




# Top Priorities for the Rural South East

The **South East** has the largest rural population of any region in England, with 2.5 million people (32%) living in rural areas. The sweeping budget cuts and the delivery of the Big Society Agenda will affect the way key services will be delivered.

To insure that informed decisions are made, the **Rural Forum for the South East** is calling on delivery agents to recognise the specific needs of rural communities and to act on the issues and challenges outlined:-

## Rural Forum South East

*To help inform and develop delivery of rural policy and services in the region.*



### RECOGNITION OF RURAL DEPRIVATION

679,000 rural households (19% of the SE Region) have an income lower than £15,500 and 31,000 children in rural areas of the South East live in income deprived households.

### THE RURAL ECONOMY

more than 100,000 (38%) of businesses in the SE are based in rural areas together with 50% of small and medium enterprises and 39% of home workers. Agriculture and horticulture employs 50,000 people. Small rural businesses have been a key factor in the growth of the South East economy for the past 10 years.

### RURAL BROADBAND

34% of households & 32% of businesses in the Rural SE do not have access to Broadband capable of 2 Mbps. Access to fast and reliable broadband is vital for all who live and work in rural areas for business, education and leisure services.

### AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The average price of a house in the Rural SE is £393,000 which is 15 times the average English income. High prices and the lack of social housing, leads to the out-migration of young people and those on low incomes, which in turn challenges the future sustainability of rural communities.

Sources for all figures and more about the work of the South East Rural Forum, are available on [www.rfse.org.uk](http://www.rfse.org.uk) & NFU website [www.nfuonline.com](http://www.nfuonline.com)





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### **RURAL YOUNG PEOPLE**

336,500 (27%) of the young people in the SE live in rural areas but many in the 15 to 29 age group are leaving their communities in order to seek opportunities in urban areas. This has an adverse effect on the land-based sector. This is largely due to extracurricular activities, social facilities, health advice and employment not being readily available in the countryside.

### **TRANSPORT AND ACCESS TO SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS**

The high cost of travel and lack of adequate public transport provision, impacts on the ability of people of all ages in rural areas of the SE to access employment, education, healthcare and social activities. Some 71,000 households in the rural South East have no car or van.

### **THE AGEING POPULATION**

408,500 (30%) of pensioners in the SE live in rural areas. By 2029 there will be 20% more people over 65 living in rural areas than in urban areas. This presents significant challenges for health and social care provision, the farming community and to the demographic balance of rural communities.

### **FUEL POVERTY**

242,500 (10%) of rural households in the SE live in fuel poverty which is an added challenge given the ageing population and lower wage levels in rural areas. There is a dependency on fuel, oil and Calor gas for heating, which like all fuel prices are predicted to increase.

### **THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY BUILDINGS AND ASSETS**

There are 2,800 Community Buildings in rural areas across the SE which are predominantly volunteer run and funded. They are the hubs of community life, offering irreplaceable support for vulnerable people but they require maintenance and management.

