



University of Brighton

Beyond the traditional lens: a partnership study of rural disadvantage in Wealden:

interview and focus group results

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Beyond the traditional lens a partnership study to identify and explore deprivation in rural Wealden: interview and focus group results

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1. Deprivation in rural Wealden: interview and focus group research

1.1 Research context and rationale

Wealden Local Strategic Partnership (WLSP) wishes to improve its understanding of rural deprivation so that it can encourage partners to make more informed decisions on service provision and the strategic planning of rural service delivery. Following preliminary scoping of the issues, WLSP contracted the University of Brighton and Plumpton College to undertake a number of interviews and focus groups to help explain the nature and underlying causes of deprivation in Wealden.

This report provides qualitative focus group and interview evidence of local experiences of deprivation as a basis for discussion at the WLSP. The interview data presented here helps to go beyond the deprivation statistics, to explore the lived reality, effects and underlying causes of deprivation. The report is structured around the WLSP Sustainable Community Strategy themes of 'Housing', 'Health and Social Care', 'Transport and Access', 'Prosperity and Business', 'Cultural Activities, Sport and Leisure', 'Education and Learning', and the 'Environment'. A previous research report on this topic worth referring to is 'Local people's perceptions on life in Wealden district' (Sussex Rural Community Council, 2001), this is a report that contains relevant background information on the characteristics of people who are most likely to be vulnerable to social exclusion, deprivation or disadvantage. Some common issues for action are also identified in this report and the 2001 report and these can be found in Section 4.

1.2 Understanding rural deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measures a range of factors that indicate whether people living in small areas are experiencing various types of deprivation, with the different domains recognised and measured separately (DCLG, 2008). People may be counted in one or more of the domains, depending on the number of types of deprivation that they experience. The overall IMD is the weighted area level aggregation of the individual domains of deprivation. The IMD consists of 38 indicators covering income, employment, health, education, housing and living environment (inside and outside people's homes).

On average, rural populations suffer lower levels of deprivation than urban areas, although there are more people living in better off urban than rural areas (Commission for Rural Communities, 2008). Within rural communities, sparsely populated areas show higher levels of deprivation than less sparsely populated areas, largely because of poorer housing and, therefore, poorer internal living environments, and lower access to services. They often score better in other domains. There has been a general increase in rural deprivation since 2004, although those living in sparse rural towns have suffered less than those living in villages, hamlets and more sparsely populated areas.

Overall, the South East of England enjoys lower levels of deprivation than many other parts of the country, although IMD scores for rural areas indicate that there are areas in the South East that suffer considerable deprivation. In particular, some areas of coastal East Sussex and Kent are ranked amongst the most deprived rural areas in England, with much of the remainder of rural East Sussex and Kent ranked in the top three quintiles of deprivation (Commission for Rural Communities, 2008). This is the case with rural Wealden, where the areas of high deprivation around Hastings and the Sussex coast tend to obscure significant deprivation throughout the district. The emphasis on Hastings and the Sussex coast has therefore tended to attract the attention of policy makers, to the detriment of areas like (inland) rural Wealden.

1.3 Methodology

Interviews: In depth interviews were carried out with 10 local people in rural Wealden. Potential interviewees were sourced and contacted by Tom Stuart, Policy Officer at Wealden District Council, with assistance from several partners including 3VA¹, Affinity Sutton (housing association) and Action in rural Sussex (see Appendix for interviewee social profiles and sources). A rapport building 'life history' approach to the interviews was adopted. This method examines memories and experiences across the lifespan to create a life story that can be used to understand behaviours in the individual and the societal and historical influences on these. Specifically, interviews explored family, relationships and experiences through the lifecourse as well as present day activities. Interviews then covered WLSP key priorities and tried to ground these in the interviewees' experiences of place. Interviews were brought to a positive end via questions on best practice. For the purposes of anonymity interviews are numbered 1-8 in the text (note that in two cases, interviews were with two respondents simultaneously), interviewee profiles are in the Appendix but names are withheld.

Focus Groups: Two focus groups were carried out; one with WLSP members and the other with community representatives (see Appendix for focus group participants and focus group questions) The focus groups covered WLSP key priorities and tried to explore these priorities through participants' specific expertise and local knowledge. Where possible, interview data were used to inform focus group discussion. Focus group participants have all agreed to be cited by name and are referred to in the text by their initials.

2. Deprivation in rural Wealden: interview and focus group results

2.1 Housing

Housing is a major issue for many people living in rural Wealden. The major divisions are between those who live in their own homes, those who are in private rentals and those who

¹ 3VA is a voluntary and community sector partner in the LSP, operating across Wealden, Eastbourne and Lewes to promote and support voluntary action

are in affordable local authority and housing association properties. Many of those on low incomes who own their own houses can no longer afford to maintain them (FG1). Some elderly residents in rural Wealden also live in poor quality or poorly maintained houses that are difficult to heat (FG1). There is a lack of gas outside of the main towns and electricity is increasingly expensive, meaning that some residents have been found to be living in just the one room in their house that they can afford to heat (FG1, S). It was also thought that there remains a lack of awareness amongst elderly and the most in need that government schemes exist to subsidise the replacement of older boilers (FG1, S). Young people also face housing difficulties in rural Wealden and many are unlikely to be able to afford to buy their own home:

"I've got grandsons who haven't got a hope in heaven of buying a property out here. It's just out of their league because so many people commute who are on big London salaries and what have you and the local youngsters haven't got an opportunity. It could become a place of old people only unless they do something, unless they give them a start, that's one thing." (I2, Broad Oak, Pensioner)

The sale of commercial premises for conversion to housing is not welcomed, despite increasing the stock of properties available to those on lower incomes, because it is felt to be resulting in a lack of local shops and services for residents in rural Wealden. This is thought to have the knock on effect of the elderly moving away from their local area because of personal transport issues and a lack of local shops (S, FG 1)).

The lack of affordable housing for residents in rural Wealden was identified as a key issue that deprived residents face (FG1, FG2). One perceived barrier to further affordable housing being built was that 'more well off newcomers' were better organized to object to planning applications (JP, FG2). Furthermore, it was identified that there is a lack of trust amongst parish councillors that the plans that are approved are not the ones that materialize in reality (JP, FG2).

This means that many people in rural Wealden have little option but to rent private accommodation. They talked about their lack of security, with assured short term tenancy of 6 months being the norm:

"It's hard being in a private accommodation coz you don't know when your tenancy's gonna be up, that's the only problem. I mean you do get some where it's long term but it's not always a guaranteed is it?" (I7, East Dean, Female)

For victims of anti-social behaviour there is often a difficulty in affording to move (GC, FG2). There are also some isolated example in rural Wealden of deprived and vulnerable people being trapped in a particular location or situation because of the difficulty they face in obtaining bank accounts meaning that a 'crisis' loan' can be difficult to obtain (CM, FG2). Rent arrears and credit checks were also an issue for those looking to move out of rural areas (CM, FG2) to seek work or better access to services. Loan sharks in rural Wealden can also be a genuine problem for deprived individuals with poor credit ratings (CM, FG2). Credit Unions have the potential to improve this situation. Home insurance is also an issue

amongst deprived populations who are not insuring their possessions and therefore suffering the most when things do get stolen (GH, FG1).

2.2 Health and Social Care

One health and social care issue facing those living in rural Wealden is the increasing centralisation of health services, with the expectation that people will travel in from the country to the main hospitals:

“...some of the things that people have to go down to Eastbourne hospital for could be done at our centre in Cross in Hand. It’s far more economical for those people to come and see a whole raft of people here than it is for all these people trying to get to Eastbourne..... suddenly getting an appointment at Eastbourne hospital at 9 o’clock in the morning or something, you think about that, getting to Eastbourne hospital for 9 o’clock in the morning. It’s really hard. Not everybody’s got cars and a lot of people when they get older don’t feel they can drive into towns and that so it really is quite a big thing.” (I2)

Sparse and inconsistent provision of day care is also a key problem facing vulnerable elderly residents in rural Wealden. Yet with annual reductions in the budget for adult social care are anticipated to be in the region of 5% per year over the next 3 years improving standards in adult social care is likely to be a challenge (MH, FG1):

“Where is the day care for elderly people in North Wealden? Where is it? You tell me because I can’t find it. ... all the villages set up sort of lunch clubs and all that sort of thing, lunch clubs are great, but there must be day care, there must be, because social isolation becomes a big issue and if you look at even our village here, there are people who live down these lanes who can’t get out and so proper day care facilities should be there.....and in the field of dementia for example you’ve got so many different agencies and people don’t know which one to go to. It’s really difficult...A one-stop shop and that’s what’s needed.” (I2)

While there will be advantages to the new system of personal budgets for care, including greater flexibility and enabling groups to pool budgets and set up their own arrangements, the new scheme of personal care budgets may leave some deprived and elderly adults confused and vulnerable to exploitation (MH, FG1). Interviewees also identified that there is in general an ‘over reliance on volunteers’ for service provision in rural areas (I2, p9) Also as post offices have closed and benefits are increasingly paid directly into bank accounts there is less opportunity for local services to check up on people and there may be an opportunity to explore here the potential for ‘good neighbour’ and befriending schemes (FG1, MB).

Access to sexual health services is also an issue amongst the teenage rural population. Some attempts have been made to make services accessible through local pharmacies; however there remain issues related to anonymity for users of pharmacy services. Sexual health drop ins would be of use (L, FG 1). Wealden has good local hospitals in Crowborough and Uckfield however there are high costs involved in visiting patients or attending a specialist appointment, especially where travel is before 9am.

2.3 Transport and access

For people without cars in rural Wealden it can be difficult or impossible to travel on Sundays or outside of usual bus route times while, in many areas there are few buses at any time, and only on limited routes:

“If you get an appointment at one of the hospitals... it takes about 2 hours by the time you got a bus into Heathfield, a bus from Heathfield to Eastbourne or even to Uckfield, if you’re going to Uckfield hospital, it takes hours and, you know, the buses are free now but the time element is colossal... people always talk about the Age Concern minibus, but I don’t think that’s good enough....because A. they’re dealing with older people, what about the youngsters and B. it’s a charity and there’s no, you know, I mean what if they run out of money or they can’t get drivers?” (I2, Pensioner, Broad Oak)

For residents in rural Wealden who are trying to access services or jobs that are not 9-5 this can be a real difficulty (GC, Job Centre, FG 2). The cost of travel was also reported as being prohibitively expensive by interviewees and focus group members - an issue discouraging some young adults from attending college courses (LA, FG1), attending pre-school activities with their child (I8), accessing jobs or the job centre (GC, FG 2) or visiting family in hospital:

“A lot of the dementia stuff is in Crowborough but nobody can get there unless they drive. Tony, man used to have to hire a taxi to take him to see his wife, £29, you know, and on an old age pension that’s a lot of money” (I2).

Public Transport issues faced by deprived residents of rural Wealden are variable depending on the location of each village. Specific bus routes that were highlighted as areas of concern included routes from Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough to surrounding villages in the evening (JP,FG2 and I1) and transport at off peak times was also difficult for those wishing to work at Gatwick Airport (CM FG2). Limited bus links available to local train stations was also identified as a problem. For example, buses run only every 2 hours from Broad Oak to Etchingam (I2). Wealden also has one of the highest rates of road traffic

accidents (RTAs) resulting in death or serious injury in the South East and concern was expressed that these RTAs will increase as some villages are expanded and there is a lack of affordable public transport options (NR, FG1). Many interviewees complained about high traffic speeds through their villages and the need for further traffic calming (I5, I8 and FG1).

Age concern run a community minibus which is regarded as essential for older people without transport as some of them are unable to walk far enough to make it to the main bus routes from their homes (I2). However, such community bus services are under threat as a result of a lack of drivers, finances and/or lack of use (FG2). A lack of Sunday services was identified as a problem for it limited possibilities of visiting family (I2).

There are also access problems to some of the public transport that is available. For example, Westham train station was identified as difficult to get off for the elderly and disabled due to large gap between the train and the platform edge (I4). Buses from Pevensey were reported to be an older design which is inappropriate for parents with pushchairs (I8). Interviewees also mentioned the recent disruption and transport problems caused by snowstorms in winter 2010. For example, there was a concern about a lack of salt bins in appropriate areas (I3) and one interviewee pointed out that she was unable to leave her house for 8 days as a result of being snowbound and nobody clearing key roads in Heathfield (I2).

2.4 Prosperity and business: working age adults and employment

Unemployed adults in rural Wealden face some specific difficulties in finding employment. These difficulties include: access to appropriately timed public transport, access to childcare, access to local job centres and access to the internet to seek work online. Young people from rural Wealden who are seeking work often need to travel considerable distances (for example to Eastbourne) in order to access the nearest Job Centre. Thus young people are relocating from rural areas to towns in order to access work (GC, FG2):

“People have to travel all the way to Eastbourne to go to the job centre.... it’s a long way down to Eastbourne... I know we can’t have them 7 days a week, no, but we could have a day when local youth or unemployed people can go there (to a local youth centre). Things need to be brought out.” (I2, Pensioner, Broad Oak)

The cost of childcare was also found to be a barrier to parents entering work. For example the closest nursery to Pevensey at Stone Cross was reported to cost £1,000 a month making it inaccessible to parents on low incomes (I8):

“I wanted to go back to work 6 months ago and so we started looking probably about 8 months ago for nurseries and that was our closest one and we just couldn’t afford it. Even if I went back to work full time and we had the tax credits to help, you had to

have that money in the first place (for the Nursery) and then they give it back to you and they don't always give the amount that you pay, it's only up to a certain point.... So it just wasn't feasible financially. So I think that's another thing because I've been out of work since I was 6 months pregnant - so over 2 years now I've been at home with [my son] and I think that I probably should have been a bit more proactive about finding services in the area but there's just not really that much going on and then when you add post-natal (depression) into everything, if you're in a smaller area you just stay inside really." (I8, Single Mother, Pevensey Bay)

It was identified that many employed adults currently working in rural Wealden are at risk of deprivation. For example, low income work in the service sector, farming and equestrian jobs can result in a 'day to day existence' that makes people working in these jobs vulnerable to deprivation even if they can afford things at the moment, the problem being that they are not saving or 'future proofing' themselves (CM, FG2). There is also a lot of seasonal work for example in Pevensey and Westham which may mean some seasonal fluctuation in JSA figures for this area.

Slow broadband speeds are also a significant problem for job seekers in rural Wealden because potential job applicants are finding it very slow to search through online adverts and are having difficulty in filling out on line application forms (GC, FG2). This difficulty of broadband access is worsened when individuals cannot sign up to a broadband provider because their credit check is denied (MB, FG2). There is also a further difficulty of setting up online businesses within rural areas because of slow broadband speeds and potential employers tend to choose sites with assured internet access (GC, FG2).

2.5 Cultural activities, sport and leisure

Patchy provision, transport issues and limited finances for access mean that people in rural Wealden do not necessarily benefit fully from sport, leisure and cultural opportunities (FG 1, FG2). In particular it has been identified that there is a lack of entertainment for rural teenage populations and this becomes a greater issue in winter when it is not possible for teenagers to cycle to local schemes and clubs and local facilities are not floodlit (FG1). Furthermore funds for cultural and sporting activities have been in short supply as a result of the recession (FG1):

"Yeah it's alright in the summer coz we got the beach but if it's in the winter then it's rubbish coz there's nowhere to go, so you gotta just stand there cold... and then we have the police coming there saying can you move along blah, blah, blah. So we move along, we go to another place, they come back down saying can you move along somewhere else and wherever we go they'll come and tell us to move along. So we're standing (saying) like where are we supposed to go and they (said) go down the park.

We just went there and you told us to move on, so what do you want us to do? There's nothing to do. " (I6, 15 years old, Pevensey Bay)

Entertainment for teenagers seemed to be a real issue for many of the interviewees and focus group members. It was perceived that if adequate entertainment were to be provided then they may be less likely to 'cause trouble'. In Pevensey Bay teenagers complained that the village lacked things to do and that they still required a multi-court for sports (for which planning permission had been turned down)(I6). Teenagers in Pevensey also felt that they did not have access to adequate information about what was going on in their local area for example one teenager pointed out:

"The other day there was like a good rapper come down that we like and then about 3 days later we found out,they were like oh yeah so and so's was in Eastbourne the other day, and I just went oh yeah we didn't know about that everybody else went. No one tells us, we was like some little pushed aside village" (I6, 15 years old, Pevensey Bay)

Quality leisure facilities for the wider population in rural areas are also somewhat unevenly distributed. In Heathfield, residents expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of a local swimming pool (I2). However, for older mobile and socially adept women it seems possible to access a vibrant social life in many of the villages in rural Wealden. For example older residents in Hartfield can access the local social club and other opportunities. However, often such groups tend to be dominated by older ladies and maybe perceived as intimidating to outsiders (I1, I8, MB FG2).

2.6 Education and Learning

Key barriers to education and learning that deprived residents in rural Wealden faced included the prohibitive cost and timings of some public transport routes and limited awareness of opportunities and subsidies available:

"There isn't really much going on for children and my closest Sure Start Centre is in Hailsham. Because it's Wealden I can't go to any of the Eastbourne ones. I mean I could go as long as there was a free space but then if someone from Eastbourne turned up then they would take a preference over me because they're registered there... I didn't realise that this was part of Wealden until like we moved here and I was like oh no, damn. So for me to get to Hailsham, because I don't drive as well, I have to get the bus to Eastbourne and then from Eastbourne to Hailsham and then once I get to Hailsham I have to walk to the actual centre so I don't really think we thought about like the implications that it would have." (I8, Single Mother, Pevensey Bay)

It is a requirement across the UK that GCSE and A-Level students have broadband access. However, there continue to be very poor broadband speeds in some areas of rural Wealden (FG1, FG2). Some GCSE students were reported to be unable to access their coursework over the winter months due to being snowed in and not having adequate internet speeds at home (LA, FG1). Village Action Plans have also identified this as an issue.

The cost of transport was also identified as a barrier to students attending college and some are not taking college places because of the transport costs involved (LA,FG1, CM, FG2). The library in Pevensey village was praised as a positive facility (I8) however, for parents in Pevensey the closest Sure Start centre is in Hailsham which is more difficult to access from Pevensey by public transport than the centre in Eastbourne (I8).

2.7 Environment and community safety

While the environment of rural Wealden contains many scenic areas recognised for their environmental quality and biodiversity there remain some key environmental quality and community safety issues faced by the population at large including deprived communities in the area. For example, littering on A- Roads remains an issue and has raised concerns regarding the visual amenity of the area (MH, FG1). Dog litter remains a problem in some areas and visitors to rural areas of Wealden who leave behind their picnic litter has also been recognised as a problem. These are themes that have been noted on recent local 'Village Action Plans' (LA, FG1). A number of respondents also commented that they were unable to enjoy the benefits of rural life:

" I don't think people realise that it is a rural area because ... the road is always busy from 7 o'clock in the morning until 9 at night, there's cars constantly and because it's so close to Eastbourne it doesn't feel that rural but when you're here, on your own, it does feel quite isolating really because you can't get anywhere." (I8, Single Mother, Pevensey Bay)

This was not a universal view, with some interviewees who lived in relative deprivation and in rented accommodation praising some aspects of their living environments:

"For my age yes it's got everything here for me basically, you know so... I never thought I would like East Dean, I thought it was a bit out in the woods but I've just fallen in love with it really. You know it's a nice, very clean area and I've got some nice neighbours and I do like it." (I7, Female, East Dean)

Doorstep collection is thought to be required for recyclables for older people and disabled as it is hard to carry such items to the nearest recycling point (I2). On a positive note the problem of abandoned vehicles is thought to have been tackled and the profile of this issue is thought to have decreased (MH,FG1).

Crime and fear of crime are issues that residents of rural Wealden face (FG1, FG2). Fear of crime in rural Wealden can also structure people's experiences, with concern that overblown media coverage of a few isolated incidents can make people fearful of crime in their area (GH, FG1). This also leads to the demonization of youth:

"When I was a teenager we had a thriving youth club. I mean you're talking eighty to a hundred people, now what have they got? Nothing, they've got nothing..... We used to make our own sport, enjoyment but they don't seem to want to, they cause trouble or drink that's it. That's their lifestyle you know?" (I3, 55-65 years old Male, Mayfield)

"One thing I hate is like when say I'm walking down the road and like an old lady moves the other side of the street to move out the way, coz it's like, everybody's like oh the Pevensey Bay kids are so bad, they've done this they've done that and we haven't done any of it. They think we're like the people we see off TV like we're just gonna come up to you and stab you in the night and take all your stuff. But I dunno anybody who's stabbed anyone so. I ain't gonna go round stabbing no one" (I6, 15 years old, Pevensey)

Attitudes towards police presence and support in the rural villages were variable. Some were happy with the level of policing and relationship established with local police (I1) and others were dissatisfied with the perceived 'inadequate' level of policing, particularly in relationship to the enforcement of speed limits and parking restrictions within villages (I8).

3. Other Emerging Issues: Local Democracy

"I suppose we don't grumble enough really, possibly because we are rather spread out and so we are not together enough to grumble" (I2, Pensioner, Broad Oak)

Some interviewees felt they did not know the right channels through which to go in order to get their complaints heard (I2). Others felt the Parish Council and other routes were adequate at times (I4, I5). However, teenagers in Pevensey didn't feel like they were adequately listened to by the council or local residents. For example, they felt they had not received feedback on a recent application for a shelter at the local Skate Park that requires planning permission (a request they put through the LAT (Local Action Team)) (I6) and at a recent street meeting they felt they were not listened to, as the following quote indicates:

*“They did a street meeting out here ages ago and all it ended up with was this geezer who lives across the road from me who thinks he runs like everything, he’s just so stuck up.... we were all going around talking to people trying to explain that we’re not doing anything wrong, and then he just stands up and goes oh we’ll send their kids back to somewhere else blah, blah, blah and everyone starts cheering. They was all turning on us like oh it’s all your fault and then we got like the older lot coming and sticking up for us, they were like the kids of the bay before us and now it’s us. And they’re like, they were just turning on us because that’s the trouble, they just want someone to blame for anything. Even if it weren’t us or say like there was a crash on the road they’d blame us, they’d probably say oh we were standing in the middle of the street. They just blame us for anything. Yeah we make a bit of noise but as I’ve already said it’s coz we’re in a bit of a big group but say they come out and have a go at us, we’re not standing there like oh f[***] off, jog on, whatever like starting on ‘em and everything. It’s like oh okay we’re move on, so we move on and get told to move on somewhere else. Then you get the old people that come out and start giving us a load of abuse”*
(16, 15 years old, Pevensey)

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Many of the issues faced by deprived and disadvantaged people in rural Wealden, particularly relating to education, health and other services, are shared with the wider community. The difficulty is that those on low incomes have less ability to absorb the additional costs of negotiating their way around the constraints that they face. Allied to this is a perception, amongst some people, that those who live in rural areas should accept lower standards of service provision because they are thought to have chosen to live in these areas. However, this ignores ideas of equality of access to services for all, and glosses over the fact that not everyone in rural Wealden has chosen their circumstances and the location in which they currently live. For vulnerable and deprived people in rural Wealden, this has led to feelings of isolation and worry about the future. As the quote below illustrates, this is not related to one specific activity or service, but to a combination of issues that leave vulnerable people feeling more vulnerable:

“Once my grandson is old enough they’re not going to pay for him to stay here and I won’t be able to afford the rent. So they will cut my rent down and I won’t be able to afford to stay here because it’s two-bedroom. So I will have to look for a one-bedroom place. But that worries me because my grandson will be going to college and he won’t be able to afford to live anywhere, because he’s only got me and he’s gonna have to live with me even if I got a one bedroom place he’ll have to stay with me, because he won’t be able to support himself in accommodation while he’s studying at college, you know he won’t be able to do that. So that does worry me because I also need him around when I can’t do things. You know I can’t lift, I cannot lift anything, like even the bin I can’t lift so I do need him here for that because it puts a hell of a lot of a strain on my back, and just lifting even a saucepan could put my back out of, out of place. So, and I can’t do hoovering or anything like that coz he does that for me so he is a big help to me really. Without him I’d be lost.” (17, East Dean, Female with limiting long term illness).

In this example a grandparent who has a limiting long term illness and who cares for and is given care by her grandson is vulnerably housed. She is facing the prospect of having to move along with her grandson once he starts college because they will not be able to afford the rent on a 2 bedroom property. Such circumstances are insecure and can result in feelings of worry about the future. It is one example of the way in which disadvantage can be experienced in rural Wealden. Other experiences identified in this report include insecure employment, insecure tenancy, lack of convenient access health and childcare facilities and a lack of ability to save for the future.

Many of these issues that are listed here under WLSP thematic areas are interlinked. For example, there is a clear connection between provision of public transport and access to education, employment and health services. Furthermore, it is apparent that the provision of services for vulnerable and deprived people in rural Wealden is patchy and that few of

them have the means to address this, particularly in terms of transport to local service centres. This has led, in the eyes of some people, to an over reliance on charitable initiatives (FG1, FG2). These are issues that have been identified by previous social research in Wealden (Sussex Rural Community Council, 2001).

The following actions have been identified as having potential to help address the constraints facing deprived people in Wealden:

Housing Actions: There is a need for more affordable housing and a need to identify vulnerable isolated individuals in need of support. This could be achieved through joined up thinking between the fire and rescue services and the 3rd sector to identify where vulnerable people living in poor housing are located (NR, FG 1). Fire and rescue already offer preventative schemes to ensure these people have access to alarms and sprinklers systems and are therefore aware of the locations of some vulnerable people. ‘County Connect’ could be a possible link for this to enable notes on vulnerable people to be shared and key safes could be adopted as required (D, FG1). At the time that the research was conducted, many interviews and focus group attendees felt that the responsibility for promoting more affordable housing lay with the local authority, through the Local Development Framework (FG1) however it is increasingly clear that alternatives will need to be found to supplement the work of the local authority.

Health and Social Care: There is support for developing the potential for ‘good neighbour’ and befriending schemes (FG1, MB) to combat problems of social isolation. Helping adults in need of care to stay in their own homes in rural Wealden and giving them a range of local housing suitable for their conditions may help to encourage local prosperity in the area (FG1).

Transport Actions: It is thought that an overarching single transport charity in Sussex, with a clear mandate and strategic vision, could better tackle some of the current issues of provision that are faced in rural Wealden (D, FG1). There are also various requirements for improvements to footpaths and shared use routes, to enable people to move more safely on foot and by bicycle. One example is between Framfield and Uckfield, as there is no footpath for the last few hundred metres despite the fact that many pedestrians use this route (S, FG1).

Employment and finance: Loan sharks in rural Wealden can be a genuine problem for deprived individuals with poor credit ratings. Credit Unions have the potential to improve this situation – for example a credit union in Crowborough (CM, FG2). There is also thought to be scope for providing more employment through farm diversifications schemes, although it is recognised that local and regional grant support is likely to decline (FG2).

Cultural activities, sport and leisure: One barrier to adults putting on activities for teenagers is CRB checks and other risk assessment paper work:

“Every single different project that I work on I have to be CRB checked for separately.”
(I4, p13)

There is a need to find those willing to commit to CRB checks in order supervise teenage groups and GH suggest there is a need for a separate person to deal with the paperwork of setting up CRB checks and other administrative elements of running groups for teenagers (FG2, JP and MB). JP identifies the work of the 'football foundation' as exemplary here. There is also a need to use school facilities available after school better and then put on transport after school (especially in winter, FG2, CM).

References

Commission for Rural Communities (2008) *State of the countryside update: rural analysis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007*. State of the Countryside Update 5. Cheltenham: Commission for Rural Communities.

Department of Communities and Local Government (2008) *The English Indices of Deprivation 2007. Full Report*. London: DCLG.

Sussex Rural Community Council (2001) *Local Peoples' Perceptions on life in Wealden District*, Wealden District Social Exclusion Project, Commissioned by healthy Wealden Partnership

APPENDIX

Interview Participants

Interviewee	Age estimate	Location	Source
1 F	75-85	Hartfield	Suggested by Chair of the Wealden Seniors Forum
2 F	65-75	Broad Oak, Heathfield	Suggested by Chair of the Wealden Seniors Forum
3 M	55-65	Mayfield	Involved with Tenant Association for a WDC housing estate.
4 M and F	65-75	Westham	Suggested by Westham Village Hall Committee. Partially-Sighted Male and his wife
5 F	50-65	Horam	Suggested by Neighbourhood Officer
6 M1 and M2	17 and 15	Pevensey Bay	Participants in Pevensey Bay Local Action Team
7 F	55 -65	East Dean	Suggested by Southdown Housing Association and Homeworks support officers
8F	18-25	Pevensey Bay	Suggested by Southdown Housing Association and Homeworks support officers. Single mum.

Focus Group 1 LSP Participants

David Liley, East Sussex County Council
Sheila O'Sullivan, East Sussex Downs and Weald Primary Care Trust
Neal Robinson, ESFRS
Liz Allsobrook, Rural Sussex
Malcolm Harris, Wealden District Council
Sue Shoemith, 3VA

Focus Group 2 Voluntary Sector Participants

Mary Colato, East Sussex Association for the Blind
Graham Coffey, Job Centre Plus
Graham Hill, Victim Support
Mark Betson, Rural Officer for the Diocese of Chichester
John Padfield, Wealden District ward councillor/farmer
Caroline Mack, Chief Executive of Uckfield CAB