



#RuralCounts

Community Action Suffolk's Rural Services Survey 2022

Executive Summary

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Foreword

Many people find rural Suffolk a wonderful place to live, valuing its quality of environment and sense of community. For some, this may compensate for the absence of some facilities and services that are easily available elsewhere.

Many Suffolk communities benefit from access to a variety of facilities but there are those, especially in smaller or isolated villages, who are not so fortunate. To help to identify these potential gaps, Community Action Suffolk (CAS) supports 'rural proofing' as a means of achieving fairer outcomes for everyone in the rural communities and believe that no-one should be disadvantaged because of where they live.

Rural communities often take it upon themselves to fill the gaps in basic service provision that others take for granted. For example,

Good Neighbour Schemes are helping people to carry out everyday tasks such as getting to doctor and hospital appointments, to get to a banking facility, or simply to the shops.

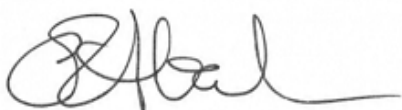
This social action not only fills the gaps, but is helping communities to thrive and be sustainable, which is central to Community Action Suffolk's mission.

CAS and Suffolk ACRE previously have been periodically undertaking the Rural Services Surveys since the 1990's. This report provides a detailed picture of what exists in rural communities across Suffolk and an improved understanding of the complex and changing picture of service provision in rural Suffolk, following on from the information gathered in previous Rural Services Surveys and particularly the impact of the COVID 19 Pandemic on community services. We hope the report will help local agencies to identify the gaps and better target their limited resources, as well as identifying the many community assets which can be supported and developed further.

I would like to thank all those who responded to this survey and contributed to a fantastic 84% response rate.



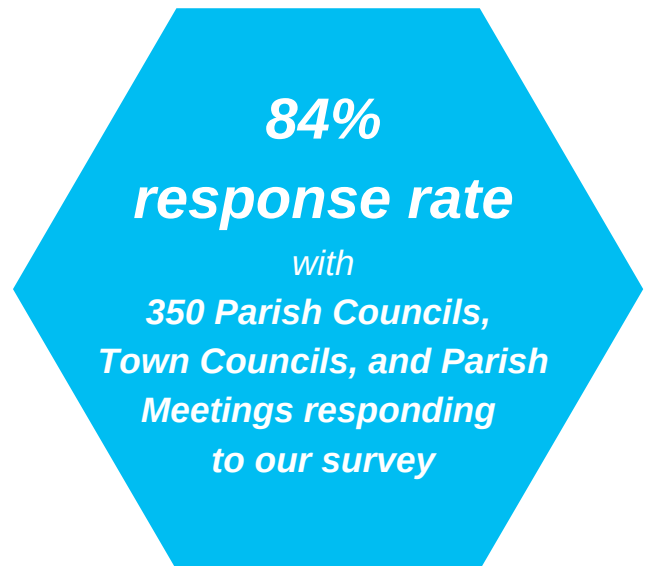
Chris Abraham
Chief Executive, CAS



Christine Abraham
Chief Executive – Community Action Suffolk

Summarised below is headline information from Community Action Suffolk's Rural Services Survey 2022. The full data set is also published alongside this document and can be found [here](#) if required.

The survey, carried out in the Summer of 2022, examines services and facilities by type and number, currently situated in rural parishes across Suffolk and whether there have been any significant numerical changes since previous surveys carried out in 2015/16, 2012 and 2008. This data provides an invaluable resource for partners across the Suffolk system to understand the changing landscape of our rural communities and enables an asset based approach to rural proofing for the future.



Areas of Highest Concern

1. Roads and Road Issues
2. Transport and Bus Services
3. Land and Development

419 eligible parish and town councils* in Suffolk were invited to contribute to the survey. **Responses covering 350 Parish Council, Town Council, and Parish Meeting areas** were received, giving a significant **response rate of 84%**.

Responses are from within the parishes themselves; some have responded as a collective from the Parish Council, Town Council or Parish Meeting, others are the views of an individual respondent or organisation.

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

Roads (repairs and maintenance)

Concerns around **potholes**, the condition of the **road** and the **poor quality of road repairs** were raised by the most parishes and received the highest combined severity of concern rating. Potholes were by far the most mentioned concern, followed by **poor road conditions** and **poor quality of repairs**, and finally, **speeding**.



Transport and Bus Services

Concerns around a **lack of public transport** / inadequate services were also raised by most parishes; with other issues including the need to increase services/frequency and the **loss of bus routes and cuts**.

The number of parishes with scheduled bus services in rural areas has declined by more than 10% since our last survey, with **only 42% of parishes having any scheduled bus service** (2015-16: 53%, 2011/12: 68%, 2008: 73%).

However, communities are still working together to address the lack of public transport in rural communities, with 31% of parishes having a formal or informal voluntary or community transport scheme available in the parish (2015-16: 49%, 2011/12: 51%, 2008: 44%). This could include community car schemes, good neighbour scheme car journeys, community minibuses, and/or dial a ride services.



Land and Development

Concerns around **land use** and **over development** were raised by parishes, with many citing the numbers of houses and size of developments increasing, and a lack of infrastructure and facilities being put in place to support such developments.

153 parishes specified this as one of their areas of concern, of which 72% (110) stated this was of moderate, severe, or very serious concern to the parish. Concerns raised were also the lack of truly affordable housing in parishes, however the concerns and severity of concerns about potential urban sized developments in rural areas seemed to dominate this area of concern.

Communications

Technology and Broadband

24% of respondents reported having “Good or Excellent Quality” Broadband coverage, which is an increase on the 13% of parish respondents rating this level in 2015-16.

With regard to mobile phone network coverage, 19% of parishes had “Good or Excellent” mobile phone coverage, compared to 10% of parishes rating this level in 2015/16.



Strengthening Communities and Community Life



Village Halls are often seen as the hub of village activities and **66% of parishes have a Village Hall, Community Centre, or Community Building** which is comparable with numbers in previous surveys.



Youth organisations have seen a significant drop in number since the time of the last survey. Disappointingly this has not recovered from the reductions in numbers recorded in previous surveys, with **only 14%** of parishes still having a youth club, youth faith group or youth uniformed group within them (2015-16: 25%, 2011/12: 23%, 2008: 44%).



37% of parishes have some form of **Shop**, with 20 shops continuing to be run by their community since at least 2008, evidencing that community shops run for their communities, by their communities, are more sustainable.



Mobile shops or delivery services have increased, now available to 73% of responding parishes (2015-16: 52%, 2011/12: 60%, 2008: 57%). This may be due to the increased availability of online supermarket orders and deliveries, and online shopping which is now in higher demand and more commonplace.

Post Offices are in 26% of parishes (2015-16: 28%, 2011/12: 24%, 2008: 26%), with 7 parishes having community run post offices (2015-16: 5, 2011/12: 3, 2008: 3). A further 6% of parishes reported having a mobile or outreach service that visited.



There is a trend of depleting **Banking Facilities** in rural areas, as noted by the BBC*. In our survey, there were just 17% of parishes that still have some form of Banking Facility other than a post office (Bank or Building Society, Cash Point Machine, PayPoint Facility or Credit Union), a decline of 8% since 2015-16 and 23% since 2008 (2015-16: 25%; 2011/12: 31%, 2008: 39%).

Regarding safety, the number of parishes which have a **Police Community Support Officer** has fallen to 16%, a significant drop since the last survey (2015/16: 52%, 2011/12: 57%, 2008: 56%)**.



Public houses are present in 46% of parishes, with some parishes having more than one pub in them (2015-16: 50%, 2011/12: 55%, 2008: 60%). This downward trend is being addressed by certain communities throughout the county, who are coming together and taking ownership of the problem. 8 pubs are run by the community, and although a relatively low number, the number of community-run pubs is broadly what it was previously (2015-16: 10, 2011/12: 6).

Affordable Housing*** is present in 28% of parishes, which remains a positive number (2015-16: 40%, 2011/12: 42%, 2008: 22%), with 16% of parishes actively pursuing plans for new or further affordable housing developments.



Education, Health, and Wellbeing

There continues to be a decline of Adult Classes in Literacy, Numeracy and/or IT, with only 3% of parishes having these learning opportunities (2015-16: 5%, 2011/12: 25%, 2008: 48%).

* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-57941001>

** Percentage of all rural parishes (population of less than 10,000) in Suffolk: - 2022-419 parishes, 2015-421 parishes, 2012-413 parishes, 2008-411 parishes

***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.



There continues to be a decline of **Adult Classes** in Literacy, Numeracy and/or IT, with only 3% of parishes having these learning opportunities (2015-16: 5%, 2011/12: 25%, 2008: 48%).

11% of parishes have a permanent or visiting **Doctors' surgery**, which has remained reasonably static over the survey periods (13% in 2015-16) and 9% of parishes have a Pharmacy within them (10% in 2015-16).



Residential care homes or facilities for Older People has remained fairly consistent since the survey began, with 18% of parishes having these facilities (2015-16: 20%, 2011/12: 17%).

Early Years Childcare Facilities continue to show a small decline with 32% of parishes having some form of provision (2015-16: 35%, 2011/12: 42%, 2008: 39%). With regards to **out of school childcare**, the availability of such services remained the same with 15% of parishes having this facility (2015-16: 15%, 2011/12: 17%, 2008: 12%).



Conclusion

Overall, there remains a good spread of services and facilities across rural Suffolk. However, there are facilities that are showing a declining trend - Banking Facilities and Pubs, Public Transport services, and Adult Education Classes, plus a smaller decline has been seen in Youth Provision and Early Years and Childcare facilities in rural Suffolk parishes and towns.

Village Halls and Community Buildings continue to be an important central hub of activity 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. They serve as a base for activities such as lunch clubs, parent and toddlers, sports clubs, dance and fitness classes, brownies, cubs, guides and scouts, dog training, faith groups, photography classes, knit and natter groups and carpet bowls; all of which provide vital opportunities for local residents to come together, socialise and learn new skills which have significant positive impacts on health and wellbeing.

Rural areas have seen an increase in the availability of mobile shops and delivery services helping those that don't have access or ability to travel, and mobile library services offer the opportunity to access library services.

With the majority of parishes (62%) having a parish newsletter or village magazine, there are mechanisms in place to communicate local news and what is happening, which helps to nurture community wellbeing and spirit. Technology has also improved with both Broadband and Mobile Phone coverage improving over time. This has been embraced by parishes who have taken on websites to promote their parish and activities within it, also acting as a virtual social meeting place.

Despite closures and decline of some rural facilities and services, others seem to be developing and adapting to the changes and new demands being placed upon them to start up and survive. With the communities that live and work in them, and with the support of the strong local communities and local volunteers breathing life into it, rural life continues to thrive in Suffolk throughout the county.

Rural Services Survey 2022 Headline Summary

84% of Suffolk towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000 responded to the Rural Services Survey

Amongst the Areas of Highest Concern were:

**Roads and Road Issues;
Transport and Bus Services;
Land and Development**

"Patchwork and inadequate repairs of carriageway instead of proper resurfacing."

"An infrequent bus service and no train line. This is not an area to live in if you don't drive."

"Too many houses built without the facilities to support a community in a rural setting"

"Technology is patchy - broadband and mobile"

Other areas of concerns were:

**Communications Technology and Broadband;
Strengthening Communities and Community Life;
Environment (including concerns around climate change);
Health and Wellbeing;
Economy; Community Cohesion, Local Welfare Support and Cost of Living**

Serious lack of facilities for an ever growing rural Parish

"Difficulties finding volunteers to keep the community facilities going"

"Impact of High Cost of Living"

"Serious roadside litter problem"

"Hard to find a NHS Dentist or Doctor"

"Electricity prices and heating bills"

Recommendations

The key benefit of this survey is that it offers a snapshot of what the landscape looks like today and allows reflection on what more can be done to ensure that rural areas remain vibrant and thriving places to live and work.

The data can also be used to lobby, campaign, and advocate for rural communities and to provide evidence to leverage further funding into Suffolk to support these areas. **#RuralCounts**

There is no doubt that a continued focus on 'Rural Proofing' is required, and that must be at the heart of our communities. It must also be a key consideration within local government, the health sector, and statutory bodies.

The combined efforts of these bodies are needed to ensure that any reduction in statutory resource has minimal negative effects on communities and residents and that available resources are deployed appropriately within Suffolk's rural communities. Residents also need to be supported to use resources effectively so that an equitable world within Suffolk's rural areas is sustained.

Volunteers are a vital resource in rural communities and while this report focuses on services and facilities, this human resource provides a wealth of value in communities and are often the key to sustaining these services and facilities. Increased understanding of volunteering opportunities and consistent reinforcement of the role of volunteers and their value is imperative and all partners have a role to play in this messaging and its communication.

For more information on Community Action Suffolk and the local infrastructure support we provide, please visit: www.communityactionsuffolk.org.uk

For further support for groups and organisations please visit:
www.communityactionsuffolk.org.uk



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