

District Councillor's Report

October 2021

A report commissioned by the LGA says these pandemic-related trends could help to “redefine” rural and coastal communities in England.

However, it warns that disproportionately low wages in coastal and rural communities is making the cost of housing increasingly unaffordable for local workers.

The LGA is calling on the Government to improve digital connectivity, extend the public transport network to ensure more young people can access employment and training, and work to mitigate the impact of seasonal tourism on local housing costs.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said “Rural and coastal communities are places which have unique challenges from low income, seasonal working and poor connectivity but also significant opportunities which can be utilised as we recover from the pandemic. With a rise in homeworking, an unprecedented increase in ‘staycationing’ and greater appreciation for natural resources, there are significant changes taking place in the local economies of rural and coastal parts of the country.

If many people who want to make these changes permanent are supported to do so, and the appropriate investment is made in rural and coastal communities to leverage the associated economic opportunities, there is the potential for a substantial levelling up of rural areas prosperity”.

Key Findings

Key Findings builds upon previous research from CPRE (Council for the Protection of Rural England) into more rural ‘deserts’:-

- Bus services are essential for allowing the inadequate statutory framework for ensuring the provision of bus services for every community, and the cuts to bus funding imposed by the government over the past decade, have left a serious lack of services to meet the needs of rural towns and villages.
- Examples from public transport systems across Switzerland, Austria and Germany show that it is possible to deliver a comprehensive bus network that offers excellent connectivity to rural communities. Despite being considerably less densely populated than every region of England, the region of North Hesse in Germany has a bus system that ensures services reach every village, every hour for at least 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. A similar level of bus services would be transformational for rural England.
- Rural communities in these countries enjoy a far more comprehensive bus network than England because decent public transport is regarded as a basic right, even in remote areas. In Switzerland, minimum service frequency standards for communities of different sizes are enshrined in law. England, too, should recognise a universal basis right to public transport backed up with guaranteed service frequency standards and the government should fund local transport authorities to achieve that level of service.

- We also need bus services that are fully publicly funded with regulated contracts and timetabling designed to integrate with rail and other forms of public transport. An integrated approach to network planning timetabling and ticketing is essential to making public transport in rural areas of England a practicable, convenient and attractive option for residents in rural areas. With regulated services, we can make public transport travel a convenient and competitive alternative to driving a private car, as is essential for tackling the climate emergency.
- Our ground-breaking modelling finds that the government could deliver a bus to every village, every hour across England from 6am to midnight, 7 days per week, for £2.7 billion annually.
- There is a range of options the government could use to make a comprehensive bus network revenue neutral. By redirecting funding currently earmarked for environmentally damaging and unnecessary road building, the government could release enough money to invest in a bus service for every village, every hour.

The views and findings expressed here are that of the sources of the reports and not those of the undersigned.

Councillor Martin Mooney