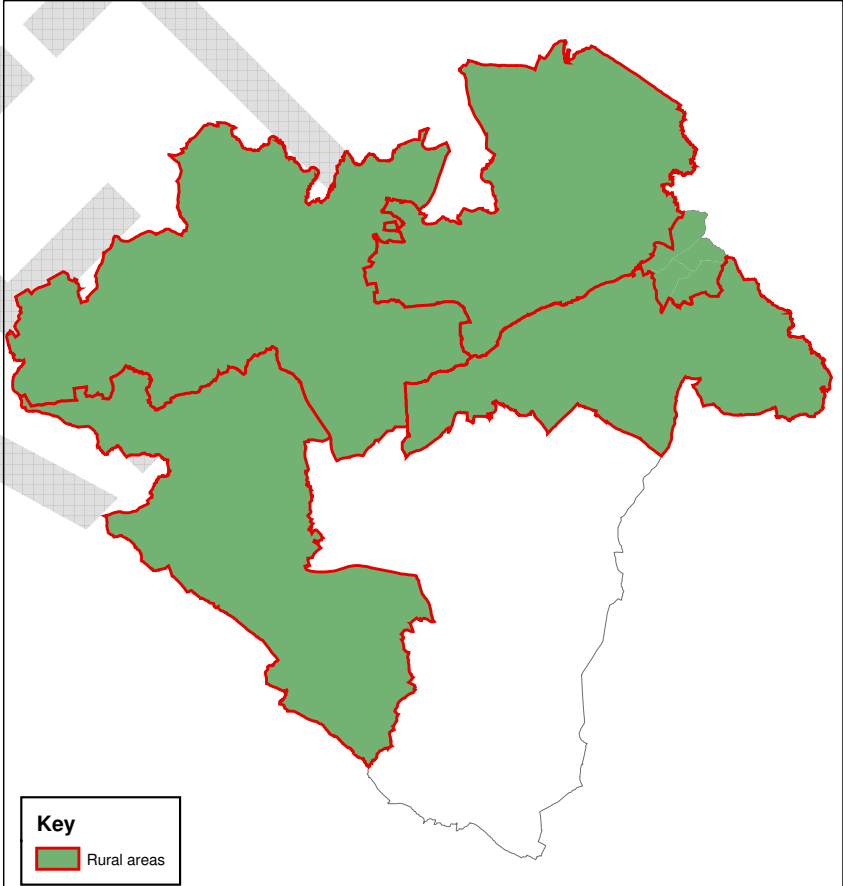


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1. Introduction

Background

The Telford and Wrekin Rural Plan is an agreed framework for collective action – based on evidence – to ensure well-being, sustainable communities and a sustainable countryside in rural Telford and Wrekin. The plan sets out a strategic framework that takes into account the government’s three priorities for rural communities:

- ❖ Economic and social regeneration - supporting enterprise across rural England, and targeting greater resources at areas of greatest need (a sustainable rural economy)
- ❖ Social Justice for all – tackling rural social exclusion, wherever it occurs and providing fair access to services for all rural people (sustainable rural communities)
- ❖ Enhancing the value of our countryside – protecting the natural environment for this and future generations¹ (a sustainable rural environment)

Definition of Telford and Wrekin’s Rural area.

For the purposes of attracting funding to assist with the development of services in the rural areas of the Borough it is proposed that the four rural council wards of Church Aston & Lilleshall, Edgmond, Ercall Magna, Wrockwardine and the market town of Newport are included in the defined rural areas of the Borough

Reasons for the Rural Plan

Disadvantage is commonly experienced by our older and most vulnerable people who find it difficult to access public services. Rural areas next to large urban populations can have a double disadvantage, with the majority of both funding and strategy being aimed at the most severe problem areas based on area-based deprivation measures, which are almost always urban areas. It is important that the rural evidence base is improved to strengthen the argument for specific measures for rural communities.

It is important that rural settlements near to large urban areas are maintained as functioning communities that retain their distinct qualities and character while also providing access to services and opportunities for economic activities and growth.

Wider Context

This plan has been devised at a time when rural communities are undergoing significant change and pressure. Some of the issues facing rural communities

- Access to services
- Climate change
- Economic challenges

We will identify the issues of the rural areas by engaging with the communities. We will use the rural plan as a tool to highlight the issues and address them. The Rural Forum will act as a mechanism to enable the communities to work with key services and partners as well as networking with each other. We will also encourage and support rural communities to put together a parish plan or needs assessment.

¹ The Government’s Rural Strategy 2004 – Priorities for Rural Policy

2. The profile of rural Telford & Wrekin

Rural population

Two thirds of Telford and Wrekin is rural with 16% of the total population of the Borough living in the rural areas and the market town of Newport. Outside the town of Newport there are 14 parish councils that make up the rural area, see map.

Telford and Wrekin's rural population grew by 15.8% between 1991 and 2001, compared with the borough-wide increase of 11.9%. The statistics for rural England show an average of 5% increase over this time². The rural population profile is older than the borough average, which often means that there is a significant amount of volunteering and involvement within these communities. However the future implications for this are likely to be an increased demand for services especially health services, care facilities and public/community transport.

Edgmond had proportionately fewer children than the Borough profile but had the highest rates of student households due to Harper Adams University College being based in the ward. Church Aston and Lilleshall had 19.6% 65years+ compared with 12.4% for the Borough, while Ercall Magna had the highest ward rate for 85years+ at 4% of the ward's population.

Deprivation

Action must focus on excluded people and communities wherever they exist - including those living in otherwise generally prosperous areas.

Use of the Index of Multiple Deprivation can be misleading when looking at rural areas, where the poor and the more affluent live side by side such that the index statistics give no clear picture of the underlying issues. This is in contrast to many of the urban areas where much higher concentrations of deprivation are seen.

The percentage of rural residents in poverty has risen from 16% to 18% between 2004/5 and 2006/7. After housing costs are taken into account the increase is from 16% to 19%. This is a faster percentage rise than in urban areas.

The need for evidence

It is recognised that there is a lack of data for the rural areas. Any available data tends to cover both rural and urban areas and distorts the picture in the countryside. This lack of data can create difficulties when it comes to prioritising needs within the rural areas of Telford and Wrekin and monitoring progress. It can also hinder progress when bidding for external funding. One of the early actions is to identify routes to improving the specific data available on Telford and Wrekin rural areas.

'Profiling the Rural Areas of Telford & Wrekin', produced by Telford & Wrekin Council's Policy, Performance and Partnership Unit, contains area profiles for the rural wards and the market town of Newport. This can be found at: <http://intranet/sites/PolicyPerformancePartnerships/Docs/Public/Rural%20area%20census%20profile.PDF>

² Population Trends in Rural Areas of England 1991 – 2001 Rural Statistics Unit Defra

3. Key issues for rural Telford & Wrekin

Since February 2008 extensive research has taken place with organisations, agencies, parish councils and communities to find out what the issues for the rural areas are. These issues will help to form the basis for a rural plan that will be produced and prioritised by the newly established Rural Forum. The following are a brief summary of these issues, more details can be obtained by contacting the Locality Manager (Newport and Rural)

A sustainable rural economy

- **Agriculture** - is still an important part of the rural community and needs to be supported to enable it to adapt to the changes that are taking place. Particularly in relation to the reform of the European Union, subsidy changes and disease threats
- **Business and employment** - There are high percentages of small rural businesses in need of business support, access to staff, incubator units to expand to. There are also a large percentage of the rural population who commute to urban areas.
- **Education and skills** – Neighbourhood and Employment Skills Plans for the Rural areas are being used to identify the particular needs of the rural community

Sustainable rural communities

- **Housing** – Average house prices in the rural area are almost double those of the urban area.
- **Access to services** – Many village services are closing leading to the most vulnerable people having greater difficulties in accessing social services.
- **Transport and highways** – Lack of regular public transport leads to higher car ownership and access to services being more difficult for those without personal transport.
- **Community safety** – Rural areas are generally safer with lower levels of crime and ASB however issue around speeding traffic are of particular concern.
- **Health and social care** - Access to healthcare and support for carers
- **Children and young people** – Rural children are often isolated with fewer things to do which can lead to lower expectations of services.

A sustainable rural environment

- **Biodiversity and landscape** – Wrekin is part of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Telford and Wrekin has a bio-diverse landscape that needs to be protected.
- **Countryside access** - Footpaths and bridleways important to communities and visitors, access to some areas needs to be improved.
- **Climate change** – Increasing unpredictable weather needs to be prepared for especially with flooding becoming a more serious issue in the rural area.

Links to Key Strategies

The Rural Plan does not summarise or duplicate other strategies but takes into account the various plans and policies.

Local

- Telford & Wrekin Community Strategy 2006- 2011
- Local Area Agreement 2008-11
- Telford & Wrekin Council Rural Access to Services Programme 2006 – 2009
- The Borough Towns Initiative
- Parish Charter
- Priority Plans
- Equality & Diversity Scheme 2008 - 2011

Regional, National and European

- Report of the Rural Advocate 2007
- State of the Countryside 2008
- Strong & prosperous communities white paper 2006 – this was enacted in 2007
- Communities in Control: real people, real power (the empowerment white paper)
- The New Common Agricultural Policy in Europe
- The Rural Development Programme for England 2007 -2013
- Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food
- West Midlands Economic Strategy
- Regional Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands
- Regional Sustainable Development Framework

4. Objectives and Action Plan

Following the first meeting of the rural forum and research done with organisations and communities in the rural areas two objectives have been identified to underpin the work of the Rural Forum.

1. Ensure that Telford and Wrekin's rural communities have a sustainable future.
2. To improve the quality of life for people living in Telford & Wrekin's rural areas.

Objective	Key Targets	Key Action	Lead Officer	Key Services/Partners	By When	Source of Resources
1.	The percentage of rural parishes with parish plans/needs assessment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33% • 42% • 50% 	Hold awareness raising events to encourage parishes to participate	Caroline Oakes	Wrekin area Committee SALC	2009/10 2010/11 2011/12	
		Introduce a rural proofing process for council documents	Caroline Oakes	Policy & Performance	2009/10	
2.	Facilitate Rural Forum meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 meetings • 4 meetings • 4 meetings 	Developing a programme of community engagement and involvement activity for the rural area and through the locality management structure. Especially with the young people and other hard to reach groups.	Caroline Oakes/locality managers	Rural Forum Cluster Partnerships Wrekin Area Committee	2009/10 2010/11 2011/12	

Objective	Key Targets	Key Action	Lead Officer	Key Services/Partners	By When	Source of Resources
2.		Agree a representative from the Rural Forum to sit on the Telford and Wrekin Local Strategic Partnership	Caroline Oakes, Partnership Officer	Local Strategic Partnership. Rural Forum.	2009/10 2010/11 2011/12	
	Facilitate Newport & Rural Cluster Partnership Meetings including Task & Finish Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 meetings • 4 meetings • 4 meetings 	Issues identified, task and finish groups set up. Main cluster meetings organised	Caroline Oakes	Meredith Evans Newport Cluster Partnership	2009/10 2010/11 2011/12	
	Satisfaction levels for those residents living in the rural areas increase – baseline to be determined (citizens survey 2009)	Launch Rural Web page	Caroline Oakes/Caz Platt	ICT Rural Forum	2009/10	
		Launch Rural newsletter	Caroline Oakes	Rural Forum Design & Print	2009/10	

5. Making it happen

Getting the most from resources

Many of the actions and initiatives proposed in the Rural Plan's accompanying Action Plan will be carried out within existing budgets. The intention is that the Rural Plan will be used to influence budget spending programmes locally. It is not intended that the Rural Plan is dependent on large amounts of council funding rather it will assist in attracting external funding to the area. It can be achieved by making good use of resources that are already available through a coordinated and strategic approach to budget allocation. This will also support the development of a partnership approach to working with our rural communities within the Borough.

Large new projects and schemes may be required to find separate funding. There are limited external funding opportunities available and Telford & Wrekin faces stiff competition when bidding against other areas within the West Midlands. The limited funding is available from a number of sources, including the European Union, Central Government, regional agencies, the National Lottery and charitable trusts. There are opportunities to gain funding by working in partnership with other agencies and also to look at working with neighbouring authorities to attract funding.

Monitoring and Review

To make sure the plan is a success there is a commitment to review its content and monitor its output regularly and report back to the Rural Forum. The monitoring will be through the Rural Action Plan Tables and will be led by the Locality Manager (Newport and Rural)

Rural Action Plan Tables

As actions are identified to be taken forward from the issues that are highlighted by the Rural Forum

A Sustainable Rural Economy					
Priorities	Actions	Partners	Timeframe	Resources	Outcomes
Sustainable Rural Communities					
Priorities	Actions	Partners	Timeframe	Resources	Outcomes
A Sustainable Rural Environment					
Priorities	Actions	Partners	Timeframe	Resources	Outcomes