# Rural England: Local Perspectives on Community and Economy

**Project Dates**: February 2020 – October 2021

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**Sponsors:** DEFRA

The *Rural England: Local Perspectives on Community and Economy* project aims to improve understanding of rural community development through exploring the ‘lived experience’ in terms of relationships between economy, society, local context, and service delivery, and in terms of the drivers of local action and engagement to address local problems and realise ambitions.

The aim of this study is to explore what it is like to live in a rural community in England. The project is seeking to gain a detailed understanding of the day-to-day experiences of people living and working in rural communities. We would like to understand community’s hopes and fears for the future, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. By creating a robust and up-to-date evidence base it is hoped policy discussion and processes will be able to better support rural communities in their development and Covid-19 recovery.

The research will focus on eight diverse rural communities across England, including:

* Pershore, Worcestershire
* Barnard Castle, County Durham
* Minehead, Somerset
* Keswick, Cumbria
* Bridgnorth, Shropshire
* Alnwick, Northumberland
* Thrapston, Northamptonshire
* Shildon, County Durham

The project will use numerous methodologies over its course, including an expert panel, a residents’ telephone survey, a business survey, public and third sector interviews, community workshops and community visits/observations. This will enable researchers to understand some of the key issues and policy priorities for the different areas.

**Current project activities**

Expert panel (Delphi) survey

Experts from range of sectors including government, policy, business, non-government organisations (NGOs) and academia with specialist knowledge of and experience in territorial governance have been invited to take part in a Delphi survey.

The survey – which is made up of three rounds – will seek experts’ knowledge in understanding the key drivers for change that will have the most significant effect on rural communities as they start to return to some form of normality following the Covid-19 pandemic. These drivers will include specific themes directly related to the Coronavirus crisis but will also include pre-existing themes that may have been pushed to the background but none the less will still have a significant impact.

The final results from this survey will then be used to generate up to three future scenarios. These will include an optimistic future, a pessimistic future and an optimal future.

Residents’ (telephone) survey Residents in the eight areas will be randomly selected and contacted to participate in the short (10-minute survey). The survey will cover key areas such as transport, employment, housing, education, services, healthcare and leisure, as well as the impact of Covid-19.

Residents will be invited to participate on an anonymous basis and all responses will be kept confidentially.

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