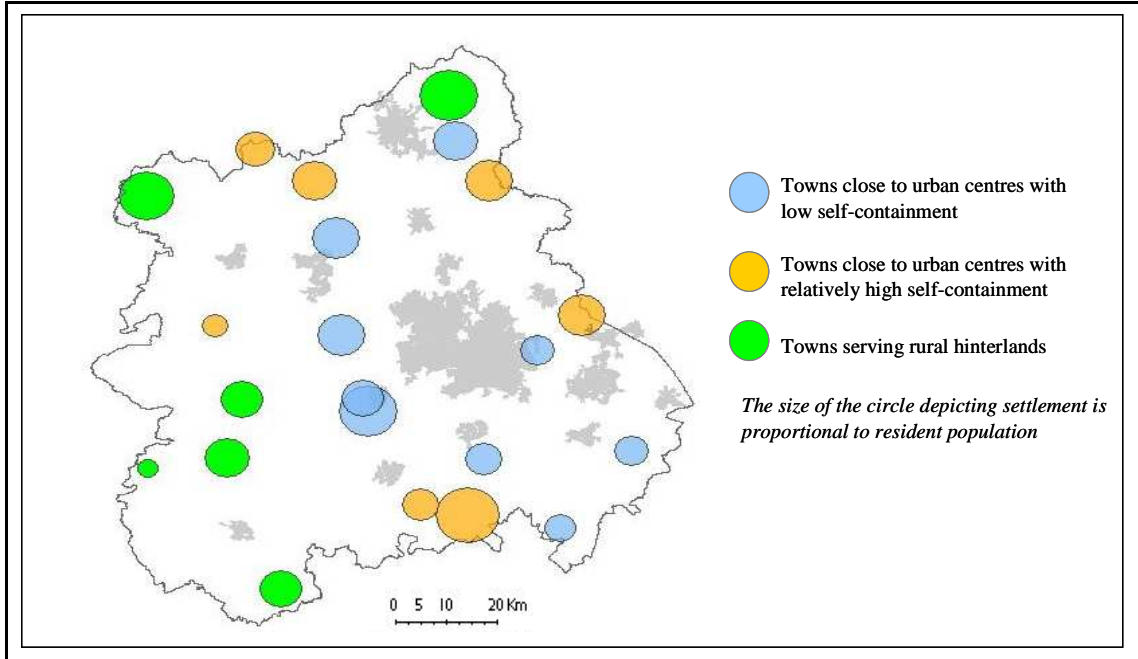
5: Spatial perspectives

- 5.1 In considering the preliminary findings from Table 4-1 – particularly in the future-facing context of the SIRS – we are left with one further critical question. From the evidence summarised in Tables 3-1 and 4-1, is it reasonable to make a judgement on progress towards rural community sustainability across the West Midlands region as a whole? Put another way, are the spatial variations in the assessment of outcomes sufficient to obviate the value of the overall judgement?
- 5.2 In devising a research frame for this study (Chapter 2), we sought to use the dichotomy between rural areas which are remote and those which are accessible in relation to “larger urban areas” (as defined by then-ODPM in the *State of English Cities*, 2006); Local Authority Districts were allocated to one of these types objectively, on the basis of commuting patterns. The typology was used reasonably consistently through the Thematic Chapters. But as a device, how useful was it in capturing the contrasts between rural areas from a range of Theme-based perspectives, and what were its limitations? Some of headline findings – drawing on data from the Thematic Chapters – are presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Understanding the nature and extent of spatial variation

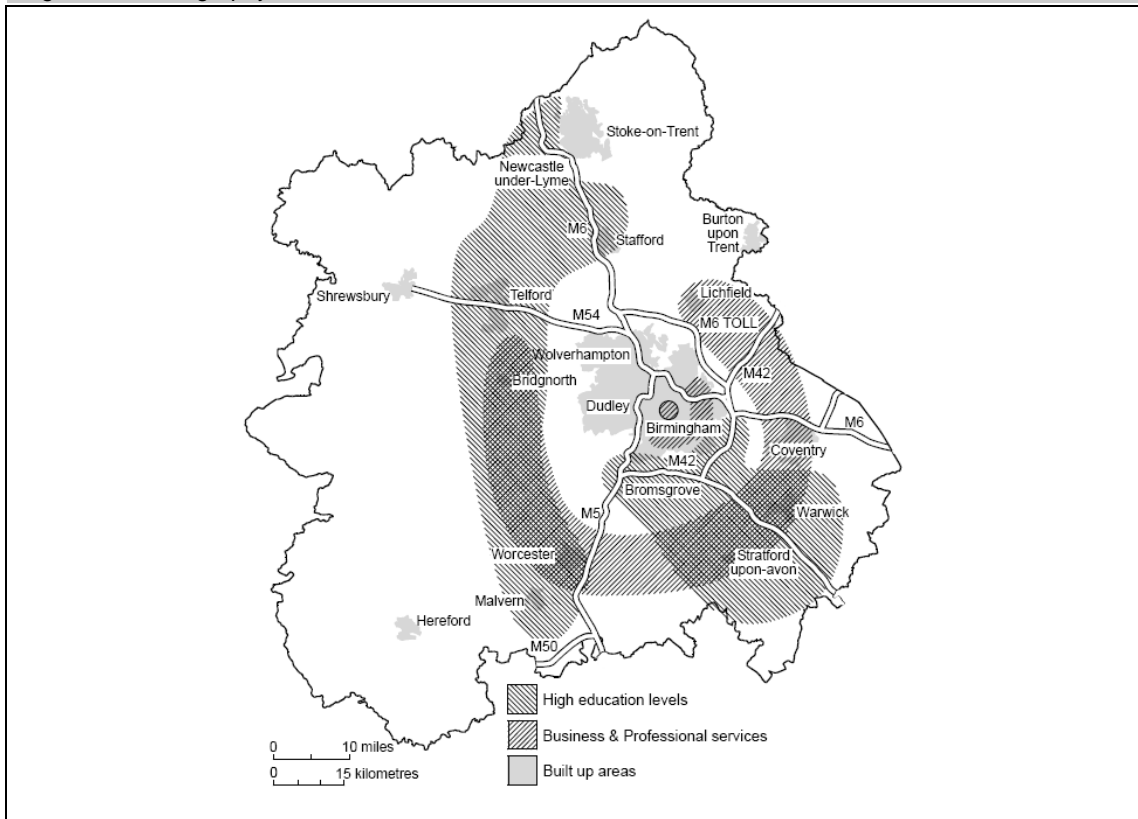
- 5.3 Based on the relationship between two key indicators of economic character – the degree of self containment (in terms of local employment) and average travel to work distances – the Rural Economy Thematic Chapter set out a typology of market towns across the West Midlands region. When the populated typology was plotted on a map, a clear regional geography of market town functionality emerged: market towns in the west of the region and the north east corner (essentially the Peak district area) appeared to be different from those in the central area and the south (Figure 5-1). Essentially, while the first group was characterised by a high level of self containment, the second typically encompassed much more ‘open’ market towns in which the flow of workers – both in-commuters and out-commuters – was far greater in absolute and relative terms.

Figure 5-1: The 22 case study settlements and market town typology



Source: Map taken from the SQW/LUC Rural Economy Study, Working Paper II, 2007 ©Crown Copyright

Figure 5-2: Geography of the “E3I Belt”



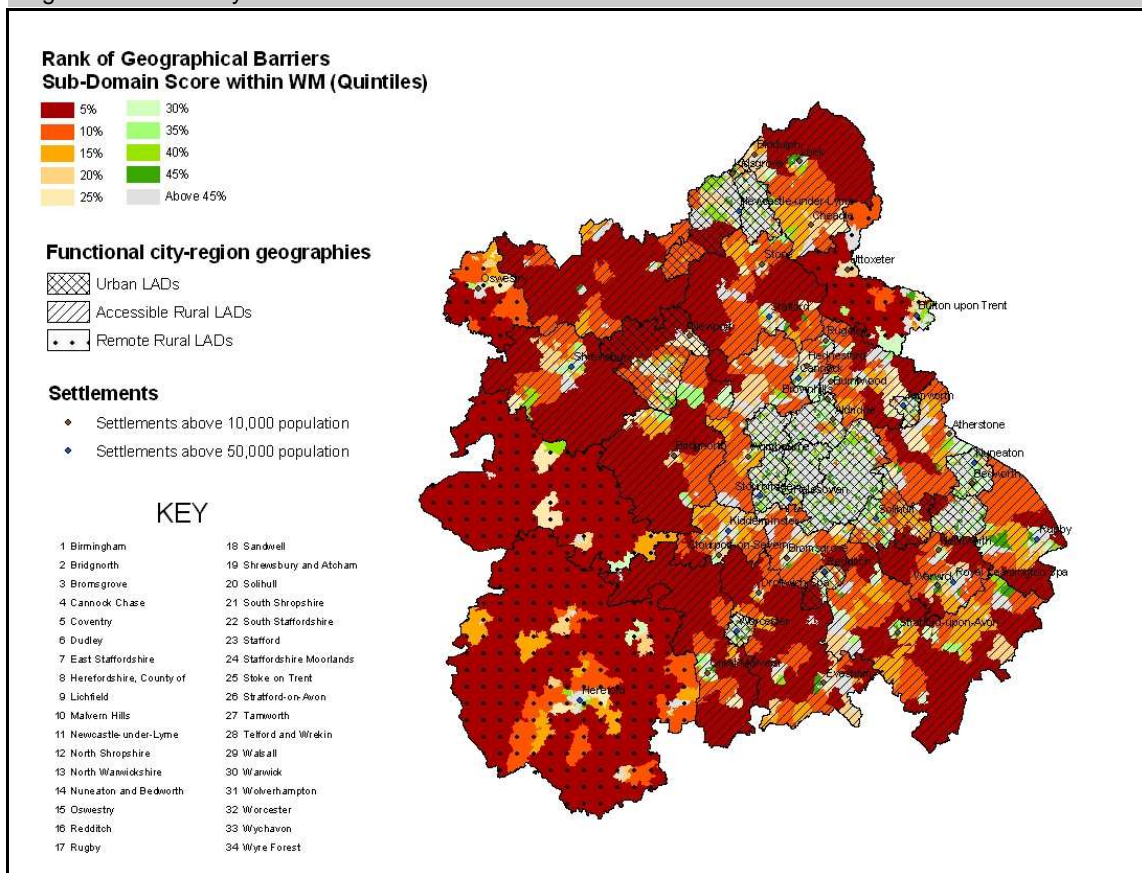
Source: *The Functioning Economic Geography of the West Midlands Region Study* by the University of Birmingham for the West Midlands Regional Observatory, 2006

5.4 A second perspective – also from the Rural Economy Thematic Chapter – related to the geography of the so-called E³I area. This had been identified through research completed by the University of Birmingham into the functional geography of the West Midlands region. This found that the spatial patterning of economic activity in the West Midlands is shifting

away from Birmingham and the Black country to a belt which lies between 20 km and 40 km from the conurbation and includes Stratford-on-Avon, Warwick, Lichfield, Cannock, Bridgnorth, and Bromsgrove. The study found that the belt combined economic, entrepreneurial, environmental (in terms of quality of life) and innovation factors, and for that reason, was labelled “E³I”¹³ (Figure 5-2).

5.5 From the Thematic Chapter on Critical Rural Services – and, indeed, also from data included in the Economic Inclusion Thematic Chapter – we can observe the spatial patterning with regard to indicators more closely aligned to the social pillar of sustainable development. For illustrative purposes, one map is provided below.

Figure 5-3: Proximity to Services in the West Midlands



Source: *The English Indices of Deprivation 2007, Geographical Barriers sub-domain.*

5.6 The ‘Geographical Barriers sub-domain of the ‘barriers to housing and services’ domain from the English Indices of Deprivation¹⁴ – mapped in Figure 5-3 – covers four services (GP surgeries, post offices, primary schools, stores/supermarkets) and measures road distance to outlets. It suggests that

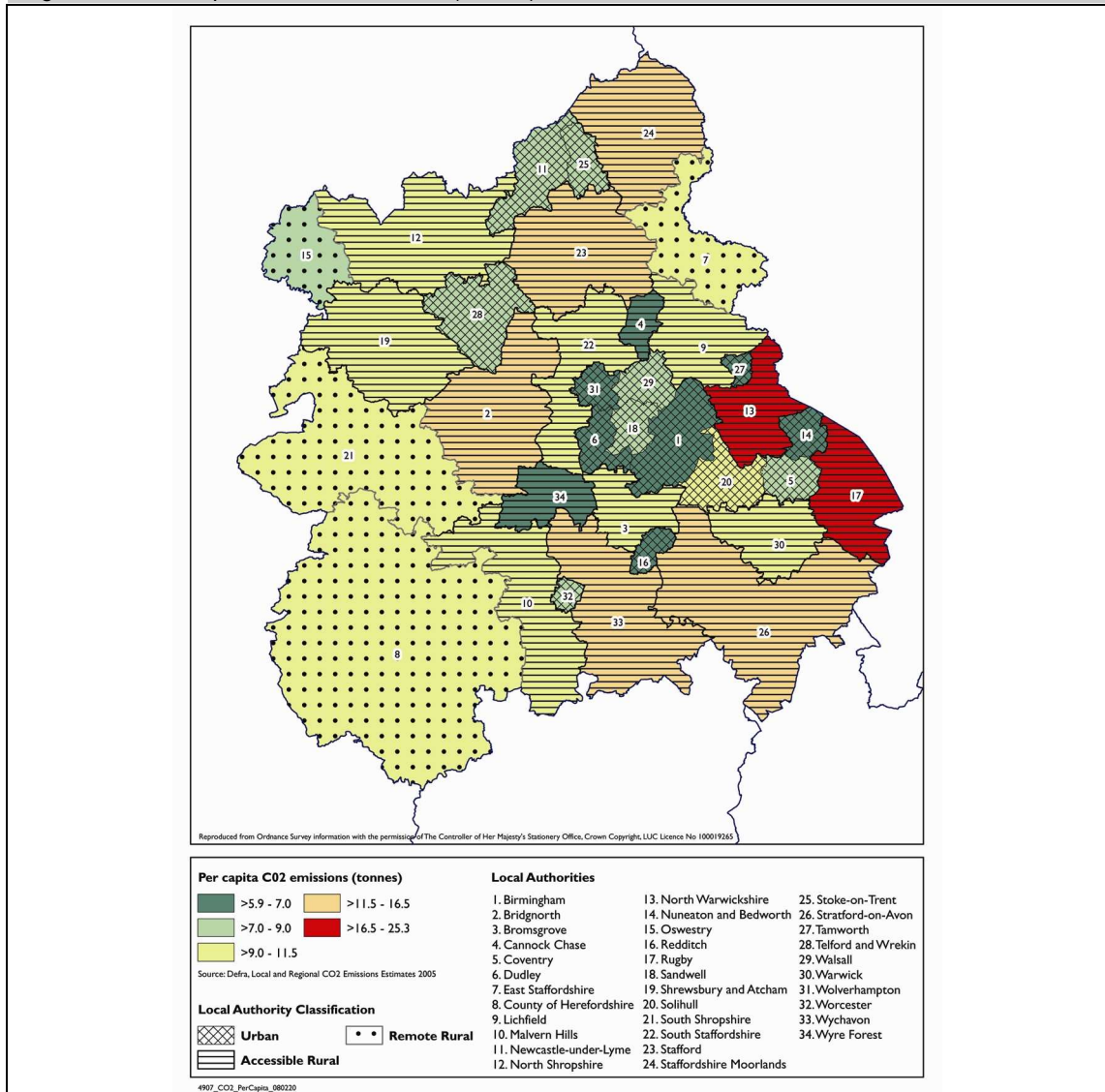
- service deprivation is more pronounced in smaller settlements and this increases with sparsity and remoteness in a consistent way. However, the level of service deprivation in accessible small settlements is also high

¹³ *The Functioning Economic Geography of the West Midlands Region Study* by the University of Birmingham for the West Midlands Regional Observatory, 2006

¹⁴ CLG *The English indices of deprivation 2007*

- market towns appear to perform a stronger service role in remoter areas, while the viability of services in their more accessible counterparts appears more marginal
- because accessible areas have better transport links and tend to be more prosperous, most residents may be able to overcome the relative lack of local services (indeed, it could be argued that their greater ability to access outside services, typically by car, contributes to local service decline). However for a minority of less mobile residents, the issues around access to services might actually be more acute in “accessible” areas.

Figure 5-4: Per Capita Carbon Emissions (tonnes)



5.7 Finally, from the Low Carbon Principles Thematic Chapter, we gain an insight into spatial variations with regard to carbon emissions – a key environmental indicator. Figure 5-4 shows the total per capita CO₂ emissions (tonnes) for each local authority district in 2005. The map indicates that:

- the major and large urban areas of the West Midlands generally have lower levels of per capita CO₂ emissions, although there are some notable exceptions such as Oswestry which although a remote rural area also has very low per capita CO₂ emissions
- the highest per capita emissions of CO₂ are within the accessible rural local authority Districts of North Warwickshire and Rugby. These high CO₂ emission levels are partly attributable to the extensive through-traffic along the main transport links of the M6, M40 and M69 combined with other routes
- the accessible rural areas tend to have higher carbon emissions than the remote rural areas.

Spatial synthesis

5.8 Looking across the four maps presented above – and indeed across others contained within the body of the Thematic Chapters – broad spatial contrasts can be drawn. In general:

- the rural areas we have classed as “accessible” tend to perform strongly on economic indicators and average levels of deprivation are low. However there do appear to be some major issues and concerns with regard to the performance of these areas in relation to key environmental indicators: per capita carbon emissions are the highest in the region. This is wholly consistent with the market towns-based observation that local labour markets in the more accessible areas simply tend to be much more fluid with high levels of both in- and out-commuting
- the rural areas we have classed as “remote” generally perform less well on key economic indicators, and we know that average earnings are well below the regional average. Within these areas, the incidence of deprivation tends to be higher than within the more accessible areas. However performance on environmental indicators is better and – at the level of individual market towns – the evidence for relatively high levels of self containment is strong.

Insights – and limitations

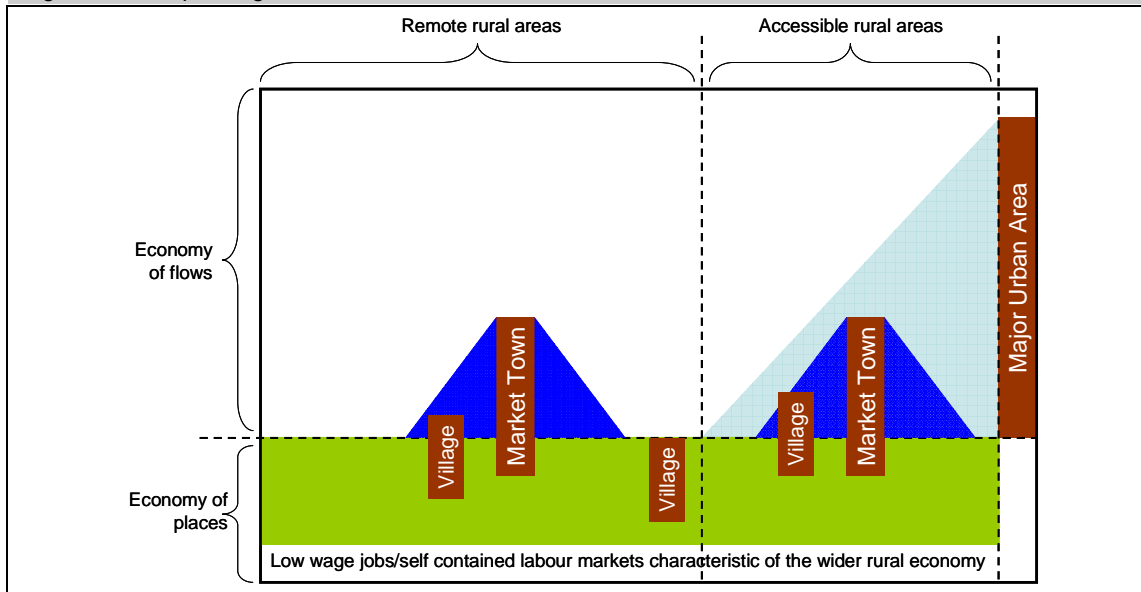
5.9 On the face of it then, the distinction between remote and accessible areas appears to be useful and it captures some of the key contrasts between different rural areas within the West Midlands. Hence it points to the different combinations of circumstances that need to be negotiated in order to effect increased rural community sustainability: in different areas, the mix of issues is different and, in broad-brush terms, contrasts can be drawn between areas that are more remote and those that are more accessible. However as a basis for policy, we would caution against taking this argument too far, for two different sets of reasons.

5.10 First, we think the map of remote and accessible rural areas needs to be used carefully, and – in a policy context – we would advise against demarcating areas according to a simple binary remote/accessible distinction. The reason for this is essentially the complexity of the underlying issues. Figure 5-3 (above), for example, demonstrated that although there is a high incidence of extreme deprivation in the Districts we have labelled as remote, there are

also sizeable parts of more accessible Districts in which the challenges are just as profound: North Shropshire and Staffordshire Moorlands are two examples. The danger is that if policy is structured solely around “average conditions” in areas described as remote or accessible, then the needs of local communities in these (and other) Districts could simply be overlooked.

- 5.11 Second – and perhaps more fundamentally – there is a need to be cognisant of the processes which are driving particular outcomes described in Chapter 4. These may or may not assume a straightforwardly spatial form.

Figure 5-5: Unpacking rural circumstances



Source: SQW Consulting

- 5.12 Figure 5-5 attempts to illustrate this argument. The accessible/remote distinction provides some, broad, indication of local circumstances – and in seeking to frame regional-level strategy, this is both useful and important. However the graphic adds a further dimension, distinguishing between what we have labelled loosely “economy of places” and “economy of flows”. The former might be regarded as that which is characteristically (and, to some extent, traditionally) rural: it is characterised by reasonably self contained local labour markets, a low wage/low skills equilibrium¹⁵, a continuing land-based sector, and an environmental performance (on CO₂ emissions indicators) which is relatively favourable. The “economy of flows”, by contrast, is premised on a strong model of mobility and interdependence: residence-based earnings are higher than those derived by working locally, the resident skills base is strong, and environmental performance is quite concerning.

- 5.13 Typically, the balance between the “economy of places” and the “economy of flows” is different between remote and accessible areas. But – as Figure 5-5 attempts to portray – this second “cut” allows the remote/accessible distinction to be nuanced. For example:

- the graphic illustrates that the “economy of places” is evident in all rural areas. Relatively it is more important in remote areas, but in absolute terms it is not absent from those that are more accessible. Given that its performance on some indicators of rural community sustainability is relatively strong (i.e. predominantly those linked to

¹⁵ This is driven by the characteristics of jobs that are available locally

environmental outcomes), its importance should not be overlooked, even if – in quantitative terms – it is a relatively minor part of the whole

- conversely, elements of the “economy of flows” are not wholly missing from the more remote areas, recognising that the processes summarised in Figure 5-5 operate at a variety of spatial scales. Market towns provide this function – albeit to varying degrees and on a smaller scale than Major Urban Areas. To the extent that remote areas can benefit from economies of agglomeration, this really ought to be encouraged – particularly if it can be advanced in a manner that retains some of the strengths of the underlying – and still important – “economy of places” character.

6: Emerging policy implications

- 6.1 From our starting point in Chapter 2 – and specifically Figure 2-2 – the two preceding chapters have examined in some detail the issues relating to the appropriate recipe of outcomes linked to the processes of rural community sustainability (Chapter 4) and key spatial dimensions across the West Midlands (Chapter 5). In this sixth chapter, we examine the third and fourth components of Figure 2-2 with a view to providing some insight into the key policy interface between homes, jobs and services, recognising that in terms of sustaining rural communities – and achieving the ambitions of both the WMRSS and the WMES – this set of relationships is absolutely critical.
- 6.2 The chapter that follows is divided into three main sections:
- first, it examines – at a headline level – the interactions between the different Themes, particularly in terms of potential interventions, recognising the high level of interdependence that exists
 - second, it considers briefly the rationale for policy intervention and, linked to this, it proposes one core indicator that might be used to monitor the heart of Figure 2-2
 - finally, the chapter turns to consider the implications for policy, principally at regional and local levels, but also with reference to central government.

Interdependencies across Theme-based interventions

- 6.3 The eight Themes that have provided the focus for this study were selected because they were all materially significant with regard to the sustainability of rural communities. But none of the Themes exist in isolation and – in seeking to effect improvements within them – the full extent of inter-Theme interdependence is apparent.
- 6.4 Based on the arguments set out in the Thematic Chapters, Table 6-1 below tries to distil some of the key interdependencies emerging from the data and analysis. In the main, it suggests that interventions with regard to one Theme area ought to be capable of being advanced in a manner which effects positive outcomes with regard to a second. On the face of it, then, the scope for ‘win-win’ situations appears to be substantial.

Table 6-1: Cross-Theme implications for effecting more sustainable rural communities¹⁶

Theme	Principal Linkages
Housing	<p>Linkages between interventions associated with housing and other Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvements to existing housing may enable homeworking and start-ups (thereby impacting on the local economy and potentially carbon emissions) and greater energy efficiency (through fitting insulation, cladding pipes, etc.) • the provision of housing (of appropriate tenure and size, and including affordable housing) and its location impacts upon the local economy (location of employment premises, supply of labour and demand for goods) and, consequently, on the scope for greater economic

¹⁶ Note that the set of inter-relationships presented here is not exhaustive, but it does summarise the principal findings emerging from our study

Theme	Principal Linkages
	<p>inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> new housing development can impact positively on per capita carbon emissions (both in terms of energy efficient buildings, and commuting flows) the scale and distribution of housing developments can trigger increased service provision – both through statutory providers and through the private sector (because of increased economies of scale) – but it can also simultaneously displace provision from other settlements new housing with workspace incorporated (live work accommodation) provides for the increasing number of people needing, or preferring, purpose designed space rather than the conversion of existing residential accommodation
Low carbon principles	<p>Linkages between interventions associated with low carbon principles and other Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> steps to reduce carbon footprints (e.g. through a reduction in food miles, etc.) could potentially generate increased opportunities for local businesses exploiting the rural potential for low carbon energy production (e.g. biomass; district heating; photovoltaics; ground source heat pumps) can provide opportunities for new forms of land management, and business opportunities, supporting the local economy multiple use of community buildings could help to reduce carbon footprints and also costs associated with viability of critical rural services radical steps to reduce carbon emissions could put rural communities which are dependent on incomes earned elsewhere under a good deal of pressure
Employment provision	<p>Linkages between interventions associated with employment provision and other Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> employment provision plays an important role in enabling economic growth, economic inclusion and the self-sustainability of rural communities, and discouraging out-commuting (thereby reducing carbon emissions) because of differential land values, employment land is under considerable pressure for housing uses, but there is a need to ensure that employment provision keeps pace with housing growth designation of employment land, and the degree of flexibility with regard to the use of buildings, can have implications for the supply of critical rural services decisions with regard to the allocation of employment land needs to take account of changing patterns of living and working and this has clear links to other Themes, most notably rural economy, economic inclusion, housing and IT Infrastructure incorporating workspace and retail units in multi-purpose community facilities in response to increasing demand from new and small businesses could help make such facilities viable.
IT Infrastructure	<p>Linkages between interventions associated with IT infrastructure and other Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> access to broadband should be an important consideration for the location of new housing and employment sites and premises increasing access to IT can reduce the need to travel, thereby improving outcomes in terms of carbon dioxide emissions increasing access to – and expertise in using – IT can improve the performance of rural businesses and it can also help to combat some forms of economic exclusion
Economic inclusion	<p>Linkages between interventions associated with economic inclusion and other Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provision of localised services and employment opportunities will contribute towards addressing economic inclusion increasing access to – and expertise in using – IT infrastructures can help to combat some forms of economic exclusion, and potentially reduce carbon emissions addressing economic exclusion ought to raise prospects for economic growth, potentially through a larger supply of labour and improved skills
Green Infrastructure (GI)	<p>Linkages between interventions associated with Green Infrastructure and other Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some GI sites may be suitable for renewable energy/biomass, therefore providing economic opportunities and reducing carbon emissions GI can provide a mechanism through which communities, local pride and inclusion can be strengthened, and areas can attract inward investment and tourism, and support

Theme	Principal Linkages
	<p>regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the location and amount of new housing and employment premises will affect the need for GI, and developments should incorporate GI principles GI can help make walking and transport more attractive, thereby reducing carbon emissions
Critical Rural Services	<p>Linkages between interventions associated with Critical Rural Services and other Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased economic activity (linked to employment land) can raise demand for, and supply of, services those most at risk of economic exclusion typically struggle to access services IT will increase in importance as a means of service delivery, but this must take into account the digitally excluded the more that critical rural services are lost, the greater the need (and tendency, which is also a causal factor) to travel further to access these services, increasing carbon emissions
Rural Economy	<p>Linkages between interventions associated with Rural Economy and other Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased economic activity (linked to employment land) can raise demand for, and supply of, critical rural services and address economic exclusion issues improved performance of businesses in rural areas may increase demand for skilled labour, putting further pressure on housing supply, but there is a risk that it could effect greater socio-economic polarisation improved business performance – particularly if the focus starts to be non-local markets – may increase demand for transportation (of both people and goods) improved business performance may generate demand for employment land and other forms of employment provision business growth in rural areas is likely to increase the importance of the IT infrastructure

Source: SQW Consulting

6.5 But, given this really very sanguine assessment of the possibilities for moving forward, why are there quite so many red cells in Table 4-1, and what should policy-makers try and do in response?

Why policy intervention might be justified¹⁷

6.6 Conventionally, policy makers have been heavily informed by economic theory in identifying possible rationales for intervention. In particular, notions of *market failure* have been hugely important¹⁸, as have concerns about *equity* (of outcome and/or opportunity) and, increasingly, concerns with regard to *environmental impact*. These three perspectives – which map directly onto the economic, social and environmental domains of sustainable development – provide a foundation for effecting sustainable rural communities. However in a spatial context – and particularly one that is rural and differentiated – the arguments are quite complicated.

6.7 In itself, spatial variation (either within rural areas, or between rural and urban) is not a rationale for intervention. One key reason for this concerns the benefits arising from processes of agglomeration: “thick” labour markets, networks of specialist suppliers, knowledge spillovers, and so on. There is much evidence to suggest that factors of this nature are a source of competitive advantage and they are one reason why economic performance is better in some areas than others. But they are not a market failure; in fact, they arguably

¹⁷ This sub-section draws on a paper produced recently by CLG: *Communities and Local Government Economics Paper 1: A Framework for Intervention*, Communities and Local Government, 2007

¹⁸ Note that market failure arguments are important in both deprived areas requiring regeneration and areas which perform strongly on key metrics in defining the rationale for intervention

provide evidence that the market is working well. In the specific context of the rural West Midlands – and as argued in the Thematic Chapter on Rural Economy – we might posit that the rural areas within the E³I Belt¹⁹ are demonstrably part of an agglomerative process, and benefits – in terms of economic performance – follow.

6.8 There may not therefore be a strong market failure/economic rationale for intervention from the perspective of rural areas within the E³I Belt. However there may well be an environmental one. The Thematic Chapter on Low Carbon Principles demonstrated quite convincingly that the accessible rural areas – many of which are within the E³I Belt – have significantly higher per capita carbon emissions than those elsewhere, and road transport is the single biggest contributory factor. There could also be a strong equity argument; it is within the more accessible rural areas that the differential between workplace-based and residence-based earnings tends to be most acute. In practice, regional policy makers have to balance needs and inter-relationships between different areas. However the focus of our argument here is on rural areas; inter-relationships between urban and rural areas are not considered as part of this analysis.

6.9 In response to “the economy of places” as portrayed above (which is strongly represented in the more remote rural areas – predominantly those in the west of the region but also those in the north east – and is not absent from many more accessible rural areas), the issues are different. In terms of the sustainability of communities, a number of key factors stand out:

- first, there may be issues with regard to path dependency and a concern that “what these areas do best” is intrinsically low wage in character (food and drink, tourism, etc.). In this context, equity arguments – certainly in a regional context – start to kick in, and they may provide a rationale for intervention: levels of earnings are notably lower than those elsewhere in the region
- second, the scope for – and likelihood of – economic exclusion is generally greater. The Thematic Chapter on Economic Inclusion demonstrated that there was a high incidence of Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the more remote rural parts of the region that had seen their ranking with regard to the Indices of Deprivation decline in the period 2004-2007. Further, the Theme Chapter on Critical Rural Services flagged the high incidence of acute deprivation on the “barriers to housing and services domain” from the Indices of Deprivation, 2007
- third, the challenges associated with the housing market (which were considered in the Thematic Chapter on Housing) also present clear challenges; barriers to mobility may be preventing the more remote rural areas from capturing agglomeration benefits. And this assertion may – paradoxically – be especially important on environmental grounds: we know that the more remote rural areas perform better in terms of per capita carbon emissions.

¹⁹ *The Functioning Economic Geography of the West Midlands Region* Study by the University of Birmingham for the West Midlands Regional Observatory, 2006

²¹ It is also worth noting, however, that individuals and households with higher earnings tend to have the highest carbon footprints

- 6.10 Hence the rationale for intervention may well vary and – in seeking to advance thinking with regard to the Single Integrated Regional Strategy – it is essential that there is clarity in isolating the problem(s)/challenge(s) that policy is seeking to remedy: there is not one uniform or homogenous rural “condition”, and equally, there is no one uniform or prescriptive “solution”.
- 6.11 However the lenses provided by the arguments relating to *market failure*, *issues to equity* and *environmental impact* – applied in a context that is spatially differentiated – are, in general, helpful; it is because of one or other of these that many of the “win-win” outcomes set out in Table 6-1 are frequently so difficult to achieve.

Back to Figure 2-2

- 6.12 Figure 2-2 had at its core the relationship between housing, jobs and services, and it considered these relationships at two levels: one targeted at individuals and a second focused on the community/settlement/place. Two groups of questions – both of which needed to be considered against a backdrop of spatial difference – followed:
- how can the individual be dissuaded from hyper-mobility (in a physical sense) and the “freedoms” associated with it?
 - what steps can be taken to ensure that the attributes of “the community/place” give the individual real options in making better and more sustainable choices with regard to housing, jobs and services?
- 6.13 Reflecting on all the evidence and argument cited in the eight individual Thematic Chapters, and also on the process of synthesis presented in this report, we are drawn back to one key indicator: earnings. In terms of Figure 2-2, for the working age population, earnings effectively define the relationship between jobs and housing and they also provide a fair insight into the issues surrounding access to services: for those with higher earnings, access to services is generally much less of a concern²¹. Yet in terms of earnings, there are two different – but equally challenging – concerns:
- in the more accessible rural areas, the principal problem – arguably – is the differential between residence-based and workplace-based earnings; as Table 6-2 highlights, this differential is approaching 10% (approximately £2,000). It is intimately bound up with issues of housing affordability and it is determined by – and determining of – *patterns of commuting to work*. Illustratively, it is worth noting that the district with the largest differential – Bridgnorth – has also performed poorly with regard to affordable housing completions in recent years
 - in the more remote areas, there is also an earnings problem, but it is a different one. As Table 6-2 indicates, mean annual workplace-based earnings in remote rural Districts in the West Midlands are approaching £6,000 (17%) lower than the English average. This differential – and everything it signals in terms of aspiration and opportunity – is bound up with *patterns of migration*; there is ample evidence of younger adults moving out of more remote rural areas as retirees move in, and this

again results in upward pressures on house prices and increasing affordability concerns.

Table 6-2: Mean annual earnings, residence-based and workplace-based, 2006

	Residence-based earnings (£)	Workplace-based earnings (£)	Difference (£)	Difference (%)
Regional				
W Mids - All Rural LADs	28,405	26,212	-2,193	-7.7
W Mids - Rural 50 LADs	26,590	25,534	-1,057	-4.0
W Mids - Rural 80 LADs	30,902	27,243	-3,658	-11.8
W Mids – Significant Rural LADs	28,380	26,223	-2,157	-7.6
Accessible Rural LADs	29,024	26,481	<u>-2,542</u>	<u>-8.8</u>
Remote Rural LADs	25,096	<u>24,847</u>	-249	-1.0
England	30,171	30,097	-74	-0.2

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

6.14 The processes underpinning the earnings data arguably provide a crucial insight in terms of the sustainability of rural communities. They also provide clear and multiple rationales for policy intervention that touch on many of the Themes that have provided the focus for this study. For example:

- *Market failures:* In more accessible areas, highly skilled people are not able to find jobs that use their skills to the full locally while in more remote areas, rural businesses are less likely to benefit from positive externalities (linked, for example, to specialist business support) and this may compromise overall competitiveness. Another key market failure is that associated with the management of the landscape; it is a classic “public good”, which every individual wishes to “consume” but few are prepared to pay for – and typically, earnings in the associated sectors are low
- *Equity issues:* Issues around rural housing affordability – which are acute in the West Midlands – point to communities that are increasingly polarised (and this is borne out by a comparison of the Indices of Deprivation from 2004 and 2007). The underlying issues are likely to be earning differentials in more accessible areas and wealth differentials in more remote ones. Additionally, as the demographic structure of remote rural communities shifts rapidly towards older age groups, the demand for people to work in health and social care – intrinsically low paid sectors – is growing. This may well be exacerbating some of the underlying problems and challenges
- *Environmental impacts:* Particularly in the more accessible areas, the environmental performance of rural communities (defined in terms of CO₂ emissions) appears quite poor²² and this is – very largely – a reflection of travel to work patterns and modes. Additionally, whilst homeworking – facilitated by the IT infrastructure – may reduce

²² Note that this comment is made in relation to CO₂ emissions data and some care is needed in its interpretation. In particular, the standard datasets focus on emissions and do not really address the fact that carbon emitted in rural areas is (probably) more likely to be taken up at night by trees and plants, etc. However on the basis of the available data, the fact of relatively high emissions in accessible rural areas remains

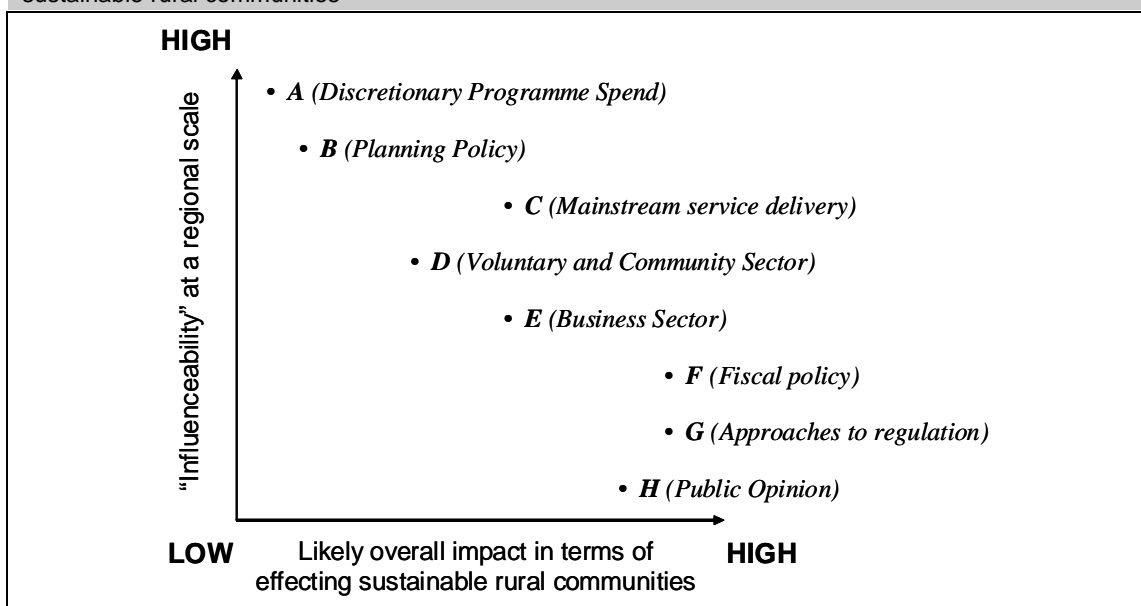
the need to travel, there is evidence that it can actually increase carbon footprints as more rural dwellings – which are typically large, old and poorly insulated – are heated during the working day.

- 6.15 Arguably then, if something could be done about the “earnings problem” – absolute levels in more remote areas, and the differentials within more accessible ones – then progress ought to be possible across many aspects of rural community sustainability, recognising that it is a *process* which exists both at the individual level, and at the scale of the communities/settlements/places as a whole.

Implications for policy levers

- 6.16 Within this overall context, there is much – potentially – that can be done (and, indeed, is being done) at a Theme-based level; detailed and specific recommendations are provided in Table 3-1 (and in the Thematic Chapters which sit behind it). In addition, however, it is important to consider the potential scope of a number of specific levers identified in Figure 2-2; some suggestions in this context are set out in Table 6-3 below.
- 6.17 Within this context, it is important to note that some of the levers are easier to control and influence than others. At a regional scale, the *degree of influence* declines, in broad terms, from A to H: from discretionary programme spend (where the degree of regional autonomy ought to be high) to fiscal and regulatory policy and public opinion (where regional influence is really quite limited). As illustrated in Figure 6-1, the *degree of impact* in terms of effecting more sustainable rural communities also changes, but (in general) in the opposite direction. Arguably, however, changes need to be brought to bear across all eight levers in order to effect a sustained transition to more sustainable rural communities – and to convert more of the outcome-related cells in Table 4-1 from red to green. Key to this will be strong rural proofing throughout.

Figure 6-1: The impact and “influenceability” of different policy levers in terms of effecting more sustainable rural communities



Source: SQW Consulting

Table 6-3: Scope and potential of different policy levers

Lever	Potential contribution in striving towards increased rural community sustainability	Decision-makers
A. Discretionary programme spend	<p>Discretionary programme spend is always likely to be in short supply (and in this context, the implications of SNR may represent a further challenge). Hence in seeking to effect enhanced rural community sustainability, it is important that it is used in a manner that is “synergistic” and complementary, but also with a clear underlying rationale. This comment relates both to “rural programmes” and programmes/activities which are delivered in rural and urban areas alike; with regard to the latter, strong rural proofing is clearly important</p> <p>Within this context, there is a strong rationale for a continued focus on market towns and, specifically, efforts to invest in their “day time” offer (i.e. as places for local people to work, shop, produce and consume services, and do “21st Century” business). Interventions to improve the vitality of market towns would appear important as a means of encouraging local people/businesses to spend more money locally, and less elsewhere</p> <p>Rural programme monies – like the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) – need to be disbursed in a manner which recognises the core outcomes linked to rural community sustainability and described above</p> <p>However, there are also clear examples of situations in which interventions should not occur through discretionary spend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one relates to Next Generation Broadband; we know that this will be rolled out to rural areas later than urban ones (if at all), and that this will affect rural communities. However there is much evidence to suggest that supply side interventions in this context are unlikely to be successful and partners in the West Midlands should not be lured in this direction • another relates to businesses that are intrinsically non competitive, have no desire to grow, are in sectors which are in structural decline, and have no wider purpose/function (In this context, it is important to note that there may be market failure arguments for supporting businesses providing key rural services) • third, discretionary programme spend should not be used to substitute for mainstream service delivery and every effort should be made to ensure that arrangements for mainstream service delivery undergo rigorous rural proofing 	Agencies, such as AWM, with discretionary programme spend, but also their sponsor departments (as they determine arrangements for monitoring, etc.)
B. Influencing planning policy	<p>In the main, planning policy is more effective in terms of controlling and promoting development in the context of buoyant market conditions than effecting it when demand is weak. Over the next period, however, planning policy will be extremely important in relation to overall rural community sustainability</p> <p>Looking ahead towards the SIRS, there is a serious opportunity to use evolving insights with regard to sustainable rural communities to inform far wider, and more holistic, approaches to place-shaping. In general, there is a need to ensure that settlements of all sizes are allowed to evolve in a manner that is attuned to local circumstances and planning policy has a key role to play in this context.</p> <p>In addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with regard to employment provision, greater recognition will need to be given to the proportion of employment that is accommodated on non B-Use Class land – because of the high incidence of employment in public and private services, including retail, and the increase in homeworking. Overall, the evidence points to a need for a more flexible approach and one that is cognisant of the increasingly blurred distinctions between the worlds of home and work, and the variety of types of space that small businesses use. It is absolutely imperative that rural communities are places of work – and preferably high quality and diverse work – and planning policy has a vital role to play in enabling this to happen • in terms of housing – and leaving to one side the issue of overall provision – planning policy can and should contribute in a number of ways. Our sense is that its more consistent implementation at regional and local levels with regard to affordable housing, for example, could achieve much • in terms of transport (as part of RSS and presumably about to become part of SIRS) there is a need to recognise that use of the car is greatest in rural areas and – particularly in some of the more accessible areas – there is a need to effect a modal shift. Given the links to the agglomeration 	Regional Planning Body (currently WMRA), local planning authorities, plus CLG (via the Government Office)

Lever	Potential contribution in striving towards increased rural community sustainability	Decision-makers
	<p>processes linked to the conurbation, this arguably ought to be a transport priority; to be successful it is likely to require an interventionist approach that significantly favours walking, cycling and public transport over car use. More generally, the implication is that rural areas must be places where people work as well as live, thereby providing the scope to reduce demand for travel</p> <p>The SIRS also offers the opportunity to provide a strategic spatial and policy framework for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> investment in green infrastructure by identifying where the greatest public benefit is to be derived from in the form of ecosystem services that support rural communities (e.g. in terms of regeneration) and protect them from risks (e.g. flooding) effecting a step-change in energy efficiency in built development, and strong support for a marked increase in renewable energy production linked to land management, and the introduction of renewable energy technologies in existing and new development <p>It is important to recognise that strategic planning policies are implemented through local development frameworks and local decisions. The quality of plans and decision making at district and parish scales is crucial to achieving strategic policy objectives.</p>	
C. Influencing mainstream service delivery	<p>Across all of our Themes, the need to influence mainstream delivery providers appears absolutely paramount. This is not easy, but it ought to be a priority and it boils down, essentially, to strong and proactive rural proofing. It could include, for example, lobbying to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Corporation (or Homes & Communities Agency) grants are structured more effectively to reflect the greater costs of delivery in rural areas Job Centre Plus, Connexions, etc. fully recognise the issues relating to employment and employability in a rural context across healthcare providers, local authorities, and other key organisations, service delivery is fully cognisant of boundary issues (especially in relation to Wales) and that solutions are developed in a transparent, effective and joined-up fashion service delivery in rural areas – particularly those that are more remote – is cognisant of the implications of decisions with regard to the regional prioritisation of transport funding 	Mainstream service providers – especially health, education, etc. – and their sponsor departments
D. Influencing the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)	<p>The VCS has a pivotal role to play in terms of effecting greater rural community sustainability, and this role is observed at two levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> first, the VCS plays a key role in terms of delivering some really important services, including elements of social care, training, financial advice, etc. second, participation in VCS activity – whether paid or as a volunteer – is often seriously important with regard to community cohesion and wider aspects of social capital: strong communities tend to be the most inclusive and potential access to services challenges are frequently solved from within <p>For the VCS to be as effective as possible, there is – in general – a need for capacity building and – particularly where it has a role in service delivery – greater continuity of funding²³. However it is important that these processes are aligned with those elsewhere in terms of the delivery infrastructure for sustainable rural communities; in particular, the interface with mainstream service deliverers is an important one</p>	Local Strategic Partnerships, etc., and representative bodies relating to the third sector
E. Influencing the Business Sector	<p>Businesses are wealth creators and hence the investment decisions they make can be seriously important with regard to the vitality of rural communities. This in turn has a number of different dimensions – from investing in workforce development, to physical assets, to the development of positive externalities (e.g. through business to business networking)</p> <p>Additionally, in effecting a transition to more sustainable rural communities, there</p>	Business leaders

²³ Exploring the Third Sector in Public Service Delivery and Reform: A Discussion Document HM Treasury, 2004. See also the Thematic Chapter on Economic Inclusion

Lever	Potential contribution in striving towards increased rural community sustainability	Decision-makers
	<p>is a need to engage more effectively with the raft of small and micro-businesses, particularly those with the appetite and aspiration to grow. For remote areas, a thriving business base is much more likely to encourage young adults to stay locally while for the more accessible ones, it may encourage people to work locally rather than to commute</p> <p>An important sub-set of the business sector in the context of rural community sustainability is the development industry (house builders, those who engage in land banking, etc.); this really ought to be engaged constructively in debates about rural community sustainability, and the development of effective solutions</p>	
F. Influencing fiscal policy	<p>Fiscal policy could, potentially, change the “ground rules” with regard to rural community sustainability. Although the West Midlands region clearly cannot act in isolation, changes that could have a very significant impact include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fiscal measures in relation to the cost of road transport and subsidies for more sustainable modes • fiscal measures in relation to second home ownership • fiscal incentives in relation to renewable energy and improving energy efficiency in the existing building stock 	Treasury
G. Influencing approaches to regulation	<p>Again, the regulatory regime exists well outside of the jurisdiction of all partners within the West Midlands. However changing approaches to regulation could, potentially, have a significant impact, and it is worth being aware of these. For example, in theory at least, Ofcom could insist that the roll-out of Next Generation Broadband does not seriously disadvantage rural communities (although the danger, obviously, is that it might then not happen at all)</p>	Central government departments and the regulators (Ofcom, etc.)
H. Influencing public opinion	<p>At a regional level, probably the most difficult lever to influence is public opinion – yet arguably, this might be the most powerful. Over recent years, attitudes have changed completely with regard, for example, to drinking and driving, and public opinion is (arguably) changing with regard to some of the issues linked to climate change (e.g. food miles, etc.) An approach which is more local in focus ought – on various fronts – to be capable of effecting greater levels of rural community sustainability</p> <p>At the same time, however, it is important to recognise that local opinion is itself enormously important; it can, for example, have a tremendous impact on the delivery of affordable housing. Strong, effective and informed local leadership ought to have a significant role to play in delivering sustainable rural communities. However it is important that efforts are focused as the communities most in need may not be either the most vocal, or the most organised.</p>	The media has a key role

Source: SQW Consulting

- 6.18 What though of the immediate implications for the WMES and the activities of AWM, and the WMRSS as it anticipates the implementation of the Phase II Revision and approaches the Phase III Revision? A general, overarching, comment relates to the importance of rural proofing and – in many contexts “border proofing” – to ensure that impacts on rural areas are considered in the context of all aspects of policy and public service delivery. Beyond this, and by way of conclusion, we make some summary comments and observations.

Implications for the delivery of WMES, and programmes advanced by AWM

- 6.19 With regard to the Regional Economic Strategy, and its implementation, the findings of this study present some important questions and challenges. A first critical question, arguably, is whether enough is being done to stimulate the growth of higher value and higher paid employment in the region’s rural areas and – linked to this – whether the response should vary spatially. We argued that low earnings – in the context of high house prices – were a continuing catalyst to a shifting age structure that was itself exacerbating some of the underlying issues and concerns with regard to the sustainability of rural communities.

- 6.20 In delivering the WMES, one programme is tackling this issue head-on: the Rural Regeneration Zone. This covers much of the remoter rural west of the region and between 2002/03 and 2006/07, some £36.9m of Single Programme Spend was disbursed through the RRZ generating gross outputs including 1,100 jobs created, 120 new businesses created and almost 4,000 people assisted in skills development. Key projects that have been advanced include the delivery of Enterprise Centres; the Redundant Buildings Grant scheme (which has sought to bring physical assets back into productive use); enhanced delivery of business link services; Enterprise Local (a programme of support for home-based entrepreneurs); and the Ludlow and Leominster Enterprise Parks.
- 6.21 However, key findings from this study have been that the issues surrounding remoteness are not restricted to the west of the region (although this is certainly the largest area affected) but also that they need to be understood at a range of spatial scales. A question that might be considered for the future is whether something akin to the RRZ – or at least the best practice deriving from it – ought to be considered for other parts of the region, particularly in relation to the more remote parts of north and east Staffordshire and other rural parts of the region in which the “economy of places” remains an important feature.
- 6.22 Additionally – and outside of Regeneration Zone thinking – there is a need to consider the spatial impacts associated with AWM’s other flagship programmes linked to cluster development and the High Technology Corridors. With regard to the former, our Thematic Chapter on Employment Provision made it clear that insofar as rural areas were implicated in cluster policy, it was generally the more accessible areas that benefitted. For the more remote areas, cluster policy is not irrelevant but it is focused on food and drink, and tourism. While vibrancy in both is important in terms of some aspects of rural community sustainability, it cannot provide the total solution and other sectors also need to be encouraged to grow: whilst strengthening the competitiveness of the food and drink and tourism clusters, there is a need also to diversify the economic base in order to stem the outmigration of younger people from the region’s remote rural areas.
- 6.23 Turning now to other aspects of rural community sustainability and other forms of programme-level intervention, the findings from this study support the continuing focus on market towns as the physical hub of activity in rural areas. While it is true that individual lifestyles may be increasingly “unaligned” (i.e. facing in multiple different directions in accessing services and opportunities of different types), market towns need to provide a robust alternative to excessive mobility – and this argument is as true in accessible areas as it is in remote ones. Market towns need to offer a range of services, job opportunities and homes, and they must be vibrant places across the region. At the same time, however, there is a need to recognise that market towns will vary in terms of their character and functionality, and interventions in support of them must recognise this diversity.
- 6.24 In terms of the really difficult issues surrounding access to services, the findings from this research offer broad support for the work of the Rural Access to Services Partnerships (RASPs) – whilst not underestimating the scale of the challenge that they face. Across public and private sectors alike, the economics of service delivery is moving – relentlessly it seems – towards centralisation, and for rural communities, this poses huge challenges. The response needs to be cross-sectoral and – in terms of Table 6-3 – “cross-lever”. The solution cannot sit

only in discretionary programme spend for the scale of the challenge far exceeds the scale of the available resources. In addition, the RASPs ought to be focusing on influencing mainstream service delivery, working with the voluntary and community sector (which has a key role to play) and – insofar as they are able – influencing the development of spatial policy (including in relation to the Regional Transport Strategy) such that it is cognisant of – and responsive to – some of the underlying issues and challenges. Additionally, further steps should be taken to roll-out and embed the rural access to services framework that was developed during 2007; if nothing else, this seeks to provide a consistent cross-sectoral approach to analysing and responding to service delivery challenges and its consistent application would be an important step forward.

- 6.25 Finally – in terms of existing programmes and interventions associated with AWM and linked to the WMES – we must comment on the use of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), successor to ERDP and Leader+. The use of funding from this programme is quite tightly prescribed as it is structured around EU-defined Measures. The vast majority of the funding is earmarked for agri-environment schemes of different types. However there are opportunities to use the programme in a way that responds to the challenges and opportunities identified through this study, particularly in relation to Green Infrastructure and low carbon solutions. As argued throughout, these dimensions are critical in terms of delivering rural community sustainability in the round and the scope and potential of RDPE needs to be seen in this context. Additionally some 25% of the funding available through RDPE is being dispersed through the Leader approach; this is a more flexible resource and the Local Action Groups that are charged with its delivery must take account of the arguments set out in this report.
- 6.26 So, does this range of WMES-related interventions stack up in relation to the challenges of rural community sustainability in the West Midlands? This project has not sought to evaluate the effectiveness of different interventions and so we can comment only on the relationship between the spread of activity and the range of issues that have been identified. In the main – and notwithstanding the fact that needs/demands will always outstrip resources – the match appears to be a good one. However, as a basis for further discussion, we do raise three key questions:
- first, is enough being done in order to increase the sustainability of rural communities in more accessible areas? These areas are very buoyant economically, but the growth model is one premised on mobility and carbon emissions are at unsustainable levels. Hence there is a need to ensure that good employment opportunities are provided locally (and in this sense, the approach to accessible areas should have much in common with that in more remote areas), but also to encourage investment in more sustainable forms of public transport. But is the public transport infrastructure linking accessible rural areas to the larger urban centres a regional priority?
 - second, although steps are being taken to improve the quality of economic opportunity in more remote areas, is the range of on-going interventions sufficient? Arguably, the challenges linked to retaining a population of young adults are absolutely paramount and more, probably, needs to be done. In this context, there is a continuing need to ensure appropriate and adequate provision is made in relation to

further and higher education; evidence from elsewhere (e.g. Suffolk) suggests that the prospect of a local higher educational institution can do much to change perceptions and, over time, behaviour. Equally, can more be done to ensure that workplace-based high value-added activity finds its way into the more rural parts of the region; specifically, can the relevant cluster policies be alerted/directed to the issues/opportunities in some rural areas, and/or can more be made of the High Tech Corridors?

- third, does the region – and AWM in particular – know enough about how to support small, micro, and – increasingly home-based – businesses effectively and well, such that real economic value can be created? Potentially these micro-businesses are a huge drain on policy initiatives as many will have little or no aspiration to grow, but those that do could well be the catalyst for sustained economic regeneration in the heart of the region’s rural communities. Seeking to understand and address the market failures that surround the growth of these businesses ought to be a policy priority.

Implications for WMRSS and its implementation

Implementation of the Phase II Revision

6.27 The Phase II Revision to WMRSS is scheduled to go through an Examination in Public in 2009 and then – subject to any amendments from the Secretary of State – it will be adopted formally as planning policy. Within this context, it is useful to reflect on key messages and insights emerging from this study of relevance to the *implementation* of policies set out within the Phase II Revision. We do this on a chapter-by-chapter basis.

6.28 Chapter 2 (*Towards a More Sustainable Region*) from the Phase II Revision sets out four completely new policies which focus on climate change (SR1), creating sustainable communities (SR2), sustainable design and construction (SR3), and improving air quality for sensitive ecosystems (SR4). With regard to the future implementation of these policies, the findings from our study provide some potentially important insights:

- *The key role of rural areas in mitigating – and adapting to – climate change impacts, and in effecting improvements in other aspects of environmental performance, must be recognised fully*

In implementing Policy SR1 (Climate Change), it will be important to recognise, actively, the role that rural areas can and should play. Specifically, rural areas have much to contribute as carbon sinks, as generators of renewable energy and in absorbing flood water²⁴. Development within rural areas needs to take account fully of these different roles and functions whilst also meeting the requirements set out in part C of Policy SR1.

The implementation of part C of Policy SR1 will also need to realise that some of the surrounding metrics ought to be different in rural areas, owing – principally – to the

²⁴ See Thematic Chapter on Green Infrastructure

smaller scale and higher unit costs of development, and the imperative (which is stronger in rural than urban areas) to provide lower cost housing.

These arguments apply equally in relation to those elements of Policy SR3 (Sustainable Design and Construction) where specific thresholds are set: although much new development in rural areas may fall below the identified thresholds, this should not mean that the imperative for more sustainable design and construction should disappear. However there may need to be some flexibility in implementation.

- *Policies identified to create sustainable communities (SR2) should apply equally to all rural areas, while in implementation, they should take full account of the findings of this study*

The sustainable communities agenda is not an exclusively urban one and nor is it solely an idiom for accelerated housing and population growth. The findings from this study suggest that the sustainability of rural communities needs to be understood as a process, not a state, and within this, viable, sustainable and locally appropriate solutions need to be found across and between the domains of housing, jobs and services. Against this backdrop, it is clear that rural communities need to be allowed to evolve incrementally, in a manner that is attuned with local circumstances.

Within this context, where new development is taking place, local authorities within rural areas need to interface with developers consistently, effectively and well, securing S106 settlements that are proportionate to the impact of development and then used to good effect. In the course of this study we have found some suggestion that inconsistencies in approach are recognised and to some extent exploited by the development industry. In implementing policies from the Phase II Revision, there may therefore be a case for (a) greater co-operation (perhaps at a sub-regional level) between rural local authorities in agreeing broad approaches to S106 negotiation and sharing specialist expertise, but also (b) more discretion in defining local area or even settlement-specific priorities in line with the process of rural community sustainability. In this context – given the relatively small scale of developments in most rural areas – it is important to recognise that (a) S106 agreements are unlikely to be of sufficient scale to pay for major infrastructure, but that (b) on average, they are being effected in settlements that are more affluent than those in other parts of the region. Hence development gain ought to be used in a different way – particularly, perhaps, in some of the more accessible rural areas.

6.29 Chapter 6 (*Communities for the Future*) provided a major focus of the Phase II revision, for it encapsulated a range of new/amended policies with regard to all aspects of housing – from broad location, to overall provision, housing land supply and issues in relation to affordability. In relation to the implementation of Policies CF1-CF10, observations deriving from our study findings are set out below.

- *Policies CF1 (Housing within Major Urban Areas) and CF2 (Housing beyond Major Urban Areas) set out an approach to housing provision that cascades through the urban hierarchy. At face value, this could be interpreted as villages being the location of last resort for new housing development and, hence, WMRSS effectively*

opposing development in rural areas. In fact, the arguments are much more complicated and nuanced; indeed, Policy CF3 sets out housing targets which, although lower for predominantly rural Districts, are generally not trivial. However the surrounding politics, “messaging” and implications need to be managed very carefully if the agreed numbers are to be deliverable and if the sustainability of rural communities is not to be compromised

Our study suggested that to avoid ossification, rural settlements – both market towns and villages – must be allowed to evolve in a manner that is attuned to local circumstances. Policies developed through the Phase II Revision do not in principle preclude this. But nor do they explicitly promote it. In implementation, the findings from this study suggest that, where appropriate, serious effort should be devoted to bringing forward sites in smaller settlements as part of an holistic and forward-looking approach to rural community sustainability. Such requirements will need to be assessed through normal Local Development Framework processes.

Linked to this, as much attention should be paid to the delivery of housing targets in rural Districts as it is in the Major Urban Areas, even if the absolute scale of new development is much smaller. Put another way, if regional targets are achieved through over-delivery in the MUAs and little or no delivery in rural areas, the implications will be highly inimical in terms of rural community sustainability. [Note however that both the overall quantum and the distribution of achieved housing provision are already being monitored on an annual basis through the RSS monitoring process.]

- *Across rural parts of the region, progress with regard to the delivery of affordable housing has been patchy (and in some Districts minimal); a better and more consistent outcome in the future – which is called for by Policy CF7 (Delivering Affordable Housing) – will depend on the more uniform application and use of different delivery mechanisms in the context of more informed local attitudes, opinions, politics and decision-making*

As argued in the Thematic Chapter on Housing, there is no “magic bullet” with regard to the delivery of affordable housing. However there are some well tried and tested mechanisms – as well as others that are currently evolving – and all of these are described in some detail in a Guide to the Delivery of Affordable Housing that was prepared by the West Midlands Regional Assembly in 2006.

However, in some Districts, progress in delivering affordable housing has been really poor. Two factors – which are not unrelated to each other – appear to underpin this: established mechanisms have not always been used effectively, and local decision-making has been overly cautious. Affordable housing is not a threat to rural communities – indeed, the reverse is true, particularly if new affordable housing can be delivered in a manner which is fully integrated within existing settlements.

In those rural areas in which past performance is weak and immediate future prospects are limited, there is a need for change. In part this could be effected by unpicking the surrounding mythology through awareness raising, good practice

examples, and so on. Additionally, it may be appropriate to provide more support linked to implementation, alongside some kind of sanction in the context of persistent non-delivery. Either way, the point needs to be made that a failure to take locally difficult decisions with regard to the appropriate delivery of affordable housing is doing as much as to threaten the future of rural communities as the perceived worst excesses of the development industry.

6.30 Chapter 7 sets out a series of policies under the heading of “Prosperity for All”. As well as Policy PA1 (which presents an overall approach to economic growth), this includes policies relating to employment land, premises and sites (Policies PA6, PA6A, PA6B, PA7, PA8 and PA9); to the broad relationships across the region’s distinctive settlement structure (Policies PA11 and PA12); and to the development of the rural economy (Policy PA14). In the light of findings from our study, we comment on the implications for the implementation of these policy areas.

- *The strong economic performance of some rural areas – particularly those which are more accessible – should be recognised, and the lessons from it and implications of it should be used to shape the implementation of WMRSS*

Policy PA1 (Prosperity for All) asserts that Major Urban Areas (MUAs) will be “*the primary focus for additional investment in sustainable economic growth*”. This policy has been agreed by the region and is current government policy as expressed in the existing RSS. In implementation, our view – based on the findings of this study – is that, notwithstanding the need for Urban Renaissance, particularly in the MUAs, the investment needs of rural areas should not be overlooked. For example, even in accessible rural areas, targeted investment and intervention, particularly in terms of effecting more sustainable transport solutions, is important, provided it is at a scale that does not undermine Urban Renaissance. If appropriate investment and intervention do not occur, the result could well be skilled people moving away from the region altogether (probably in the general direction of London). This will do nothing to enhance the performance of the Major Urban Areas or the West Midlands as a whole.

- *The changing relationship between economic activity and the provision of land and premises designated for employment use needs to be treated seriously*

Within Chapter 7, the Phase II Revision has led to the development of a series of policies which are concerned with employment land and premises. These clearly are important with regard to the future sustainability of rural communities. However, our work has suggested that in implementing current policy, there is an need to recognise that the relationship between employment land and premises, and economic activity, has become much more complicated than previously. This argument is especially important in rural areas where there is a high incidence of small businesses, and home working is a central feature. In the future, a key issue for rural areas will be the extent to which sites and buildings can be used flexibly and responsively in response to two different drivers, both of which are critical:

- first, sustainable rural communities will depend, increasingly, on home-based economic activity, and in implementation, planning policy needs to be flexible enough to embrace this requirement positively²⁵
- second, given the increasing challenges surrounding the economics of service delivery in rural areas²⁶, active provision ought to be made for multi-use buildings, recognising that the uses must include (and arguably ought to encourage) the delivery of private sector services (such as retail) which may formally have their own Use Classes.
- *Policies linked to the role(s) of different settlements within the urban hierarchy should not inadvertently consign rural settlements to an undifferentiated economic future; instead, they should recognise the importance of and potential for developing specialist roles and niches*

Within Chapter 7, several of the policies that have emerged through the Phase II Revision rightly emphasise that, amongst the larger settlements, different places have different roles, and – in the main – these policies are supportive of wider arguments relating to polycentricity. In our view, the implications of this argument should extend across the urban hierarchy: whilst needing to serve the needs of their resident population and avoiding undermining larger urban areas, market towns, and even some villages, should also be encouraged to develop specialist and differentiated niches. There is evidence to suggest that some of the most buoyant market towns in the region have already done this: Ludlow, for example, has a national reputation with regard to the quality of its restaurants. Hence in implementation, it is necessary to recognise that market towns – and smaller settlements – are differentiated places; policy needs to be implemented flexibly and appropriately in response.

6.31 Finally – in relation to the Phase II Revision and the implementation of policies set out within it – we should comment on Chapter 9 and the associated policies with regard to transport and accessibility. In the course of this study, transport was not specifically examined through a dedicated Thematic Chapter. However, it has emerged as a recurring issue across many of the other strands of research. In particular:

- it was shown to be absolutely pivotal with regard to critical rural services, both in understanding the nature of the problem and in developing appropriate and sustainable solutions
- in the Thematic Chapter on Low Carbon Principles, the consequences of limited public transport provision and over-dependence on the use of the car were seen to result in a poor performance on key environmental indicators (e.g. CO₂ emissions), particularly in more accessible areas
- the Thematic Chapter on Green Infrastructure demonstrated the fallacy of treating an accessible green infrastructure as an assumption in rural areas. It went on to

²⁵ See the Thematic Chapters on Employment Provision and IT Infrastructure

²⁶ See the Thematic Chapter on Critical Rural Services

demonstrate the use that could be made of a viable green infrastructure in effecting modal shifts, particularly linked to walking and cycling.

- 6.32 Within this overall context, what insights can we provide with regard to the implementation of the policies in Chapter 9 that were developed in the course of the Phase II Revision?
- 6.33 Our main comment relates to Policy T12 (*Priorities for Investment*). In the surrounding narrative, the point is made that the rationale for investing in improved accessibility and mobility across the Region is linked to the need to “*support the economic and community growth that the Region aspires to*” (para 9.109). Subsequently – and within the body of the policy – a long list of investment priorities is identified, the majority of which are related either to the motorway network, or the rail network, or schemes within larger urban areas; no further indication is provided as to how limited resources should be prioritised. Of the 28 investment priorities, one relates explicitly to rural areas (“*Enhancement and development of rural public and community transport, particularly links between market towns and their hinterlands*”); and the associated delivery mechanism that is identified is AWM/LTP²⁷. It is notable that it is the other 27 priorities that command the attention of the really key delivery mechanisms in relation to transport investment – particularly those which could bring significant resources to bear (Highways Agency, Regional Funding Allocations, Transport Innovation Fund, etc.).
- 6.34 Of course, the “other 27” investment priorities are not irrelevant to the needs of rural areas – but nor are they primarily a response to them. In implementation – and given the findings of our study – it will be important that priorities aimed at behavioural change and modal shifts – and the associated policies such as T1-T6 (inclusive) – are taken forward in a manner that is fully cognisant of the issues and challenges facing rural areas (as is the intent). While the rural transport priority from Policy T12 is *necessary* for rural areas across the region, it is not *sufficient*, particularly in those more accessible rural areas which are dominated by the “economy of flows”. Here, the imperative for modal shift (as set out in policies T1-T6) is compelling; it will have considerable implications in relation to the future sustainability of a significant number of rural communities.

Preparation of the Phase III Revision

- 6.35 The RSS Phase III Revision – which is planned for the next period – is focusing on the following themes and issues:
- *Rural services*: to identify and prioritise the services that are critical to the sustainability of rural communities, and to identify mechanisms for promoting their provision
 - *Housing*: to identify the number of pitches required for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople
 - *Culture*: to identify and address gaps in the provision of international, national, regional and sub-regionally significant cultural assets

²⁷ See Policy T12 Priorities for Investment – Sub-Regional Priorities Outside MUAs – WMRSS Phase Two Revision – Draft Preferred Option, December 2007, page 194

- *Environment:* to further develop environmental policies in the WMRSS, including flood risk, air quality, renewable energy and Green Belt
- *Minerals:* to develop policies on safeguarding mineral resources and the future supplies of construction aggregates and brick clay.

6.36 Of these, the one that is most directly relevant to the work completed in the course of this study is, obviously, the first, although we can also offer some observations with regard to the fourth.

6.37 Our Thematic Chapter on Critical Rural Services argued that ‘important and measurable’ services ought to be considered. These correspond to the range of services that are vital to individuals and communities in a range of settlement types; they reflect the social and economic objectives of regional policies and they can be monitored on a consistent, regional basis. Against this backdrop, Box 6-1 below summarises key issues arising from our research on Critical Rural Services and of relevance to the Phase III Revision. For WMRSS, we consider that these are seriously important: it is imperative that evidentially robust – and politically negotiated – answers to the questions are embedded within future policy with regard to critical rural services, but also far more generally (including in relation to key WMRSS policies for housing, employment provision and transport). Hence although the issues summarised in Box 6-1 are not easy, they need – we think – to underpin an informed regional discussion and the RSS revision process is a good vehicle for this. Consistent with our comments on the implementation of policies developed in the course of the Phase II revision, in many cases, the answers are less about policies and more about politics, particularly at a local level; but this is where and how choices are made, and the implications for rural community sustainability are substantial.

Box 6-1: Key issues of relevance to the Phase III Revision

Definition of Sustainable Rural Communities in service terms:

- whether the WMRSS should adopt a socio-economic view of sustainable rural services, and within this context, the balance between focusing on individual circumstances and wider settlement vitality
- the extent to which the ‘sustainability’ of rural services should be considered more in terms of environmental limits (i.e. carbon emissions) than the focus on social and economic regeneration

Identification of services that are critical to maintaining rural communities in different parts of the region:

- whether the view of ‘critical’ services should move away from a limited list of ‘basic’ services, to a broader set of ‘Important & Measurable’ services that reflect the wider range of priorities specific to people and place, and are more compatible with the social and economic objectives for rural areas contained in WMRSS
- whether an approach which combines the use of national data sets to indicate and monitor the state of services in different types of rural areas with the application of the Rural Accessibility to Services Framework approach to gathering local intelligence, offers a useful and practical approach

Applicable delivery mechanisms:

- whether WMRSS could do more to encourage the provision of multiuse facilities and, in response, the signals that would be useful/effective in relation to LDF processes

- the extent to which housing and transport policies might be more effective levers on service availability than measures which act directly on services and how – as a result – housing and transport policies can be applied to ensure positive outcomes in terms of service delivery
- whether WMRSS should seek to influence resource allocation processes which, frequently, seem to sit at the heart of the challenge of delivering critical rural services
- whether WMRSS could do more to highlight the importance of the VCS in relation to service delivery and community cohesion

6.38 With regard to environmental aspects of the Phase III Revision, this study has flagged the potential importance of renewable energy in terms of rural community sustainability. This argument is made both with regard to the environmental performance of rural communities but also in terms of the potential of renewable energy as a growth sector. While there is also a need for some safeguards, we would encourage the contributors to the Phase III Revision to take an holistic approach and recognise the potential role and contribution of both renewable energy²⁸ and Green Infrastructure to the whole spectrum of outcomes listed in Table 4-1. Potentially, renewable energy has much to offer while green infrastructure can contribute to flood risk management, improving air quality and improving access to natural environments.

²⁸ In this context, there will be a need also to consider the consequential impacts on food supply

7: Conclusions

- 7.1 In this final chapter, we make some concluding observations which focus less on the broad implications for policy than on the way in which the findings from this study ought now to be used, disseminated and developed.
- 7.2 The starting point – and the end point – was a working definition of sustainable rural communities that could be used in a consistent way across all levels of policy across the West Midlands. We have argued throughout that rural community sustainability needs to be understood as a *process*, not a state, and that the issues relating to it will manifest themselves in different ways, depending on the particular vantage point: the community/settlement perspective will differ from that of the individual, while the pursuit of rural community sustainability will typically point to quite different priorities from the perspective of incoming retirees as compared to young adults in the local population. A multiplicity of outcomes linked to rural community sustainability can be – and has been – identified, but the manner in which these come together at particular times and in particular circumstances is, of necessity, contested; it is for that reason that good, effective and reasoned local governance is so important.
- 7.3 At a regional level, it is neither possible or appropriate to provide prescriptive solutions; to be effective, these need to be determined in response to local circumstances. However, the regional tier can facilitate this process in a number of ways; and it is in this context that the resource provided by this study ought to be of some help. Elements of it need further development, but some thoughts and observations on how this might work are set out below.

The importance of monitoring progress towards rural community sustainability

- 7.4 A first – and most obvious – role might be defined as monitoring progress in relation to agreed outcomes linked to rural community sustainability. Although it might appear technical and dull, effective monitoring is both important and, potentially, powerful.
- 7.5 Table 4-1 – and the narrative that accompanied it in Chapter 4 – provided an initial attempt to provide a regional snapshot of progress towards greater rural community sustainability, based on a review of our Thematic Chapters. The assessment was broad-brush and it was (rightly) heavily caveated. Nevertheless, even at this most crude level, it provided some important messages that are probably quite useful: overall, progress to date appears strongest with regard to some of the economic outcomes and weakest on those concerned with environmental and social dimensions, although – looking ahead – there are some initial suggestions that elements of environmental performance (notably with regard to Green Infrastructure) might be improving.
- 7.6 Table 4-1 could be developed. It could be used as a basis for monitoring progress on a regular and systematic basis. Additionally, it could potentially be used to flag where the real “crunch points” are likely to arise. To take the Table further – and to increase its robustness – indicators would need to be attached to outcomes (which is easier in some cases than others)

and data would need to be gathered regularly and at a fine-grained spatial scale. In this way, it ought to be possible to generate time-series information, for rural areas region-wide and for individual local areas; both ought to be useful.

- 7.7 The provision of good data and intelligence would allow the regional tier to contribute in two further ways to effecting rural community sustainability. Again, the findings from this study ought to provide an important initial composite resource in both contexts.

Gathering together examples of good and best practice, and helping to improve outcomes linked to rural community sustainability in the future

- 7.8 First, particularly through the Thematic Chapters, this study has gathered together a range of evidence and insight in terms of what works – and what doesn't – on the ground in moving towards outcomes that are consistent with more sustainable rural communities; case studies were provided relating, *inter alia*, to the delivery of affordable housing, provision for rural employment, measures to address economic exclusion, and so on. These ought to be of some value and use, both for local partners and for regional agencies in seeking to come to a shared view of the circumstances in which particular types of intervention are likely to be most effective.
- 7.9 In the future, it would be useful if this stock of good/best practice examples could be updated and refreshed, and made available widely. Ideally, this should be through networks of practitioners, rather than long reports. Regional agencies – and mechanisms such as the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum – should have a role to play in this context.

Lobbying for change

- 7.10 Second, through the Thematic Chapters – and to a degree through this final report – this study has provided some initial indication of the principal impediments to change. In some cases, it has been necessary to question the effectiveness of local partners/partnerships – and in this context, regional partners ought to take a view on the levers they can bring to bear (both carrots and sticks); the seriously poor performance of some rural Districts in relation to the delivery of affordable housing is one example.
- 7.11 In other cases, it is difficult to conclude anything other than that funding regimes are wrong, or that fiscal arrangements are incentivising sub-optimal forms of behaviour; in this context, a clear example of the first surrounds the economics of mainstream service delivery while a probable example of the second concerns the poor performance of some of the more accessible rural areas in terms of CO₂ emissions. Regional partners cannot unilaterally change the “ground rules” with regard to issues of this type; however, they ought to have the ear of government and – armed with real evidence – they ought to be able to make the case for change. And if it is serious about sustainable development in the round, government ought to be willing to listen. The evidence and argument generated through this study ought to provide some helpful insights.