



Suffolk Rural Services Report 2015-16: Executive Summary

Results from the Community Action Suffolk Rural Services Survey

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Executive Summary

Community Action Suffolk carried out the Rural Services Survey to present a snapshot of rural services available throughout Suffolk as at Autumn/Winter 2015.

The survey determines the type and number of services and facilities currently in rural parishes across Suffolk and whether there have been any significant changes in these numbers since previous surveys carried out in 2012 and 2008. Previous Rural Services Surveys were carried out by Suffolk ACRE (now CAS).

CAS invited appropriate respondents from 421 eligible parish and town councils¹ in Suffolk to contribute to the survey. 359 parishes responded, giving a response rate of 85%.

It is important to note that all of the responses are from the parishes themselves.^{2,3} Community Action Suffolk has chosen not to validate this information. This reflects the perception of the services that exist as well as those that actually exist that respondents are aware of.

Areas of Highest Concern

The survey asked participants to rank their top concerns for their parish, these were:

1. Roads and Road Issues
2. Transport and Bus Services
3. Technology and Broadband

Roads and Road Issues

Concerns around “speeding” were raised by the most parishes, and received the highest combined severity of concern rating; the “condition of roads” closely followed, as well as the “volume of traffic”.

Regarding safety, the number of parishes which has a Police Community Support Officer has fallen to 52% (2011/12: 57%, 2008: 56%)⁴.

¹ The 11 towns which have populations of over 10,000 are Ipswich, Lowestoft, Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Felixstowe, Stowmarket, Newmarket, Kesgrave, Sudbury, Mildenhall and Beccles.

² Some have responded as a collective from the Parish Council, Town Council or Parish Meetings; others are the views of an individual respondent.

³ Whilst all rural parishes were invited to take part in 2015, 2012 and 2008 Rural Services Survey, there were some parish representatives that completed one and not the other survey, and this should be borne in mind when considering the comparisons.

⁴ Percentage of all rural parishes (population of less than 10,000) in Suffolk:- 2015-421 parishes, 2012-413 parishes, 2008-411 parishes

Transport and Bus Services

Concerns around “No Public Transport / Inadequate Services” were raised by the most parishes; other issues raised included the “Need to Increase Services/Frequency” and the “loss of bus routes and cuts”. Many parishes also commented that it was “difficult to get about without a car”.

The number of parishes with scheduled bus services in rural areas has declined. Only 53% of parishes have any scheduled bus service serving them (2011/12: 68%, 2008: 73%). 28% of parishes had a bus service that could be used to access a hospital (2011/12: 37%). With hospital car parking charges frequently discussed in the local media, this is perhaps surprising.

However, communities are working together to address the lack of public transport in rural communities, with 49% of parishes having a formal or informal voluntary or community transport scheme available in the parish (2011/12: 51%, 2008: 44%). This could include community car schemes, good neighbour scheme car journeys, community minibuses and dial a ride services.

Technology and Broadband

The top three concerns raised under this area were that “Broadband speeds were slow or inconsistent within the parish”, that “Broadband and Mobile Phone coverage was patchy” and that “Better Broadband” was required.

Surprisingly, only 13% of respondents reported having a “Good or Excellent Quality” broadband coverage, which is almost identical to the 14% of parish respondents in 2011/12. With the amounts of funding going into improving broadband speed and reliability in Suffolk, this implies that progress is slow, even taking into account that respondents’ expectation of “Good or Excellent” may have become more demanding in the four years since the last survey, particularly with the recent introduction of superfast, fibre optic broadband.

With regards to mobile phone network coverage, 10% of respondents had a “Good or Excellent” mobile phone coverage, whereas in 2011/12 16% indicated that their mobile phone coverage was good or excellent, so this rating has seen a downward trend in the past four years. However, this may again be due the respondents’ expectation of what is “Good or Excellent”, particularly with the recent roll-out of 4G.

Strengthening Communities and Community Life

Village Halls are often seen as the hub of village activities and 67% of parishes have a Village Hall or Community Centre, which is an increase in numbers on both of the previous surveys (2011/12: 65%, 2008: 59%)

One of the uses of village halls has often been by **youth organisations**. There was a significant drop in the number of youth organisations at the time of the last survey, which disappointingly has not recovered, with only 25% of parishes still having a youth organisation within them (2011/12: 23%, 2008: 44%).

Shops are present in 38% of parishes have some form of Shop, with 10 shops continuing to be run by their community since at least 2008. This is really positive, as it shows that the community shops are run for their communities, by their communities, in a sustainable way.

Mobile shops or delivery services have decreased slightly to 52% of parishes (2011/12: 60%, 2008: 57%); however this may be due to the increased availability of online supermarket orders and deliveries.

Post Offices or related services are in 28% of parishes have a (2011/12: 24%, 2008: 26%), with five parishes having community run post offices (2011/12: three, 2008: three). However there is a trend of depleting Banking Facilities in rural areas, in line with the [national picture](#), where just 25% of parishes have some form of Banking Facility (2011/12: 31%, 2008: 39%).

Public houses are present in 50% of parishes, with some parishes having more than one pub in them (2011/12: 55%, 2008: 60%). However this downward trend is being addressed by certain communities throughout the county, who are coming together and taking ownership of the problem. 10 pubs are run by the community, and although a relatively low number, the number of community-run pubs is on the rise (2011/12: six).

Affordable Housing⁵ is present in 40% of parishes, which remains a positive number (2011/12: 42%, 2008: 22%), with 26% of parishes actively pursuing plans for new or further affordable housing development.

Education, Health and Wellbeing

One of the most concerning factors to come out of the survey has been the sharp decline of **Adult Classes** in Literacy, Numeracy and/or IT, with only 5% of parishes having such (2011/12: 25%, 2008: 48%).

13% of parishes have a permanent or visiting **doctors surgery**, which has remained reasonably static over the survey periods and 10% of parishes have a Pharmacy within them.

Residential care homes or facilities for Older People has seen a slight increase, possibly reflecting demand from an aging population, with 20% of parishes having these facilities (2011/12: 17%)

Early Years Childcare Facilities have fluctuated with 35% of parishes currently have some form of provision (2011/12: 42%, 2008: 39%). With regards to out of school childcare, the availability of such services fell slightly to 15% (2011/12: 17%, 2008: 12%).

⁵ This is local needs housing including social rented accommodation, mid-market rented accommodation, shared ownership, shared equity, discounted low cost housing for sale including plots for self build, and low-cost housing without subsidy

Conclusion

Overall there remains a good spread of services and facilities across rural Suffolk. Village Halls and Community Buildings continue to be an important central hub for communities across the county, and these along with other Community Assets are essential in creating and maintaining resilient and sustainable communities in the future.

Rural areas continue to have mobile shops and deliveries helping those that don't have access or ability to travel far. Mobile library services still offer the opportunity to access library services.

With the majority of parishes (70%) having a parish newsletter or village magazine, there are mechanisms in place to communicate local news and what is going, which all helps to nurture community wellbeing.

The developments of local affordable housing are enabling young families to remain in the communities they grew up in and older people to remain in the parishes that they have always known. 10% of parishes are currently looking into the possibility of developing their Recreation and Playground Facilities.

Lunch Clubs and other social networking groups and amenities help improve people's health and wellbeing across the county tackling issues such as loneliness and encouraging people to engage with others in their local community. Activities included, but are not exclusive to, are parents and toddlers, sports clubs, dance and fitness classes, uniformed groups such as brownies, cubs, guides and scouts, dog training, wood turning, faith groups, photography classes, knit and natter groups and carpet bowls. These are essential for rural communities that help, often provided by or supported by local volunteers to make Suffolk a thriving county and a good place to live.