

Feedback from Rural Proofing Workshop – Annual CP Forum 2023

Workshop delivered by Frances Bedding and Sarah Mortimer from Community Action Suffolk, Debbie Jackson from SALC and Andrew Jolliffe from East Suffolk Council Communities Team.

The workshop started with an outline of rural proofing as part of the Community Partnership process. We outlined what it is, why we should assess the differential impacts of policies and actions on different areas – so urban, market town, large village with services, small villages and hamlets, and then remote rural areas. We do this to ensure that rural areas are not disadvantaged by their rurality.

The work being done in East Suffolk to address speed reduction in communities near to Ipswich by aggregating the communities voices on this topic. They shared traffic speed data to influence where speed traps were located, and over time found that by working with Community Speedwatch and the Police, they were able to enable a lowering of average speeds along a given route. There are particular issues with speed through Otley, and communities to the North of Ipswich such as Tuddenham.

The workshop looked at a range of issues such as financial inequality, isolation and loneliness, mental health and well being, transport and travel including access from A to B, not necessarily motorised, attitudes to travel and the reality of living and working in a rural area.

The workshops focussed on two exercises (outlined later) and we were keen that workshop attendees focussed on the challenges of rural proofing and not the challenges of living in rural areas during the 2 exercises.

We had 22 attendees and discussion was varied.

Assessment of the key issues that were raised:

- Discussion focussed initially ‘issues’ with rurality as opposed to ‘rural proofing’. Needed guidance to look at challenges of applying rural proofing, and then of solutions that are realistic.
- Feeling that the concept of rural proofing needs to be made more easily understandable. We grouped the challenges under several headings to help thoughts. Ended up with a number of issues plus some suggestions of solutions:

Financial services:

1. Issues that affect take up of services – in market town car parks largely cashless – possibly puts off older people – process for ‘signing up’ is not clear or fast.
2. Rural services do cost more and this is not recognised by providers other than not providing the service.

3. Difficulty of identifying inequality in a small village – ‘only poor person in the village’ unlikely to identify that they may need help/support.
4. One size doesn’t fit all – rural needs specific consideration.

Possible solutions:

- a. Need for development of a rural premium to reflect additional costs to help suppliers to provide adequately for rural areas.

Access/transport:

1. Rural roads not always amenable for active travel.
 - a. Solution: to give confidence around walking and cycling. BUT some don’t want more lighting – some do – how to mediate this.
2. Issues around resources and money.
 - a. Solution: bus pass swap for tax credits.
 - b. Commissioners don’t necessarily take into account numbers served.
 - c. Cost per head.
3. Volunteers – lack of?
4. Need cheap transport using renewable energy.

Possible solutions:

- a. Build a rural premium into tenders
- b. With active travel rural scores poorly as there are fewer people – need to account for this

Mental Health & Wellbeing:

1. Lack of access to 121 services.
2. Challenges for single parents already experiencing financial struggles;
3. Online is not seen as the answer – still issues with internet access.
4. Young people need parental support to access sports and other clubs in rural areas – if parents unable/not supportive is a significant barrier.

Possible solutions:

- a. Build a rural premium into tenders for services
- b. Find ways to reconnect people to place – Shaun’s Shorts – puts out local info, people looking for help.

- Actions that delegates themselves said they would / could take back to their organisations.

None specifically – it did prompt thoughts and some suggestions. I worry that we are still in the ‘identify issues’ and not ‘how to tackle them in a realistic way’.

- Any issues / actions that you consider the Community Partnership Board or individual Community Partnerships could help address.

1. Make walking/ cycling safer – signage that between 4-6 this is a regularly used walk/cycle route perhaps?

2. Few clear suggestions – but thinking left field – suggest a quarterly/half yearly update to CP's on how they are tackling/considering rural proofing, accommodating specifically rural needs?
3. Standing agenda item at each CP meeting with identified rural champion on each CP (this came out of Sarah and my discussions).