



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

Digest report

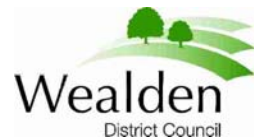
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Plumpton College



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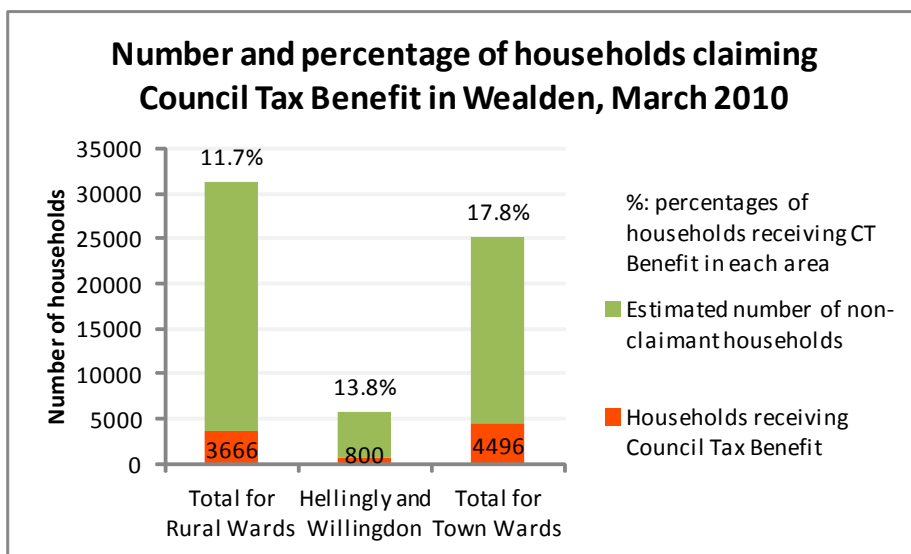
The Wealden Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) carried out this project to assist in planning better service delivery for rural Wealden. With the help of LSP partners, community organisations and local residents, we have been able to obtain information at a more local level than is normally available. This has given us a more accurate understanding of rural needs at ward level, and of a range of types of disadvantage: economic; health; safety; housing; education; etc. The report considers the findings in relation to the eight themes of the Wealden Sustainable Community Strategy.

For further information, visit:

www.wealdencommunitystrategy.co.uk/projects/Rural_services/Ruralservicesproject.aspx

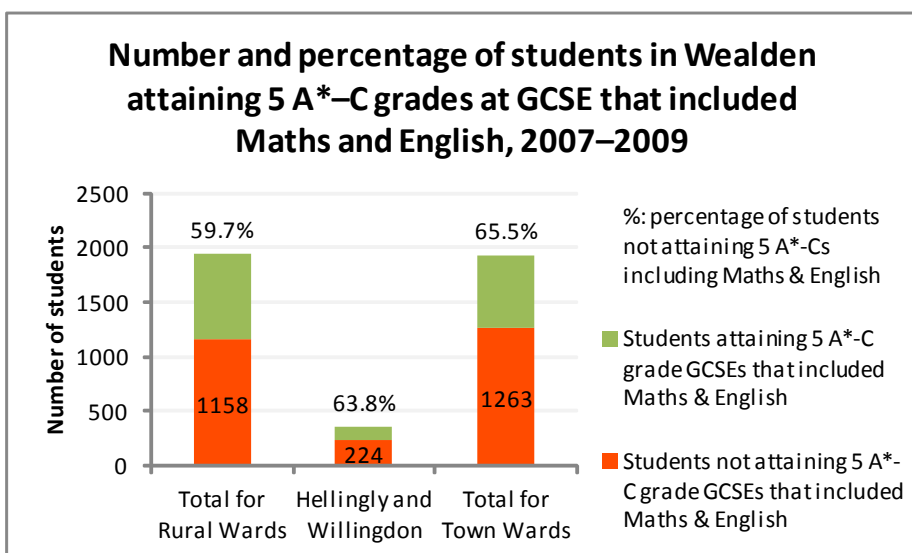
Understanding rural disadvantage

The project confirmed that disadvantage exists across Wealden and in all eight LSP theme areas. The proportions of disadvantaged people are generally higher in Wealden towns than in the rural areas, with some notable exceptions such as private housing condition and fuel poverty. However, comparisons of percentages between different wards often hide large absolute numbers of disadvantaged people in rural wards, for example, 3,666 rural households receiving



Council Tax Benefit (see figure above); 3,030 rural households without a car; 1,158 out of 1,940 GCSE candidates not achieving 5 A*-C grades including Maths and English (see figure below). In some cases, there are more people affected in Wealden's rural wards than the towns, for example: 2,880 rural residents claiming out-of-work benefits (2,535 from Wealden towns) and 11,184 emergency hospital admissions (11,086 from towns). The total populations are: rural wards 71,000; town wards 58,000 and Hellingly and Willingdon (which are mixed town/rural) 12,500.

Our interviews and focus groups with service-users and providers showed how specific issues can negatively affect people's experiences in ways that data analysis cannot pick up. They also shed light on connections between different issues and ways they could combine to make people's situations even more difficult. This part of the project highlighted the importance of taking account of perceptions alongside data. Perceptions have a pronounced effect on people's quality of life, compounding feelings of insecurity.



The project looked back at data from "The Rural Share of Deprivation in the South-East" report¹, finding for example, that 1320 people who claim Department for Work and Pensions benefits live in the 9 most deprived of Wealden's 94 Lower Super Output Areas², but 5010 (79.2%) live elsewhere in the District. In other words, focussing services on the most deprived places risks leaving large numbers of people who need the services unable to access them.

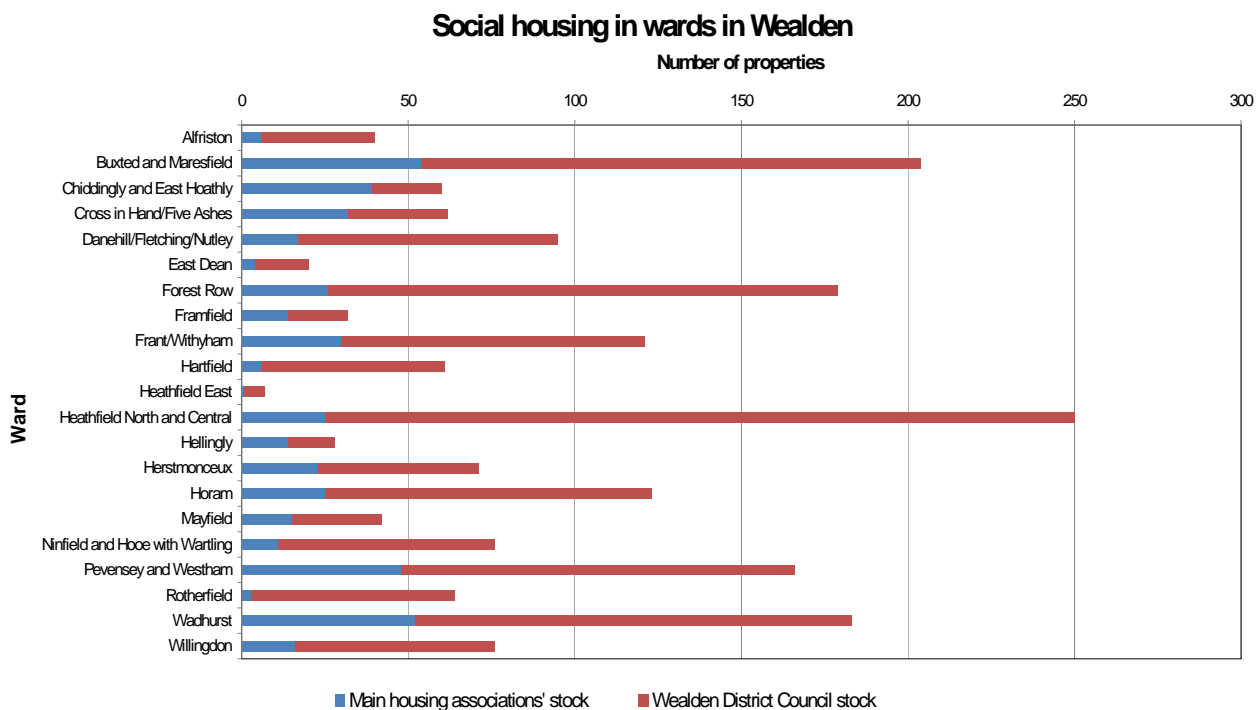
¹ Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI), 2007. The Rural Share of Deprivation in the South-East: East Sussex Version 2. <http://www.rural-evidence.org.uk/reports.php>

² According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007

Housing and fuel poverty

Around half of Wealden's population live in villages, hamlets and rural areas. As shown in the following graph, there are a significant number of social rented houses in these areas, often with low income households living in them. In the private sector, affordability and housing condition are significant issues. Fuel poverty is a particularly rural problem as many houses are less well insulated and off the mains gas network, making them too expensive for people with limited incomes to heat properly, which can affect their health. In 2003, 6.2% of households in rural Wealden were living in fuel poverty and the rise in fuel prices over the past eight years will have increased the numbers.

"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."



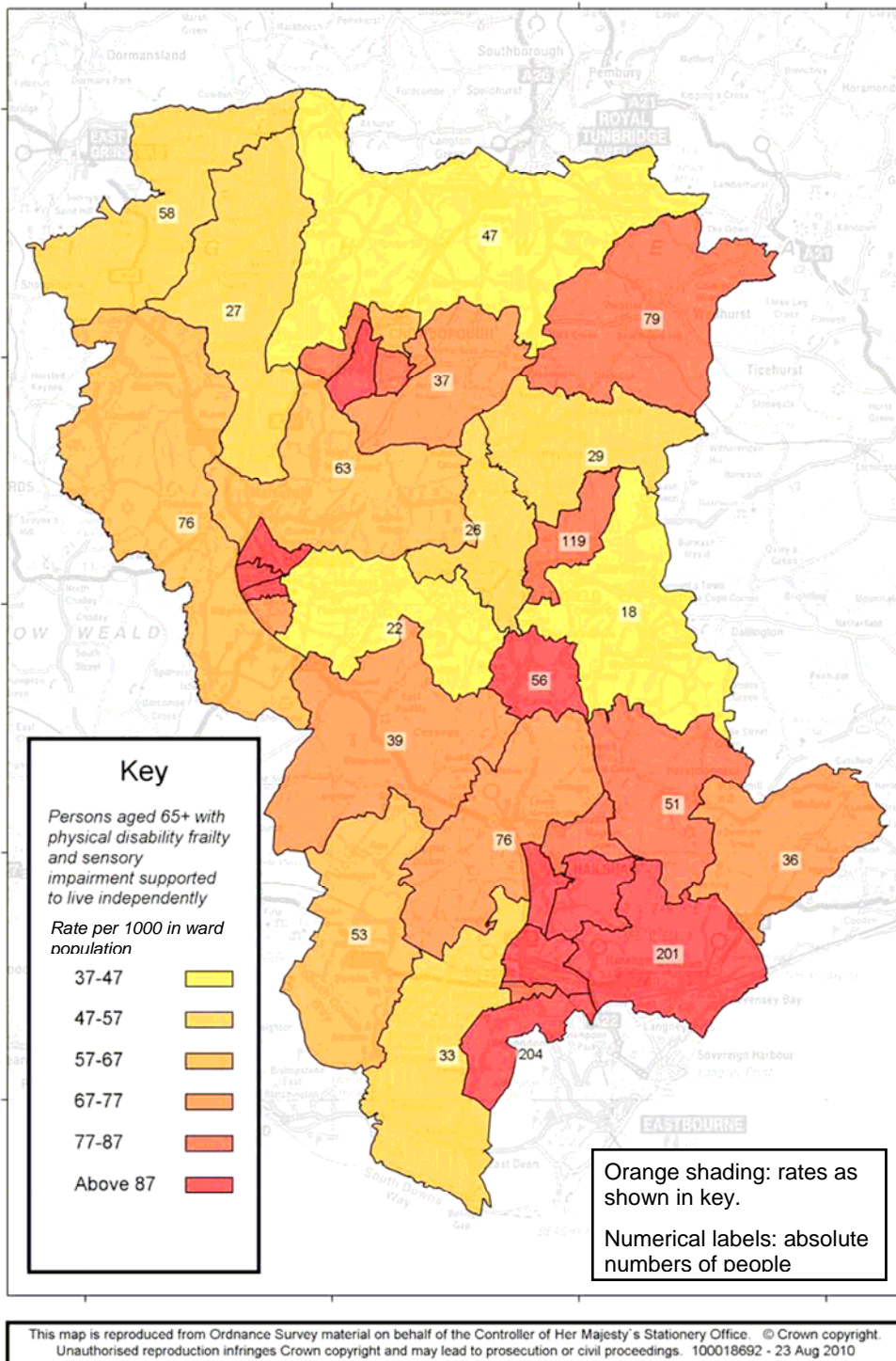
*: Includes the four housing associations with significant housing stocks in Wealden

Health and Social Care

Emergency hospital admissions is one of the indicators where the rate is lower in rural areas than in towns, but the absolute number of people from rural wards going into hospital in an emergency is higher. There are also 11,053 people living with a long-term limiting illness in rural Wealden. The map overleaf shows that while the highest proportions of people aged 65 and over who are supported to live independently live in Wealden's towns, there are also high proportions in some rural wards, such as Horam and Pevensy & Westham, and significant numbers across the District. All in all, there are high numbers of health and social care service users living in rural Wealden.

Our qualitative research demonstrated issues of sparse provision of day care for vulnerable elderly residents. With the closure of Post Offices and village shops, there is also less opportunity for local service providers to 'unofficially check' on vulnerable residents.

Persons aged 65+ with physical disability, sensory impairment and frailty, social services support to live independently, rate per 1000



Cultural Activities, Sport and Leisure

Our research showed that people in rural Wealden do not fully benefit from sport, leisure and cultural opportunities because of patchy provision, issues with transport, lack of information and cost. There is a particular issue for teenagers living in rural Wealden.

Education and Learning

Attainment data showed that Wealden schoolchildren in both rural and town wards performed well at primary level, but were below the county average at GCSE. Although more students attained 5°A*-C GCSEs (including maths and English) in rural wards, the average attainment rate was still under 50% across rural wards, and less than 33% in two wards. Note that many more students achieve 5 A*-C in total, but attain lower grades in Maths and/or English.

The focus groups and interviews covered barriers to education that may hinder a child's development. These included public transport costs and timings; lack of awareness of opportunities or subsidies; cross-authority boundary Sure Start centre access arrangements and poor broadband access.

Prosperity and Business

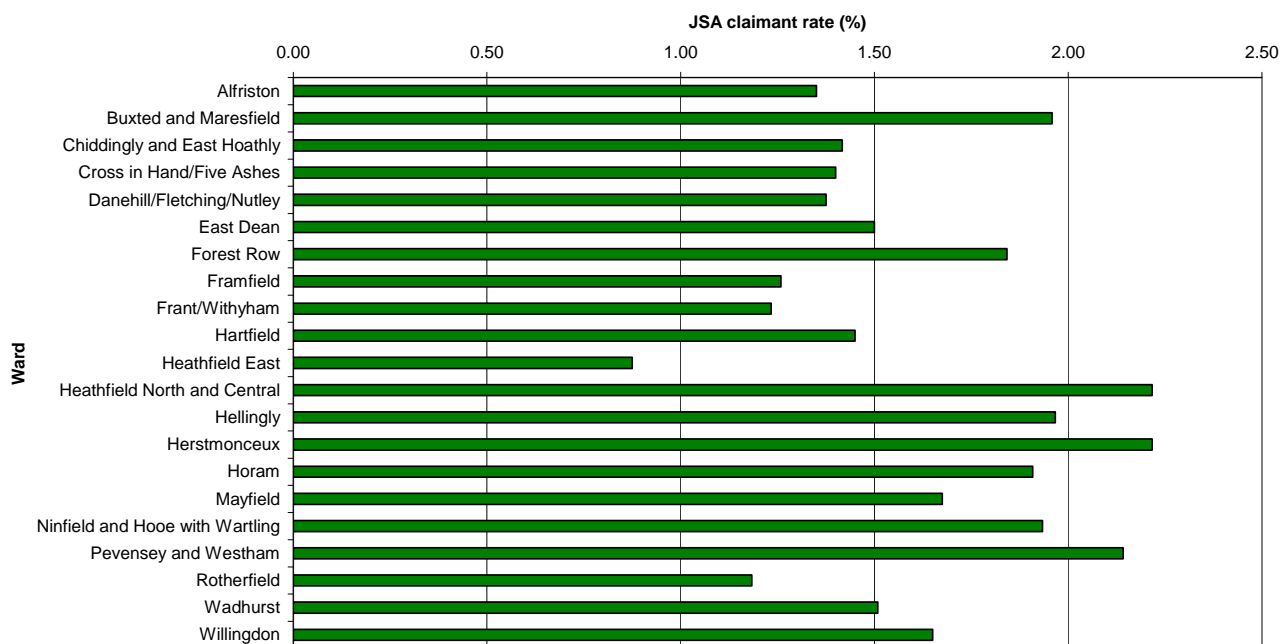
In 2009, although there were a higher number of (short-term) Job Seekers' Allowance claimants in towns, a greater number of rural residents were claiming one of the wider range of out-of-work benefits (2,880) than those living in towns.

Focus group and interview participants told us about factors affecting people who are out of work that are felt particularly strongly in rural wards. This includes lack of access to Job Centres, affordable childcare, fast, affordable broadband and deficiencies in public transport. This is a good example of how the lesser availability of services in rural areas combine to make it more challenging for people to overcome things like unemployment.

National figures indicate that low local incomes (below £7 per hour) are a more significant prosperity issue than unemployment in the most rural areas of the country.

The number of young adults aged 16-25 not in education, employment or training (NEET) is lower in rural wards (132) than in towns (173), but some rural wards did have high numbers. Nationally, this issue has grown much more serious since the research was carried out. The findings also reflect the trend for young people to move from rural areas to towns to find work.

Wealden Rural Wards - Job Seekers Allowance Claimants Rate (2009 Average)
Percentage of the working age resident population



Transport and Access

Car ownership is higher in rural areas than in Wealden towns, but 10.5% of rural households do not have access to a car. The patchiness of public transport in rural wards leaves 6,331 households with journeys of over 30 minutes (by public transport) to access the local GP surgery. The fact that more people in rural areas need to have a car and travel further, means that transport is a disproportionate financial burden compared with households in towns.

Issue	Households, weighted for sensitivity to travel, within 30 minutes of a GP by public transport		
Units	Households		
Date	2005		
Analysis	Area	Percentage	Total
Comparator (if available)	East Sussex	77%	
Rates and totals	Rural wards*	79%	23,532 (6,331 >30 mins)
Rates and totals	Town wards*	73%	17,888 (6,642 >30 mins)
Poorest rural ward figures	Framfield	54%	568 (476 >30 mins)
Poorest rural ward figures	Heathfield North and Central	71%	2,412 (974 >30 mins)
Poorest rural ward figures	Rotherfield	71%	712 (286 >30 mins)

*: The mixed rural/town wards of Willingdon & Jevington and Hellingly are not included in either of these figures

In addition to patchiness, the focus groups and interviews highlighted specific issues around public transport: the lack of off-peak services, which affects shift workers and young people going out in the evening; accessibility for the elderly or parents with pushchairs; and cost.

Transport is a key element of rural disadvantage, which combined with distant locations and lower levels of local service provision creates the concept of mobility deprivation. For people unable to drive, such as the young or those prevented by age or health rural life can be very isolating in terms of accessing services, even if the community they are part of is a stronger reason to stay.

Environment and Community Safety

People value the District's countryside and wildlife, but are concerned about litter and dog fouling. Having the countryside for informal activity and exercise to some extent makes up for the lack of access to formal leisure facilities.

We collected data on domestic violence incidents, which were slightly more prevalent in towns, but still numbered 325 in rural wards. However, emotive media reporting of isolated incidents of crime has made some residents unnecessarily fearful of crime in their area. As shown through our interviews perceptions and feelings of insecurity about all kinds of issue have a pronounced effect on people's quality of life.

Customer Insight

Data from Mosaic and Output Area Classification (OAC) in conjunction with data from the Council Tax Benefit recipients database showed that economic hardship in rural wards mainly affects older residents. In addition, many residents who can be classed as 'disadvantaged' live in areas that are generally affluent. This part of the project was useful in identifying kinds of people (age, family/marital status, housing type and location, and, income and employment type) who are more likely to need to claim Council Tax benefit.

Reflecting the data for emergency hospital admissions, Mosaic groups with high levels of ill health were concentrated in Pevensy Bay and surrounding villages as well as Wadhurst.

The Council Tax Benefit recipients were also mapped to highlight areas of the District where numbers are high. While there are concentrations in social housing estates, it is striking how widespread pockets of high rates of claimant households are across rural Wealden.

Conclusions

Many of the issues faced by disadvantaged people in rural Wealden are the same as the wider community. However there is a perception amongst some that those who live in rural areas should accept lower standards because they are thought to have chosen to live in these areas. By no means everyone in rural Wealden has chosen their circumstances. Many people living in rural wards, particularly the elderly, feel isolated and worried about the future. There should be equality of access to services for all residents, not just those in our towns.

There are issues that are prevalent in rural areas that can create disadvantage, such as hard to heat homes, distances to travel and weaker public transport, weaker broadband and patchier access to services. Equally there are positives such as less crime, higher attainment in English and maths among children in their last year of primary school and the attractive natural/living environment.

In conclusion, there are many positives to rural living, but for those who find themselves in disadvantaged situations, there are aspects of rural areas that can make life difficult. Key findings of the project are that:

- Disadvantage is widespread in rural Wealden.
- There are few places in rural areas where the proportion of people in disadvantaged circumstances is as high as in towns, but in total, comparable numbers of people experience disadvantage. It is important to tackle the hotspots of deprivation in large towns, but this should not be to the exclusion of measures in rural areas where services are needed to address disadvantage.
- A number of wards appear repeatedly among the most disadvantaged in rural Wealden, especially Pevensy & Westham. The majority of others are in the south of the District.
- At an individual level, a series of interacting factors will often compound a person's situation, as illustrated by the interview quote below.

“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.”