Social Capital and Quality of Life in Rural Areas

A Report prepared for the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs by Brook Lyndhurst Ltd

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The research team for this study was led by Brook Lyndhurst Ltd, with patient and insightful guidance on the use of Q methodology from Dr Stephen Jeffares, Roberts Research Fellow in the Centre for Public Service Partnerships & School of Government and Society at the University of Birmingham.

The research team would like to express particular thanks to our clients at Defra for giving us so much freedom in exploring this topic. We would also like to thank those who contributed to our expert workshop for their thoughtful contributions and enthusiasm for the project, Hilary Pateman-Jones and Liv Maher at Criteria for their input into the selection of the urban case study areas and excellent work in recruiting the urban participants, and last but not least the 96 research participants and the dozens of others who enabled us to find a good mix of people in each of the rural case study locations (through persuading others to talk to us, pointing us in the direction of doors we might want to knock on and so forth). We were consistently struck by the warmth with which we were received and the openness and honesty with which people spoke to us.
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1 Executive Summary

Social Capital and Place is part of Defra’s programme of research designed to deepen understanding of rural life in England.

Our research produced findings which led us to ask a number of challenging questions about the role of social capital in the development and delivery of policy.

In particular, the implications of our findings led us to question those policies which aim directly to engineer ‘more’ of a ‘better’ kind of social capital. This questioning encouraged us to consider the potential of policy interventions aimed at providing opportunities for people to develop their own ‘social capital’ as they see fit.

We have argued that policy has the potential to influence social capital indirectly by improving the liveability of places and in particular by encouraging residents to walk around the places where they live. Such policies would aim to provide the infrastructure that our findings suggest is needed for the development of widespread and diverse place-based social networks.

The novelty of our findings stemmed from the original research that we carried out with 96 participants in eight case study locations (six rural, two urban) across the country using a methodology called Q-method.

This method allowed us to characterise the subjective standpoints of our participants into groupings of the different shared perspectives that they held in relation to their social capital in the places where they lived.

During interviews with our participants we asked them to sort 47 statements that had been carefully selected to reveal their opinions and behaviour on:

1. Informal social networks, including friends, family and neighbours;
2. Formal community networks, including participation in ‘community life’ such as clubs and societies, volunteering, political action and governance;
3. Norms and values, including the presence (or absence) of trust, reciprocity, co-operation, cohesion and inclusion;
4. **Place**, including how the physical, spatial and demographic characteristics of their place affected their social interaction.

The quantitative analysis of the data from the sort exercise combined with qualitative material from the interviews, allowed us to identify six rural and five urban *perspectives* on place-based social capital.

We characterised and described each of these perspectives and gave them a name reflective of their character, such as *Community Champions*, *Happy Bystanders*, and *Friends Matter*. Our analysis also included a consideration of the socio-demographic characteristics and the geographic spread of each of the perspectives.

The diagram below summarises the key differences and similarities between the perspectives. It shows three main aspects of our findings:

1. The extent and nature of involvement associated with the different perspectives in place-based networks;
2. The differing attitudes to change held by those with different perspectives;
3. The similarities and differences between the urban and rural perspectives.
A more detailed unpacking of the comparative analysis of the different perspectives follows.

1. There were three key differences between the perspectives in terms of their place-based networks: they tended either to favour ‘formal’ networks (eg ‘Community Champions’), ‘informal’ networks (eg ‘Friends Matter’), or had very little in the way of ‘local’ networks at all (eg ‘Lost Communities’ and ‘Happy Bystanders’).

2. Involvement in place-based networks varied by socio-economic group and age. The most striking difference was between the ‘Friends matter’ and ‘Community Champions’ perspectives: all of the participants who subscribed to the ‘Friends matter’ perspective were younger C2DEs, while all of the participants who subscribed to the ‘Community Champions’ perspective were older ABC1s.

3. Participants with different perspectives favoured different venues for meeting and socialising: for example, the ‘Community Champions’ relied heavily on the village hall/community centre and strongly disagreed that the pub was the lifeblood of the community. People with the ‘Friends Matter’ perspective, on the other hand, thought that the pub was the lifeblood of the community, and tended not to use the
village hall.

4. Different perspectives were not distributed evenly across all locations. The key difference was not between rural and urban places, but between locations enjoying relatively stable and prosperous economic, social and environmental conditions, and locations enduring disruption or difficulty.

5. Although experiences of place-based networks varied, the ‘everyday’ values that emerged from those networks were strikingly similar across the perspectives: trust, neighbourliness, reciprocity and co-operation were all commonly held values for most people in most of our case-study locations.

6. However, more deeply held values, and in particular attitudes to change, showed differences across the perspectives.

In working through the implications of our research findings we developed the following critique of social capital.

Social capital, as commonly defined, encompasses all social networks and their emergent properties (such as values and social norms), which means that it cannot be directly measured, only gauged through the use of proxies such as ‘rates of volunteering’, or ‘levels of trust’, etc.

However, our research confirms that there is no single version of social capital - it clearly means different things to different people. This suggests that the use of proxies to measure social capital is particularly problematic. Although social capital is meant to be neutral in the abstract, inevitably, once it is researched or policy is developed around it, value judgments begin to be made: one version (or perspective) of social capital is measured at the expense of another; or one version is ‘promoted’ by policy at the expense of another. Our findings on the different perspectives on social capital raise questions about how such value judgments can be justified.

There are at least two key policy ramifications of the above observations on social capital.

Firstly, certain people’s or groups’ experience of social capital may go entirely unnoticed and unappreciated by commonly-used proxy measurements. For example, the social capital of the Friends Matter...
perspective would not be captured by surveying rates of volunteering. To then conclude that people who do not volunteer have worse social capital or in some way have worse values than people who do choose to volunteer, would be to misunderstand profoundly the importance of many people’s networks and the strength of their shared values and norms.

Secondly, there is a need to understand who may benefit from any social capital policy intervention, or the risk is being run that policies will not benefit the people who need them the most. Compare, for example, the ‘Community Champions’ perspective – which we found predominantly among people from social group ABC1 – with the ‘Friends Matter’ perspective – which was strongly represented among people from the C2DE social group. Current policy appears to support the social capital of the former group, through its focus on ‘formal’ networks, but does not directly support the latter group, whose networks are predominantly informal.

We do not anticipate that the task of reconsidering the beneficiaries of social capital policies would necessarily be a straightforward one. The relationship between formal and informal networks needs to be better understood. For example, the community-wide benefits of the event-organising, community-asset-owning and volunteering behaviour of the Community Champions are well recognised (and hence relatively well supported in terms of policy). However, less is known about any positive spillover into the wider community from the friendly, favour-giving behaviour of the Friends Matter perspective.

Furthermore, if social capital brings benefits to an individual, there is no reason to suppose that those benefits carry equal weight in policy terms: they may vary from providing a pleasant way of spending leisure time, to providing job opportunities and otherwise unaffordable services (for example, providing care for children or the elderly, helping with a house move, or fixing broken plumbing, to name but a few). In other words, some people may need or rely on their social capital more than others.

These conclusions suggest at the very least that social capital policy in general, and in particular the questions of who benefits from social capital policies and how important those benefits are, require careful reconsideration.
Executive Summary

However, there may already be policy tools in place to address a large part of the social capital agenda, but through less direct means than traditional social capital policy would suggest. In fact, ‘liveability' (and its various incarnations) appears to provide the means for dealing with many of the challenging issues that our research uncovered. Our reasons for drawing this conclusion are as follows.

Firstly, in some of our case study locations residents described how friendly their places were and, on the whole, told us how content they were with the places where they lived, and how important this was for their quality of life. These locations had more local networks, both formal and informal, and more going on locally than those locations where residents were less content and where there was less diversity of, and involvement in, place-based networks.

Secondly, in such places, casual social interaction largely stemming from residents walking around and passing the time of day together, or simply developing the ability to recognise one another in the street, was commonplace. These places in turn seemed to have had the infrastructure that we hypothesise is necessary for developing such friendliness:

- Good quality, well maintained public or shared space;
- Local events - such as fetes, fairs and festivals;
- Local amenities – especially pubs and village/community halls, but also schools and shops.

By contrast, opportunities for friendliness were more limited in the places which had fewer local networks and where residents were less content with where they lived. Examples of such limitations were:

- An absence of the above infrastructure;
- Heavy, unmanaged traffic;
- Proliferation of un-connected residential developments;
- Lack of surveillance in areas of petty crime or anti-social behaviour;
- Rapid, large-scale change.

Such observations may sound like obvious, good common sense, but despite this they are worth setting out as they seem to have become detached from the world of social capital policy. Perhaps in an understandable attempt to make 'social capital' more manageable and tangible, policy has instead developed a focus on participation in governance and volunteering.
Our findings suggest that where people live in places which give them the opportunity to develop networks, then over time such networks have developed *organically*. In these cases, policy support for governance and volunteering (done well) may indeed provide added value, as there is more likely to be capacity for developing local governance and volunteering.

However, in places where there are barriers to people developing local networks (of the kind listed above) then an altogether different approach appears to be needed: those underlying barriers need to be addressed.

The key tools for doing this are likely to come from strategic planning and local service provision. If a better appreciation were to be developed of the impacts of planning and services on the networks that people are able to form in any given place, our findings suggest that more places are likely to feel ‘friendly’ and more people are likely to feel content with the places where they live.

This represents a particular challenge, not only in dealing with the historic misfortune of certain places, but also in terms of managing the inevitable change that many communities are likely to face in the near future.

However, with a recent resurgence of interest in place-based policies, there appears to be an opportunity to embrace that challenge and to devise policies aimed at providing places with the infrastructure that would give their residents the opportunities to develop their own vibrant, local networks: in other words, by offering the planning and provision of ‘friendliness infrastructure’.

This ‘friendliness infrastructure’ does not begin and end with formal expressions of ‘the community’, as our findings on the diversity of place-based networks have shown. Instead, such an infrastructure encompasses everything about a place that has the potential to offer the people living there the opportunity to get to know one another, to build trust and to develop their own social networks as they see fit.
2 Introduction

Rural areas are often perceived to benefit from ‘stronger’ social capital than urban communities, and aggregate-level data often support this popular image (see, for example, Defra’s indicators of social capital).1

However, there is a shortage of in-depth accounts of how rural social capital operates and in particular the extent to which social capital is located in place. Headline statistics that seek to define, quantify and measure social capital may gloss over underlying detail or fail to recognise certain aspects of social capital entirely. They also run the risk of oversimplifying the links between social capital and quality of life. This represents a weakness in the evidence base for rural policy intervention.

This project continued Defra’s programme of research designed to deepen understanding of rural life in England and the experiences and needs of rural residents. It feeds into Defra’s departmental strategic objective (DSO) for strong rural communities by contributing to the body of evidence relating to how these needs may be addressed through public policy and service delivery. The research was framed as a piece of strategic research covering a broad range of issues, designed to go beyond headline statistics relating to social capital and quality of life in rural areas and to look in more depth at differing experiences in different rural locations. In particular, the study investigated the following questions:

1. How is social capital experienced in rural England:
   a) by different groups of rural residents?
   b) in different types of rural place?

2. What, if anything, distinguishes rural social capital from urban social capital?

3. If experiences of social capital are found to differ by person and place, what might help explain this difference?

In addition to these questions, this study reflected upon how social capital in rural England may be affected by possible future trends.

To develop a robust theoretical and practical foundation from which to explore the above questions, the overall project was designed in three phases. The first phase, a literature and evidence review, involved both desk-based work and consultation with experts and provided the theoretical and analytical framework for the project in which subsequent

phases were firmly grounded. The second phase involved primary research, beginning with a development phase of initial semi-structured interviews in rural areas, as well as a pilot study. The substantive fieldwork used Q methodology (see section 4) and involved 96 participants across six rural case study locations and two urban comparators. The third and final phase comprised analysis and reporting of all the evidence reviewed and collected.

**Figure 2 Outline methodology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence review</th>
<th>Fieldwork</th>
<th>Analysis and reporting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scoping, preliminary literature review and analysis</td>
<td>Development of fieldwork materials</td>
<td>Original fieldwork using Q methodology in eight case study locations with 96 participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expert workshop with 15 experts from the fields of social capital and rural research</td>
<td>Preliminary semi-structured interviews</td>
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<td>In depth literature review, analysis and interpretation</td>
<td>Pilot study</td>
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3 Background

This section provides a very brief synopsis of key literature on social capital: in part as a context-setting exercise; but more importantly to illustrate the background thinking that informed the design and analysis of our primary research. A specific review of the literature in relation to rural social capital takes place in section 6.

3.1 What is social capital?

It is widely acknowledged, and well-documented, that the term 'social capital' suffers from a lack of definitional consensus. At a fundamental level, different schools of thought (for instance, 'neo-liberal' and 'neo-Marxist') disagree over issues such as the role of power and agency. However, many recent definitions do use similar terminology and coalesce around the core notion that 'networks', 'norms' and 'trust' 'facilitate' 'co-operation' between people. Such definitions are often variations on Robert Putnam's seminal contribution. Putnam described social capital as:

"networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively and pursue shared objectives."

Our review of the literature led us to draw the following conclusions about definitions of social capital:

Social networks are key

Social capital can be 'located' at various levels from the individual, through informal and formal groups, to nation states and international networks. As such, it spans a number of levels of analysis and functions differently at each of those levels. However, given that social networks describe the quantity and quality of links or relationships between individuals, they are

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5 Ibid
often identified as being some part of social capital (although social capital is much more than just the sum of those links).  

A common typology of social capital has developed in the literature: bonding, bridging and linking. These different types are in part a function of the characteristics of the social networks that are the source of the social capital:

- **bonding** social capital refers to the horizontal relationships between members of a social network, exemplified by strong ties to family and friends;
- **bridging** refers to the ‘weak ties’ between members of different social networks that are essential for the movement of resources (such as information) in and out of groups; and
- **linking** social capital refers to the vertical links between groups with different levels of power (for example, the links between a community group and the council which may provide funds).

It has been observed by various authors that an imbalance between the bridging, bonding and linking types of social capital can lead to negative outcomes. For example, an excess of bonding social capital in the absence of wider links and influences could potentially lead to the *downward levelling of norms* – that is, the strengthening of norms that operate to maintain the status quo, keep the powerless in their place, exclude ‘outsiders’ and restrict individual freedom.  

### Norms, trust, reciprocity and co-operation are of central importance

These are the *emergent properties* of social networks of most relevance to social capital. They are complex and unquantifiable and in part experienced subjectively by members of a network, and as such they are notoriously problematic to research. These emergent properties (for example, trust) may be simultaneously thought of as *inputs, components* and *outcomes* of social capital.

### Social capital is neutral in the abstract

Following Putnam’s lead, the most common conceptualisations of social capital assume it to be consensual and empowering. This can imply that

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Social capital has some intrinsic ethical or moral element with regard to the good of the individual and the group. However, Coleman argues that it is in fact a neutral concept that can be associated with both positive and negative outcomes, and Bourdieu points out that social capital can be used to produce or reproduce inequality. This in turn raises the important question for research purposes, of whose perspective counts: in other words, social capital is in the eye of the beholder, and what may be perceived as a beneficial outcome of social capital for one person, may have negative consequences for another.

**Access to the social capital may be limited**

Putnam defined social capital as a public and private good: as a by-product of social relationships, it benefits both the creator and the bystander. However, others argue that social capital, although it may be a public good, is not equally accessible to all: for example, geographical or social isolation can limit access. Similarly, since communication is needed to access social capital, those who are not able to communicate effectively may be excluded.

### 3.2 What is the role of place in social capital?

From the complex definitional and theoretical issues surrounding the idea of place, one key insight emerges: “there is no single definition and many different perceptions of place.” There are, of course, objective ‘measures’ of place – for example, the boundary of a super output area, or a county. However, these may or may not align with the subjective perceptions and personal meaning people assign to a place. Some authors go as far as to argue that boundaries on maps are insignificant, and that ‘place’ is a purely social construct rather than a fixed administrative ‘container’.

These considerations point to the question of whether social capital can legitimately be thought of as being located in a particular place, or whether it is better thought of as a property of individuals or social groups. The theory and research on whether social capital is located in people or

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11 ibid
17 CLG (2008) Place Matters: the location strategy for the United Kingdom
places presents a mixed picture. While it is possible to state with confidence that "place makes a difference to the outcome of social processes", the nature and extent of this relationship is highly complex.\textsuperscript{19}

Geographers have made connections between place and social capital by arguing that "locality may be a site of 'emergent causal powers'", in terms of understanding how social interaction amounts to more than the sum of its parts (locality theory).\textsuperscript{20} Others find evidence that social outcomes in a place are not fixed but are contingent on the interactions between people and place. As a result of this, actions may have unintended and unexpected consequences in any one place when compared with another (structuration theory).\textsuperscript{21} This links to findings relating to the importance of geographical and cultural context; for example, it is well documented that the declining associational life observed by Putnam in the USA is not matched in the UK.\textsuperscript{22}

It has been conjectured that the physical and spatial characteristics of places, such as the 'shape' of a place (for example, nucleated versus linear/ribbon villages)\textsuperscript{23} has an effect on social capital, and research shows that access to green space\textsuperscript{24} and the existence of busy roads\textsuperscript{25} may affect social relationships.\textsuperscript{26} The importance of public spaces as sites of social interaction and activity (and sometimes of exclusion) has been a recurring policy theme for some time,\textsuperscript{27} and links are often made between the existence of shared spaces and levels of community participation.\textsuperscript{28}

Overall, there seems to be a general consensus in the literature that, for whatever reasons, some elements of social capital are locally contingent.\textsuperscript{29} Place, with all its ramifications in terms of morphology, history, socio-demographic characteristics and so forth, does matter in terms of how people experience social capital. However, there is certainly no simple answer to the question of the extent to which social capital is found in people or place: it seems likely to be found in both people and place in a nuanced, reflexive and unpredictable relationship.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p196
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p196
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p196
\textsuperscript{22} Office for National Statistics (2001), Social Capital, A Review of the Literature. Social analysis and reporting division
\textsuperscript{23} Campaign to protect rural England (CPRE) representative, expert workshop
\textsuperscript{24} Bell, S, et al, (2008), Green Space and Quality of Life: A critical literature review p6
\textsuperscript{25} Williams K and Green, S, (2001), Literature Review of Public Space and Local Environments for the Cross Cutting Review
\textsuperscript{26} Bell, S, et al, (2008), Green Space and Quality of Life: A critical literature review p6
\textsuperscript{27} Consider, for instance, the Liveability, Cleaner Safer Greener, Urban Renaissance and Neighbourhood Renewal policy agendas
\textsuperscript{28} Action with Communities in Rural England (2006), Rural Evidence Paper: Village Halls
\textsuperscript{29} Mohan, op.cit., p200
3.3 How can social capital be researched?

Difficulties in defining social capital are inextricably linked to difficulties in researching it.

A number of studies and surveys which seek to measure social capital have chosen to measure ‘proxies’ which are either (or both) easy to identify and relatively easy to generate policies around. For example, the most widely quoted of Putnam’s findings relates to the decline of associations in America and Defra also measures “participation in regular formal volunteering at least once a month” as part of its DSO on social capital and quality of life.

The prevalence of these kinds of measures suggest a bias towards approximating social capital with what we have called ‘formal community networks’ at the expense of more ‘informal’ social networks. So commonly held is the understanding that ‘good’ social capital equates to the prevalence of things like volunteering or club/society membership, that other manifestations of social capital may be entirely overlooked (this is true even in qualitative research which does not need to rely on proxy measurements in the same way). This circumscribed view may in turn prejudice the understanding of social capital in entire areas, or of entire groups, and may lead to a misunderstanding that certain behaviours are necessarily and even exclusively causes of the ‘good life’. These issues are further discussed in sections 6.1 and 6.2 below.

In an attempt to provide an alternative measurement of social capital, some have argued that we should define social capital functionally (i.e. in terms of what it does, rather than what it is). This has led to social capital being used as an explanatory variable for various social outcomes, including health, economic performance, a healthy democratic culture, and well being. The sum of these outcomes provides the basis for the conjectured relationship between social capital and quality of life.

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32 Putnam also makes a similar distinction, using the Yiddish words macher and schmoozer to describe formal and informal social interaction. Ibid, chapter 6.
33 For an example of this, please see RERC, Moseley, M J and Pahl, R E, (2007), Social Capital in Rural Places, A Report to DEFRA
However, this approach can be simplistic and, as such, is prone to falling apart under closer examination. For example, there is no clarity about whether social capital is either (or both) a quality or a quantity: some researchers talk about *more* social capital; whereas other want *stronger* social capital or even *better* social capital. In reality, many authors in fact want better health outcomes, or less crime, or more social trust, and seem to treat social capital a type of black box means to their particular end. In fact, despite research showing correlations between social capital and various other life experiences, there is no reason to suppose that the quantity or quality of social capital *causes* a certain ‘good’ quality of life at all.

Indeed, it is questionable whether the concept of ‘social capital’, with its multiple definitions and measures, provides a robust or even manageable basis for research or policy decisions. It is a slippery and complex notion that, through its history, has included most aspects of social interaction and has been used to explain a multitude of ‘social goods’. We are very aware that as such, it is potentially unwieldy.\(^{39}\)

As a solution to these difficulties, this research has taken an approach to social capital whereby common themes, termed ‘dimensions’ of social capital, have been identified from an analysis of the literature and evidence.\(^{40}\) This has allowed us to consider social capital as a *dynamic process* in which each of the dimensions are inter-related and thought of simultaneously as an *input*, *component* and *output*. On this basis, we have developed four dimensions of social capital to use in this research:

1. **Informal social networks**, including friends, family and neighbours;
2. **Formal community networks**, including participation in ‘community life’ such as clubs and societies, volunteering, political action and governance;
3. **Norms and values**, including the presence (or absence) of trust, reciprocity, co-operation, cohesion and inclusion;
4. **Place**, including how the physical, spatial and demographic characteristics of a place affect social interaction.

\(^{39}\)See annex A for our ‘social onion’ diagram: an illustration of our efforts to ‘define’ and conceptualise social capital.

\(^{40}\)A similar approach is taken by the World Bank, whose six dimensions of social capital are: Groups and networks; Trust and solidarity; Collective action and cooperation; Information and communication; Social cohesion and inclusion; Empowerment and political action. See Dudwick, Nora, Kathleen Kuehnast, Veronica Nyhan Jones, and Michael Woolcock (2006). *Analysing social capital in context. A Guide to Using Qualitative Methods and Data*. World Bank, 2006.
These dimensions of social capital emerged from our analysis of the literature and the priorities of this research project, both in terms of policy and methodology. They have been used throughout the project to create the landscape of our research and the framework for our analysis.
4 Methodology

As outlined in section 3, given the involvement of intangible, subjectively experienced dimensions within the concept of social capital and in conjunction with the project’s aim of exploring social capital from the perspectives the individual, we selected Q methodology as the basis for our primary research.

Q methodology uses both qualitative and quantitative tools to systematically explore subjective structures, attitudes and perspectives from the standpoint of research participants. The method is designed to reveal both individual responses and patterns of shared understanding that emerge from populations. It is therefore ideally suited to uncover the social constructs of shared meaning for different groups in rural areas and to explore different experiences of social capital.

The main output of Q methodology is to provide an outline of the perspectives which exist on the issues being investigated. As such, it gives policy makers (and anyone else concerned with the subject in question) an illustration of the viewpoints which might need to be considered when thinking about policy options or those which might be affected by an intervention.

4.1 Q Methodology

At the heart of Q methodology is a sorting exercise in which participants rank a set of statements according to their relative agreement or disagreement with those statements. Participants are invited to sort the statements in the shape of an inverted pyramid along a scale ranging from ‘Agree most’ to ‘Disagree most’ (see annex B). This requires the systematic identification of the statements that are most meaningful to participants and about which they feel most strongly.

Analysis of the data gathered through the sorting exercises begins with a factor analysis of the final data matrix in order to draw out correlations in the patterns of responses. The resultant factors are generalised statements of the patterns that emerge: they represent different points of view or perspectives.

A key part of the Q-sort process involves discussing the statements with each participant and asking them to explain why they have sorted them in
that particular pattern. This generates a wealth of qualitative data which is then used in the analysis and interpretation of the factors.

**Figure 3** A Q sort in action

Source: Included in a presentation given by Steven Brown at the University of Birmingham on 16 July 2007
There are several steps in the process of planning and implementing Q methodology which we describe below with reference to this study.

1. **Defining the concourse and the Q-set**
   Firstly, the *concourse* – the universe of issues and possible points of view – was defined. Discourses around social capital were explored during the first phase of research through both primary and secondary sources including the literature review, expert workshop and a series of preliminary interviews with rural residents. The concourse was then reduced, through an iterative, collaborative process, to a set of 47 statements – the Q-set (shown in table 1). While designing the Q set, we aimed to maintain the essence of the main themes of the concourse, while providing a manageable set of statements for participants to engage with.

2. **Selecting participants (the P-set)**
   The focus of Q methodology is on the perspectives held by participants, rather than the participants themselves. Representative samples are therefore not a feature of Q methodology; instead, participants are sampled theoretically in order to ensure that a diversity of points of view are covered. Our aim was to reflect the diversity of rural areas and people. We recruited 72 participants in six rural locations, plus 24 urban participants as a comparator sample. Participants were recruited on the basis of a spread of socio-demographic characteristics, as well as a range of attributes related to our questions about social capital, such as how long they had lived in their area, the location of their family and friends, and how active they were in their communities. The full breakdown is included in annex E, and further information is in section 4.3.

3. **The Q sort and interview**
   For this study, the Q sort was conducted as part of an hour long face to face interview with each participant. Respondents were asked to think about the place in which they lived and their experience of living there and rank the cards according to their level of agreement with each one. The sort was carefully framed to minimise the risk of social desirability bias; participants were assured that there were no right or wrong answers – that it was their point of view we were interested in – and that results would be completely anonymous.

   As well as collecting background information about each participant, qualitative data was collected during and after the Q sort, as respondents talked the researcher through their rationale for positioning the statements.
in that order. They were also probed about their networks and values, the wider community in which they lived and the place itself (see annex F for the full interview guide, which is based on the Q concourse described above).

4. **Q analysis**

Sort data was factor analysed using PQMethod software, which is designed specifically for Q methodology. For the results, see sections 5 and 7 and annexes G and H of this report.

The qualitative data collected before, during and after the Q sort were used in the interpretation and analysis of the results of the factor analysis; they were also analysed thematically in complement to the Q analysis – see sections 6 and 8 of this report.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Most people I know live in the local area</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>People here look out for one another</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I stop and chat with people round here</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Some people get left out of community life</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Women do most of the work when it comes to community social life</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>People are willing to give older people a hand</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>People here are happy to ask each other for help if they need it</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>You can just be yourself round here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I have similar values to people round here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Local events are generally well attended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>When there’s something people here feel strongly about they’ll work together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Local clubs and societies play an important role in local social life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>It takes a while to be accepted round here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>This community relies on a few people to organise everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I feel I belong here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I find that this place can be cliquey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Most of my friends don’t live locally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>People don’t stay here long enough to put down roots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>This place needs its village hall/community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Living here gives me a good quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Smaller places are friendlier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>I wouldn’t feel welcome in some of the places where people meet up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Local people have a say in the decisions that affect them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>The church is at the heart of the community (rural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Living in a small place can be claustrophobic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>This is a close-knit community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>People round here can be trusted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>People cross the road when they see a group of young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Children can play out round here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>There are places in the local area where people feel unsafe at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Having open spaces nearby is important for my quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>There’s nothing here for young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>This place relies on volunteers to make things happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>People from different backgrounds get on well with each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Some people round here don’t get on with each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>There are people I can call on round here when I need to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Young people can’t get away with bad behaviour round here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>There are some people round here who don’t play by the rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>This place benefits from having some well connected residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Pubs are the lifeblood of this community’s social life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>People should make an effort to get to know their neighbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Housing should be made available first and foremost to local people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>This village/town should stay just as it is now (rural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>There should be more to do locally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>It’s hard for commuters to get involved in community life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Getting involved in community life is important to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>People who live here are proud of the village/town (rural)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Case Study Selection

Choosing the case study locations

This research, in using case study locations, defined eight ‘places’: two suburbs, three rural towns and three rural villages/hamlets.

A detailed explanation of the process by which we chose these case study locations can be found in annex C but, in short, a decision was made to concentrate on a cross-section of ‘unremarkable’ places in the hope that it would provide a relatively coherent baseline of how social capital is experienced.

The places selected touched upon several key issues that run through the narrative of contemporary rural England: commuting, mining, tourism and wind farms. However, we did not choose the locations with these issues in mind, or as a focus for our research. Instead it was our expectation that these issues would not dominate the experiences of all the participants interviewed in any one place, but instead would provide a degree of understanding of themes common to the experience of many rural residents.

In choosing the two areas for the urban case studies, we extended this rationale and chose locations that were not disproportionately affected by any particular issues. Additionally, we chose areas which could meaningfully be compared with the rural case study locations in terms of demographic and socio-economic structure and so on, and where those conducting the recruitment were confident of being able to recruit a good cross section of the population.

The six rural locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sparse parish, South West</td>
<td>Cornish parish classified as ‘village, hamlet and isolated dwelling’, ‘sparse’. The parish’s villages and hamlets have a combined population of c.1,200; in the most deprived third of LSOAs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small village, South East</td>
<td>Oxfordshire village classified as ‘village, hamlet and isolated dwelling’, ‘less sparse’. The parish has a population of c.700; in the least deprived third of LSOAs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Village, Yorkshire and the Humber | South Yorkshire village classified as ‘village, hamlet and isolated dwelling’, ‘less sparse’. Population of c.1,600; in the middle third of LSOAs in terms of deprivation.

Small town, North East | County Durham town classified as ‘as town and fringe’, ‘less sparse’. Population of c. 2,000; in the most deprived third of LSOAs

Market town, East Midlands | Lincolnshire town classified as ‘town and fringe’, ‘less sparse’. Population of c.4,600; in the middle third of LSOAs in terms of deprivation.

Market town, West Midlands | Warwickshire town classified as ‘town and fringe’, ‘less sparse’. Population of c.4,500; in the least deprived third of LSOAs

Below is a pen portrait of each case study.

**Sparse parish, South West**

Cornish parish classified as ‘village, hamlet and isolated dwelling’, ‘sparse’. The parish’s villages and hamlets have a combined population of c.1200; in the most deprived third of LSOAs.

The South West case study location is a large, sparsely populated, rural parish in North Cornwall comprising one main village and a number of hamlets and isolated houses in rolling countryside.

Although the parish has a primary school and parish hall, there are few other local services around and, notably, no commercial outlets. Barriers to services are high: residents have to travel around six miles to the nearest town for groceries or two miles to the nearest pub. Public transport is limited and people are very dependent on their cars.

A number of formal community groups operate within the parish: among them a newly formed youth club and a social club initially set to help...
welcome and integrate newcomers. The PTA and parish hall committee are both active and organise regular events.

The area is popular with incomers looking for a better quality of life – e.g. people taking early retirement - and house prices are high in relation to incomes (most of those who work, work within 10 km of the parish, and agriculture and skilled trades are important employers).

In recent years there has been a great deal of controversy over proposals to put wind turbines up in the parish. The proposals were rejected but there is little doubt that they both galvanised and split the community, creating lasting ill-feeling.

**Small village, South East**

Oxfordshire village classified as ‘village, hamlet and isolated dwelling’, ‘less sparse’. The parish has a population of c.700; in the least deprived third of LSOAs.

The South East case study location is a small, wealthy village set in rolling hills. It acts as a hub for a cluster of very small villages; has a canal and railway running alongside it; and is close to A-roads, the motorway network, and a large market town.

Many villagers use the good transport links to travel to work in nearby towns, although there are also a number of local, small businesses. The village’s convenient location makes it popular with retired couples and commuters, but it also has a prominent proportion of long-standing families, whose village heritage has been traced back generations.

The village itself has a nucleated centre developed around a church and several small greens. It is dominated by old housing but has several small twentieth century developments including a small amount of council and social housing. Unusually, it has a centrally located, privately-owned block
of flats offering low-cost, rented accommodation specifically for younger and older residents. Otherwise, private housing is expensive.

With the help of visitors using the canal, a large annual music festival, and its status as a local hub, the village sustains many local amenities and services, despite its small size. There are numerous local societies and groups, an active parish council, and regular community events. Some local groups have an outreach or social care function and some are purely recreational.

**Village, Yorkshire and the Humber**

South Yorkshire village classified as ‘village, hamlet and isolated dwelling’, ‘less sparse’. Population of c.1,600; in the middle third of LSOAs in terms of deprivation.

The South Yorkshire case study is a medium sized village located nine miles from a large urban centre. Originally an agricultural village, it has tripled in size over the last 15 years and is now predominantly a commuter village.

The village is spread out along a main road and surrounded on all sides by open countryside. The original stone housing has largely been demolished: as well as a number of large detached houses and early 20th century terraces in the centre of the village, there are several areas of 1970s housing and local authority bungalows. An estate of large detached family homes has been developed within the last five years.

A cross roads with a post office and a pub lies at the centre of the village. In addition to the post office, there is a small selection of commercial outlets interspersed among the houses along the main thoroughfare: a convenience store, a newsagent, a hairdresser and an antiques shop. There is a large supermarket four miles away: villagers reported that the
free bus service provided by this supermarket when it first opened was a direct contributor to the closure of a number of village shops.

There is a working men’s club at one end of the village and two pubs, one of which was reportedly the centre of village life until about ten years ago. Neither pub is currently well used by villagers and both have changed hands frequently over recent years.

Although the village has a primary school and a community hall, the latter is used mainly for a playgroup and was recently under threat of closure. There are no other village societies or clubs\textsuperscript{41}.

**Small town, North East**

County Durham town classified as ‘as town and fringe’, ‘less sparse’. Population of c. 2,000; in the most deprived third of LSOAs.

The North East case study location is a small town situated in an isolated, weather-beaten spot, with beautiful views.

Built in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century to cater for the mining industry, the last pits closed in the 1960s. It remains a predominantly white, working-class town and deprivation levels are high - particularly in employment, health and education.

The town itself is built along a main road, with clusters of houses behind the main terraced street. Some housing was demolished in the 1970s but new estates are being built, seemingly catering for more wealthy newcomers.

There is a good selection of shops and take-aways on the main street - although many have closed over the years. There is also a doctors’

\textsuperscript{41} Rumours of a WI remained unsubstantiated.
surgery, primary school and a large community centre, as well as a half-hourly bus service to a nearby town.

Social life here mainly revolves around the pubs and social clubs but there are some formal community organisations such as a residents’ association.

Two developments have shaped the recent history of the town: a mass burial of animal carcasses following a disease epidemic and the building of a large onshore wind farm nearby. In both cases the plans were put into place despite substantial local opposition.

**Market town, East Midlands**

Lincolnshire town classified as ‘town and fringe’, ‘less sparse’. Population of c.4,600; in the middle third of LSOAs in terms of deprivation.

The East Midlands case study location is an old market town in which agriculture still plays an important role. The population is predominantly white British, with notable variation in levels of social and economic deprivation between different parts of the town.

There are rail and bus connections to nearby towns and centres of employment, but their low frequency means that the car is the dominant mode of travel.

Although a number of local shops and pubs have closed in recent years, the town has also seen some regeneration - small, independent shops are starting up, pubs are being refurbished, there is a new supermarket and a modest amount of new housing.

The town has a community centre which hosts various clubs and societies – the majority catering for the older age groups – and a large number of churches. Nevertheless, it is widely considered to have lost its community
spirit as is evident in a shrinking yearly calendar of events, and poor attendance at the remaining ones. There have been attempts in some sections of the community to fight this trend and find ways to restore pride in the town.

**Market town, West Midlands**

Warwickshire town classified as ‘town and fringe’, ‘less sparse’. Population of c.4,500; in the least deprived third of LSOAs

The West Midlands case study is a lively, affluent rural market town on the edge of the Cotswolds. It has an abundance of services, including many shops (both big names and small independent businesses), banks, doctors’ surgeries, dentists, opticians, frequent bus services, a community hospital, a leisure centre, a post office, and various well used pubs.

Residents maintain an active town social life, with various options for clubs and societies every day and evening of the week. The town holds an annual music festival that attracts people from all over the area and is well attended by residents. The town council is also active and there are several grass roots political groups, such as a community based town partnership.

The town retains its Georgian character, with newer housing developments around the outskirts. Some residents make use of good motorway connections to commute as far as London, but there are also many employment opportunities in the thriving business community in town. However, two major employers in the area have recently closed down leading to a spike in unemployment and more lower skilled residents having to travel outside the town for work.

**The two urban locations**

Table 3 Urban Case Study Locations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban suburb, North West</td>
<td>Suburb of an ‘urban’, ‘large town’ in Cheshire. The ward has a population of c. 7,000; its LSOAs are in the middle and least deprived third of LSOAs nationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban suburb, West Midlands</td>
<td>Suburb of a West Midland ‘urban’, ‘large city’. The ward has a population of c.14,000; its LSOAs span the most, middle and least deprived third of LSOAs nationally, but are mostly middling.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Urban suburb, North West**

Suburb of an ‘urban’, ‘large town’ in Cheshire. The ward has a population of c. 7,000; its LSOAs are in the middle and least deprived third of LSOAs nationally.

The urban case study area in the North West was originally a village in its own right before it was subsumed by the larger conurbation. However, it retains its village-like atmosphere; at its centre is a high street containing a large number of small independent shops, including two butchers, a fishmonger, a baker, a greengrocer and a hardware store. The suburb is generally well serviced with its own doctor’s surgeries, libraries, banks and three large parks.

The area has numerous primary schools and services such as playgroups and so is popular with young families. Its proximity to town also attracts young people and young couples who come for the lively atmosphere and nightlife. Commuters have good access to the motorway and the main city train station is only a short distance away.

The suburb is divided into different areas of housing: in the centre are streets of Victorian terraces occupied by first time buyers, young house sharers and young families. Many families move slightly further away from the centre to larger semidetached and detached houses with gardens.
The eastern edge of the area comprises social housing, whereas the western end is mainly tree lined streets of large, detached, grand Edwardian houses.

**Urban suburb, West Midlands**

Suburb of a West Midland ‘urban’, ‘large city’. The ward has a population of c.14,000; its LSOAs span the most, middle and least deprived third of LSOAs nationally, but are mostly middling.

The West Midland case study location is a well-kept and well-established suburb renowned for the quality of its schools. Its location provides residents with easy access to the town centre and to the motorway network but it also has its own bustling parade of shops nearby and green spaces including a large park offering recreational opportunities.

Within the ward there are a number of different housing types, reflecting different levels of affluence. The bulk of the suburb is made up of terraces and semis from the 1930s and 1950s, but it also has an area of large, detached houses; an area of post-war social housing and a number of 1970s housing estates with mixed accommodation.

Overall, the area is significantly wealthier than others in the town and is somewhere that people aspire to live in.

A recent event which had galvanised the community was the closure of a local pub. The pub had burned down after a petition was organised to save it and many were suspicious of what had happened. The future development of the site was also attracting community interest.

### 4.3 Recruitment

The full rationale for the recruitment strategy is detailed in annex D.
By means of a summary, the recruitment in rural areas was done by Brook Lyndhurst researchers who ‘embedded’ themselves in each case study area for five to six days, both recruiting and interviewing participants. For the urban case studies, we used highly skilled professional recruiters operating in areas in which they were already well-established. Brook Lyndhurst researchers then spent four to five days in each area conducting interviews.

In both rural and urban areas, a combination of methods were used to recruit prospective participants; predominantly approaching people in the street, in shared spaces (such as community halls, shops, pubs, bus stops, etc...), using snowballing\(^{42}\) and using local sources of information such as notice boards and magazines.

As outlined above in section 4.1, the focus of a Q study is not the participants, but rather the perspectives held by those participants. Nevertheless, it is important that the P-set (the sample of participants) represents as wide a range of views as possible.

As such, we aimed to recruit a spread of participants which represented the demographic and other characteristics of the population living in each of the case study areas; for example, where a place had a relatively high number of people in one particular age group or socio-economic group, our sample in that place reflected this.

As well as recruiting across age group, gender and socio-economic group, we also aimed to recruit participants belonging to a range of different types of formal and informal networks, and a mixture of ‘incomers’ and long-time residents. The achieved sample for residents in rural and urban areas can be found in annex E.

### 4.4 Limitations of the research

As with all research, this study has its limitations. These fall into three main categories: limitations of Q methodology; limitations of the size of the study; and limitations of the scope of the study.

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\(^{42}\) Snowballing (or ‘chain referral sampling’) is a social research technique that involves following a trail of responses until the required person is identified.
Limitations of Q methodology

There are various well-documented limitations to Q methodology. In particular, the ability of participants to express their own construction of a subject is limited by the quality and scope of the Q-set statements. Successful employment of the methodology therefore depends on the meticulous development of the concourse. Every effort was made to avoid this ‘garbage in garbage out’ pitfall: the research team performed an extensive literature review; conducted interviews with rural residents and experts; and piloted Q sets in rural settings. Despite this, there will inevitably have been viewpoints that we were unable to capture in the concourse.

Another limitation relates to the inherent subjectivity of the Q-sort process. Since they were sorting the cards from their own subjective viewpoints, participants imbued statements with their own personal meaning. On the one hand, this is the greatest strength of Q methodology (and is what distinguishes it from conventional methodologies). On the other hand, participants’ meaning could conceivably be different from the meaning given to the statements by the research team, which may affect the validity of the analysis and interpretation of results. We aimed to mitigate this difficulty through simple and unambiguous wording of statements and through the discussion of the statements and the sort with each participant. However, the study of subjective opinion remains philosophically and methodologically challenging and the results of any Q study must be understood in this context.

Limitations of the size of the study

Given that this research was commissioned by Defra as a piece of strategic research covering a broad range of issues, it was not designed with the main aim of producing large-scale, quantitative findings that could be used to make generalisations about ‘the’ nature of ‘the’ rural experience in Britain. Indeed, plenty of such data already exists, and this study was commissioned, in part, to ‘get underneath’ those large-scale, necessarily simplistic, generalisations.

Instead, we used a small number of case study locations to provide a richer, more novel and nuanced understanding of social networks and

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their emergent properties in certain places. The methodology did allow for some quantitative analysis, and the ‘perspectives’ that were identified are generalisable. However, the findings should be understood in the context of the sample size (96) and the number of case studies undertaken (eight).

**Limitations of the scope of the study**

Despite rigorous efforts to encompass all that ‘social capital’ includes, it is a concept of such breadth that inevitably there were issues that we were unable to fully explore. In particular, a more detailed understanding of volunteering, local governance and asset ownership was not possible within the remit of the research; nor was there scope for consideration of gender, race, ethnicity or disability.

The research findings and analysis presented in the following chapters should be read bearing these unavoidable limitations in mind.
5 Perspectives on social capital in rural areas

As outlined in section 4, Q methodology was designed as a systematic means of revealing and mapping subjectivity: using this methodology allowed us to find a middle road between the two extremes of a quantifiable, measurable vision of social capital and a rich, qualitative but unsystematic, descriptive account. The subjective standpoint of participants is central to Q analysis: the true sample of a Q study is the set of perspectives held by participants, rather than the participants themselves.

Q sort data is factor analysed in order to identify the different perspectives that exist within the population. The factor matrix (table 4, annex G) shows how closely each participant’s view was represented by each factor; those individuals with high factor loadings are termed factor exemplars, or people who embody that particular perspective. The qualitative interview data and characteristics of the exemplars of each factor are used to contextualise and interpret the results of the factor analysis.

A six factor solution for rural areas

The optimal factor solution for understanding the points of view expressed by those living in rural areas was a six factor solution, which accounted for 57% of the variance in responses.

Table 4 Six factor solution for rural areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Factor Name</th>
<th>Variance explained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I belong here</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Community Champions</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Friends Matter</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Happy Bystanders</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lost Communities</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Place Matters</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The section below contains a pen portrait of each of the rural perspectives that emerged from interviews with 72 rural residents. Each perspective has

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44 Several different factor solutions are generated; the optimal solution is selected on the basis of the maximum explained variance, limited by the conditions that each factor must have (i) an eigenvalue (or character value) of ≥ 1, and (ii) at least two factor exemplars. These criteria ensure that each factor represents a meaningful shared point of view.

45 This variance figure signifies that 57% of the ways in which the cards have been sorted are accounted for by the six factors. As a result it would be incorrect to say that 18% of the sample shares the perspective expressed by factor one.

“The results of a Q methodological study are the distinct subjectivities about a topic that are operant, not the percentage of the sample that adheres to any of them.” (van Exel, J and de Graaf, G (2005) Q methodology: A sneak preview)
been reconstructed based on the results of the Q sorts (see tables 3 and 4, annex G) and the qualitative interview data collected alongside the Q sort data.

We have indicated in the description of each factor the Q-sort values of particular statements (see table 3, annex G). For example, (s1, -4) indicates that statement 1 (s1) from the Q set (see table 1 of the main report) was typically placed at -4 on the Q grid by participants with that point of view.
Figure 4 Illustration of rural perspectives on social capital
5.1 Rural factor 1: I belong here

Table 5 Background characteristics of factor exemplars\(^4\): Rural Factor 1 (number of people)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Residence (years)</th>
<th>SEG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spars, SW</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16-29</td>
<td>0-14</td>
<td>ABC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village, SE</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30-44</td>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>C2D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village, Yorks</td>
<td></td>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town, NE</td>
<td></td>
<td>65+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town, E Mids</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town, W Mids</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"We cherish every single day, we appreciate what we’ve got...everybody helps each other out and works together."
(West Midland market town, Male, 30-44, AB)

In common with the majority of the rural perspectives, participants with an ‘I belong here’ outlook were very positive about where they lived and felt that living in their village or town gave them a very high quality of life (s20, +5). They placed great importance on feeling that they belonged (s15, +4): they felt strongly embedded in their local social networks and liked to feel that they knew everyone, and that everyone knew them. Their quality of life was strongly linked to feeling that there were people around them who they could rely on, and they painted a picture of living in an environment of mutual support (or even ‘supportive nosiness’ as one participant put it) (s2, +4; s7, +3).

"Everyone looks out for each other...everyone knows what everyone else is up to really. I know that sounds bad but they’re looking out for each other."
(South West sparse parish, Female, 45-64, DE)

People with this viewpoint were highly sociable and enjoyed being a part of well-established friend and family networks, as well as sometimes being involved in formal community groups, depending on where they lived and their particular interests. They were also likely to have sociable jobs that helped them to meet people; for example, factor exemplars worked in local post offices, as community care assistants or in the local beauty parlour.

The peace and tranquillity of living in the countryside was prized among rural residents with this point of view, and living near open spaces contributed strongly to their quality of life (s31, +4). They were often very proud of where they lived (s47, +5) and described their towns and villages

\(^{44}\) It is important to remember that the number of factor exemplars is not important in assessing the validity or prevalence of a particular factor; factor exemplars simply fit the pattern well and so provide qualitative insights that are useful for interpreting and contextualising the results of the factor analysis.
as safe, friendly and welcoming (s29, +3; s28, -4; s30, -5; s22, -5). Many felt strongly that it was important to actively nurture these attributes.

“I said to [newcomer at church], ‘Is there anything we could do different to make you feel part of it?’...he said, ‘This is the friendliest church I’ve ever come to, I’m part of it now, after two weeks I feel part of it.’”

(North East small town, Male, 65+, DE)

“I feel welcome everywhere. Generally, walking around the village, I know everyone. But if you want to feel welcome, you’ve got to go out and join in the community spirit.”

(South East village, Male, 45-64, AB)

Holders of this viewpoint often subscribed to what they called ‘old fashioned’ values of neighbourliness, trust and morality. Some lamented the loss of these ‘old’ values and a deterioration in standards; however, many felt that they shared common values with those around them.

“A lot of the people we mix with are very likeminded people. We all say the same things, we’ve got similar tastes and outlook on life. [This place] gives us that, we’re very fortunate.”

(West Midlands market town, Male, 30-44, AB)

As table 5 above shows, the ‘I belong here’ point of view was found predominantly among residents of villages. It was strongly represented among the 45-64 age group and among those who had lived in their place for less than 15 years.

5.2 Rural factor 2: Community Champions

“We were welcomed and I was determined I would get to know people so I joined WI immediately... you’ve got to make an effort”.

(South West sparse parish, Female, 45-64, AB)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Residence (years)</th>
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<td>Spars, SW</td>
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<td>16-29</td>
<td>30-44</td>
<td>45-64</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</table>
Again, in line with the majority of rural perspectives, participants with a ‘community champion’ outlook were very positive about where they lived: they felt that it gave them a good quality of life (s20, +4) and they had a strong sense of belonging (s15, +5; s3, +3).

“We came to look around the town, it was a bitterly cold Monday - miserable day, and everyone we passed said good morning or hello - to complete strangers - and I just felt so at home here.”

(West Midlands market town, Female, 65+, AB)

One of the key characteristics of those sharing this perspective was that they were very involved in what we have called ‘formal community’ (such as clubs, societies, volunteering and local governance) (s12, +3), and this differentiated them from other groups. They attributed a great deal of importance to the formal structures of community life and had often made a concerted effort to get involved (s46, +5). Sometimes this was done in order to give something back to the community, sometimes as a means of ensuring that they too would share the mutual support that community networks offered. Either way, their degree of involvement seemed linked to a strong disagreement that their area was in any way cliquey (s16, -5; s22, -4).

“Widows do get left out […] in a lot of cases their children don’t even visit them […] I wouldn’t like to be in that position, which is why we’ve joined the trefoil and the church. Because the church, they’re the most likely to knock on the door and say ‘how are you’, ‘how’s the wife’.”

(South West sparse parish, Male, 65+, C1)

Although very involved in formal community networks, many of those sharing this outlook felt that the burden of organising and making things happen fell on a small number of volunteers (s14, +4; s33, +4).

“It’s the same people doing the same things all the time. They do it for the church, the social club, WI and whatever else – the village hall – it’s always the same giving, and doing, and working, all the time”

(South West sparse parish, Female, 65+, C1)

They sometimes worried about the long-term future of the committees and clubs that they were involved with, or resented the present situation – particularly when they had seen a change for the worse (this element of
nostalgia was also present in the ‘I belong here’ perspective described above and was the dominant feature of the ‘Lost Communities’ perspective discussed below).

“Everyone used to get involved, but now the town has lost its pride […].”

(East Midlands market town, Male, 45-64, C1)

Nevertheless, those sharing this perspective often had a positive attitude towards newcomers because they saw them as necessary for the continuity of community life:

“You do need people with new ideas, energy and a willingness to join in. Otherwise things don’t get done.”

(South East village, Male, 65+, AB)

It is interesting to note that this group strongly disagreed that the idea that pubs were at the centre of community social life (s40, -4) - their social life was more often linked to their formal community involvement.

Those with exemplars holding this point of view were exclusively from the higher socio-economic groups (A,B and C1) and tended to be in the older age bands.

5.3 Rural factor 3: Friends Matter

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<th>Place</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Residence (years)</th>
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<td>Sparse, SW</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>45-64</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>65+</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“You need to know people…It’s people that make the difference.”

(South East village, Male, 16-29, C2)

Local people and the general friendliness of the area were very important to those who subscribed to what we have coined the ‘friends matter’ point of view. They often cited other people as the best thing about where they lived and were distinct from the other rural perspectives in their agreement that most of the people they knew lived in the local area (s1, +4; s3, +3). They
also contrasted with the other rural perspectives in the lack of importance they placed on having open spaces nearby (s31, -1).

Bonded networks of family and friends were key to this perspective (s17, -4). Some also contrasted the informal networks to which they belonged with the more formal community and governance networks of which they were generally not a part.

A strong sense of the importance of reciprocity was often expressed by those of the ‘friends matter’ perspective. The need to help each other out and the knowledge that they themselves could ask for help in return featured strongly in this viewpoint (s36, +3; s6, +3; s7, +3):

“Everyone here knows you. People are always helping each other out. If you need a beer they’ll buy you a beer. If you need a tenner, they’ll give you a tenner.”

(West Midlands market town, Male, 30-44, DE)

Examples of the kind of support given by local networks included helping each other move house; fixing a broken tap; providing childcare; finding jobs; and giving emotional support in times of need (s36, +3).

Casual interactions, such as stopping and chatting were also mentioned (s3, +3), and in common with the two perspectives above, general friendliness, rather than specific friendships, was also considered important.

Those with a ‘friends matter’ perspective generally expressed a sense of belonging and satisfaction with where they lived but they felt less strongly about these statements than other things (s15, 0; s20, -1). They seemed to feel they were well-liked and widely known in their areas and often contrasted their situation favourably with that of other people’s - suggesting that they would not experience the same levels of friendliness and support if they lived in a bigger place.

“Most people that’s lived, like, here for years and years get on well…Like you can go anywhere and you can like, talk”

(North East small town, Female, 45-64, DE)

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47 N.B. It is worth remembering that the statements are placed in relation to one another in the pattern described above rather than being placed in accordance to specific points on the agree to disagree scale. A participant who agrees with the majority of the statements will therefore have to place some of the statements that he or she agrees with on the left hand side (i.e. negative side) of the sort.
For many with this viewpoint, the pub was the key venue for facilitating social networks (s40, +4). They often felt that there needed to be more to do locally though, in particular for young people (s44, +5; s32, +5). They also tended to welcome modest, but not radical change - which might have been a reflection of the young age profile of those subscribing to this point of view.

As well as tending to be young, exemplars of this view point came predominantly from the socio-economic groups C2, D and E and many lived in rented accommodation. They also tended to come from rural towns rather than villages.

5.4 **Rural factor 4: Happy Bystanders**

**Table 8** Background characteristics of factor exemplars: Rural Factor 4 (number of people)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Residence (years)</th>
<th>SEG</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village, Yorks</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town, NE</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town, E Mids</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town, W Mids</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I’m certainly not the type of person who’d be in somebody’s house all the time, but I think it's important to keep that social feeling going between people.”

(Yorkshire village, Female, 30-44, AB)

A common characteristic of those sharing this perspective was that their social networks were predominantly located outside the place where they lived. They strongly agreed that most of their friends did not live locally (s17, +5) and conversely, strongly disagreed that most people they knew were in the local area (s1, -5).

Although they tended not to be involved in formal clubs and societies (s46, -3), they did see them as an important part of community life (s12, +4). They felt that people should get to know those living around them (s41, +4; s3, +4), and they felt they could rely on their neighbours for support (s36, +3). However, despite a positive view of local people, they saw themselves as distinct from them (s9, -3) which also differentiated them from other rural perspectives.

“They’re friendly but they’re not friends.”
Many subscribing to the ‘happy bystander’ perspective received support from local people (e.g. during times of illness) but also wanted to keep an element of distance and so shied away from close relationships with those in their local area.

“Well I wouldn’t want everybody to know what I was doing every five minutes [...] On the other hand, I suppose if you’re ill or if someone was breaking in or something it might be handy if everybody else knew about it”

(West Midlands market town, Female, 45-64, AB)

Common to their point of view was a relatively positive opinion of where they lived (s20, +2) and a strong appreciation for the open spaces around them (s31, +5).

“Because of the nature of my job I’m quite cooped up in the day; I love being here where two nano seconds away there’s open countryside...that’s really important to me.”

(Yorkshire village, Female, 30-44, AB)

Even so, they did not feel that the place should stay as it was (s43, -5) and, in fact, felt positive about change.

“It’s getting its act together slowly but surely.”

(North East small town, Male, 30-44, C1)

“A town this size needs to grow or it will die. They say the Tesco killed some of the shops on the high street, but we need the Tesco so the town grows and we can get another supermarket and more shops on the high street.”

(East Midlands market town, Male, 45-64, AB)

In general terms, those with this perspective were affluent people (A, B, C1) of working age. Many were professionals who had come into their areas
relatively recently due to work and had chosen not to become active in community life.

5.5 Rural factor 5: Lost Communities

Table 9 Background characteristics of factor exemplars: Rural Factor 2 (number of people)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Residence (years)</th>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>30-44</td>
<td>15-24</td>
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<td>Village, Yorks</td>
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<td>45-64</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Town, NE</td>
<td></td>
<td>16-29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Town, E Mids</td>
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<td>30-44</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Town, W Mids</td>
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<td>45-64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

“*We just sit in our own little boxes and say that things shouldn’t be done, but don’t get up and do anything about it.*”
(Yorkshire village, Female, 45-64, C2)

The ‘lost communities’ viewpoint was characterised by a distinct feeling that things in the local area used to be better. Dissatisfaction centred around the loss of services and facilities, and places having nothing for young people (s32, +5; s44, +4; s12, -4; s24, -5; s40, -5).

“The pub used to be the lifeblood, but it’s not any more is it? People just don’t go and socialise anymore.”
(East Midlands market town, Male, 30-44, C2)

Participants described the loss of shops and pubs, the passing of an older generation of more community-minded residents, the impact of housing growth, and the arrival of commuters who did not stay long enough to put down roots (the strength of feeling on this point set them apart from the other perspectives; s18, +4). They felt that these factors had had a negative impact on where they lived.

“I would have said at one time, when we first moved into the village, that it was quite a close-knit community, because people had lived here a long time. As people have died, people have moved in, commuters… or younger people, and you don’t get the community, they’re not involved in the community because there’s nothing for them to get involved in.”
(Yorkshire village, Female, 45-64, C2)

There was a feeling from participants subscribing to this point of view that their places were generally unfriendly in comparison to elsewhere, whether
it was the simple matter of other people not chatting in the street, or of some people being excluded from community life (s4, +1).

“There are a lot of little groups that stick together and to hell with everyone else kind of thing…. There’s a lot of people here who are just interested in themselves, they don’t care about anyone else… it comes down to selfishness.”

(East Midlands market town, Male, 30-44, C2)

This viewpoint also encompassed a feeling of disempowerment and an idea that the participants themselves could do nothing to effect change for the better (s23, -3; s11, -3). Participants with this point of view tended not to be involved in local events or governance (s10, -3; s12, -4), although they wanted things to change (s43, 0).

“Nobody’s ever asked us anything. This is our own fault because we don’t go to the meetings. Nobody comes and asks us what we want...I’m waiting to see what’s going to happen down at the bottom of the village now that we’ve got some caravans on the field, see if people get together to stop anything that happens.”

(Yorkshire village, Female, 45-64, C2)

The ‘lost community’ outlook was also distinct from the other rural factors in that those who shared it did not think that people were proud of where they lived (s47, -3) or that clubs and societies played an important role in local social life (s12; -4).

The exemplars came from the C2 socio-economic group and had lived in their places for long enough to have witnessed change taking place.
5.6 Rural factor 6: Place matters

Table 10 Background characteristics of factor exemplars: Rural Factor 6 (number of people)

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<td>1</td>
<td>0-14</td>
<td>C2DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village, Yorks</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Town, W Mids</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Town, W Mids</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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“I just like the place… I don’t have that much in common with the people at all. My wife finds the same thing.”

(North East small town, Male, 45-64, 10-14, AB)

One of the most striking elements of the ‘place matters’ perspective was the strong sense of being an outsider (s8,-5; s15,-3). This in turn appeared to stem from the feeling expressed by participants that they did not have much in common with most other locals and did not share the same values (s9,-5). Often, they reported that they and their families had not been accepted (s13,+4), and there was also a strong sense of having chosen to withdraw from mainstream local social life (s46,-1).

“People have an opinion and make assumptions, but they don’t know who you are… I tend to keep myself to myself.”

(South East village, Female, 30-44, DE)

The feelings of it taking a long time to be accepted (s13, 4), of not being able to be themselves (s8, -5), of cliqueyness (s16, 3), of not sharing similar values with those around them (s9, -5) and of not being able to call on local people when they needed to (s36, -2), all differentiated this group from other rural perspectives.

Despite their outsider status though, people with this point of view were very positive about the places where they lived (s20,+4): they liked living in the countryside, found open space important to their quality of life (s31,+5) and stressed that they had specifically chosen to live in that place.

“For everything I’ve said about people complaining, don’t put it out of context. I’ve been happy to be here. I chose this place and I’ve loved living here.”

(South East village, Female, 30-44, DE)
The social networks of those subscribing to the ‘place matters’ perspective were based around tightly knit family or friendship groups that were not part of mainstream local society. These networks tended to include people living close-by (s17, -3) and participants generally were not trusting of people outside them (s27, -3).

“We’ve got our own support system because we’ve got three children in the area.”

(North East small town, Male, 65+, AB)

Despite not taking part in local social life – which they knew went on without them – these participants reported feeling a ‘duty’ to at least attend community events. Some of them did, although perhaps not as often as they thought they should.

“I’m guilty of not partaking in a lot of local events.”

(North East small town, Male, 45-64, AB)

Those holding the ‘place matters’ viewpoint did not, on the face of it, appear to share any background characteristics. However, they all belonged to socio-economic groups that were in the minority in the places where they lived, and none of them had been born and raised there.

5.7 Summary of the main differences between the rural perspectives

There were many nuanced differences between the six rural perspectives, but we found they could be grouped most clearly along two major axes: involvement in local networks (either formal or informal) and attitudes towards change. We have aimed to represent these key differences between the perspectives in the diagram below.
Figure 5 – Summary of main differences between rural perspectives

- Community champions
- I belong here
- Friends matter
- Place matters
- Happy bystanders
- Lost communities
6 Discussion: implications for rural social capital

Throughout the review of the evidence and the fieldwork, the concept of social networks proved a particularly useful unit of analysis. Social networks can be easily located, classified and described, and they lend themselves to being observed. They are also the basis of the emergent properties that are of interest to this research: trust, cooperation, cohesion and inclusion; or, as the case may be, anomie, distrust and exclusion.

This study sought to include within its research of social networks, both the characteristics and experiences of a network’s individual members, and the links and relationships between those individuals and the emergent properties of the group as a whole.

In this section we consider all the primary and secondary evidence gathered for rural areas through the prism of social networks and draw out implications of what this evidence may mean for social capital in rural areas.

This section brings together findings from the literature review, insights from the expert workshop, and the findings of our Q analysis. In addition, it incorporates the wealth of additional data collected during the 96 face-to-face participant interviews (which often lasted over an hour):

- Section 6.1 considers the role of informal networks in social capital;
- Section 6.2 considers the role of formal networks in social capital;
- Section 6.3 considers the emergent properties from rural networks.

Section 7 contains the results for the urban case study locations and a summary of where the main similarities and differences lie between the rural and urban places we researched.

6.1 The role of informal networks in social capital

As mentioned in section 3.3 above, and as will again be mentioned in section 6.2, what we have termed ‘formal’ community structures (including participation in ‘community life’ such as clubs and societies, volunteering, political action and governance) are commonly used as a proxy measure for social capital. This is particularly true of studies of social capital in rural England: nothing was found during the literature review that explicitly looked at informal networks as a manifestation of rural social capital. We concluded
that omitting informal networks from our own study would present us with four problems commonly found in other social capital research:

1. If, as some research contends, informal networks are more prevalent than formal networks in urban areas, it may compromise our ability to draw comparisons between social capital in rural and urban areas, because we cannot compare like with like.  

2. An in-built bias may occur whereby rural social capital appears 'better' or 'stronger' if it is measured with an indicator (such as levels of voluntary activity) which is generally higher in rural areas. Urban areas, or areas without formal structures, may have equally valid, but unmeasured manifestations of social capital that go unreported.  

3. The formal community idea of social capital tends to focus on 'elite' participation at the community level, perhaps thereby replicating a 'white middle-class' image of rural life.  

4. Some argue that the formal community approach can result in social capital being treated as a 'cure-all' for society’s ills: by positioning social capital as the main driver of development or social change, disadvantaged members of a community are effectively given responsibility for their own problems. Moreover, the exclusion of the most disadvantaged is exacerbated, since they have the least time and resources to devote to ‘participating’ in formal networks.

These difficulties highlight the importance of questioning assumptions about social capital, as well as the necessity of striving to understand social capital and its associated outcomes from the point of view of the people involved. They also represent a warning about an over reliance on social capital as a panacea, since it is clear that social capital is not intrinsically a good thing (as discussed in section 3).

Describing informal networks

The term ‘informal networks’ encompasses a variety of different social relationships. We have taken them to include contacts between family, friends, neighbours and social groups: in other words, any relationships that do not rely on formal structures or organisations.

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49 Woods, M et al, (undated), Participation, Power and Rural Community Governance in England and Wales, Full Report of Research Activities and Results for ESRC p5
Although we did ask participants to talk about the location of their networks in general, in keeping with our objective to explore social capital in rural places, we were primarily concerned with local networks specifically within the place or area defined by the case study locations.

**The extent and nature of local informal networks varied across the perspectives**

The different perspectives gained from our factor analysis of the Q-sort results (see section 5) illustrated the broad spectrum of the qualities and location of different informal networks. Most of the rural perspectives valued local friendliness, but differed in the nature and extent of their involvement in local social networks. These networks ranged from strongly bonded networks of families and friends (*friends matter*), through weaker, more extensive networks (*I belong here*), to much smaller more functional networks with neighbours (*happy bystanders*). Only the *place matters* perspective stood apart from the others in actively rejecting local social networks.

**Bonding, bridging and linking social capital were all part of informal networks**

Local, informal networks may, on the face of it, look largely like manifestations of bonded social capital: that is, they exhibit strong ties between members of the same social group. In a rural context, such a supposition may be part and parcel of the stereotypical images of rural England, which often include the notion of ‘close-knit’ communities.

However, our research findings suggest that informal, rural, networks are not always bonded or ‘close-knit’ and that opportunities for bridging and linking capital exist - depending upon the nature of the informal networks, the opportunities for social contact offered by a place, and the individuals involved.

**Strongly bonded groups within informal networks existed in all rural case study locations**

Where we noticed strongly bonded groups in our research, we identified certain typical factors which tended to bind members together, sometimes to the exclusion of others:

- Age
“The families were not especially welcoming in this street. The bungalows are for elderly people and the older council houses tend to have older people in them.”
(South East village, Female, 30-44, DE)

- Class
“IT’s only really working class people that live in [North East town] that get on with each other”
(North East small town, Male, 16-29, DE)

- Length of residency
“There are two types of [Yorkshire village] people. There’s the ones that have lived here quite a long time... then you’ve got the other ones who have moved into the big houses... They really are two separate types of people. But there’s nothing in the village for people to get together.”
(Yorkshire village, Female, 45-64, C2)

- Family ties
“Course I’ve got my family here, see, that’s the trouble innit, yeah, they’re always here you see [...] I would go to them in the first place..”
(South West sparse parish, Female, 65+, C1)

The extent to which bonded groups were exclusionary or welcoming appeared to depend upon a number of factors tied up in the complex relationship between people and place. It would be wrong to conclude that the above binding factors were necessarily exclusionary. For example, whereas some participants saw family ties as a negative factor in some places, other participants in other places saw them as an asset.

And whereas length of residency was a genuine cause of division in some participants’ minds, we noticed that it was sometimes referred to in a tongue-in-cheek manner that suggested it was more a running joke on rural life than an everyday reality.

“When we moved in 40 years ago we were considered interlopers and the butcher told me it’d take me 30 years to be accepted as a villager.”
(Yorkshire village, Female, 45-64, C2)

The ability of different groups to make bridges with others varied by place and person
Bridging was noticeable between informal, bonded networks in most case study locations, and was particularly noticeable in places where opportunities existed for people to meet each other both in an ad hoc manner and through formal social occasions. Ad hoc meetings seemed closely related to the availability of local meeting venues, and this is discussed further in the following sub-section. Formal social occasions are discussed in section 6.2.

However, bridging was not solely a function of physical meeting venues; it was also something that could be nurtured by participants' perspectives, which ranged from wanting to keep themselves to themselves, to wanting to be friendly, welcoming and proud of living somewhere that people wanted to be a part of.

“This is a king-pin village out of five or six villages around. It’s the hub of the local community.”

(South East village, Male, 45-64, AB)

“So I thought long and hard about this, and this is where we realised that we did not want village life, or life with a neighbour. Simple reason is it’s very easy to fall out with neighbours, but you’re damned if you can fall in again. If you haven’t got neighbours, you haven’t got problems. I formed a conclusion that people spell problems. You always get problems from other people. We looked long and hard before we found this place.”

(South West sparse parish, Female, 65+, C1)

Once again, it seems likely that there is a reflexive relationship between people and place. In this case, we suspect that participants' individual perspectives on the friendliness of a place either reinforce or undermine the physical attributes of a place that lend themselves to sociability, in turn giving a place a character with a perceived level of friendliness. This may lead to the possibility of a self-perpetuating cycle developing whereby certain ‘types’ of people are attracted to certain ‘types’ of place.
“It sounds quite sentimental really, but we came here, we came to have a look at some houses, and at that point we’d decided we wanted to live in a little village with roses round the door…We came to look around the town, it was a bitterly cold Monday, miserable day, and everyone we passed said ‘good morning’ or ‘hello’, to complete strangers, and I just felt so at home here. It felt a comfortable, pleasant town, even on a miserable Monday morning.”

(West Midlands market town, Female, 65+, AB)

The ability of participants to make vertical connections to others in positions of power varied by person and place

Linking capital was less apparent than bridging or bonding, but did appear to manifest itself in broadly the same way as bonding capital. Across the case study locations, most participants seemed to know who to talk to if they wanted to get something done, or to find something out, and even if they didn't know the person who could help them directly, they could reach them through a ‘friend of a friend’.

“There are a couple of lasses I know, they deal with, not complaints, but ideas for the park and other issues round here. Basically you mention it to them and they deal with it through the person who can sort it all out. Sometimes you don’t have to ask for names, you just know it’s going to get sorted, which is nice.”

(South East village, Female, 30-44, DE)

This, again, seemed to be most usual in places which, and amongst people who, were generally sociable. In places with fewer opportunities for meeting and with less going on, even if participants did know who to ask to get things done, they may not have set much store by that person.

For participants who were either outside the loop of formal community, such as those subscribing to the ‘friends matter’ and ‘place matters’ perspectives, or who didn't feel that a 'community' really existed where they lived, such as those of the ‘lost communities’ perspective, the idea of talking to ‘influential’ locals could be treated with suspicion.

“Not everyone’s allowed to go to meetings and voice opinions… I’ve never been to a parish council meeting… The parish council consists of all the ‘figure heads’ of the village: the important, the wealthy, the powerful, the
long-term residents. They happen to be on the council. It’s not a coincidence… It should be a group who represents everyone: the young, the housewives, the publican, the canal-liver… But it’s only ever going to be the same sort of people.”

(South East village, Male, 16-29, C2)

What was striking was that, even in places with strong formal communities and lots going on socially, participants could not identify ‘well-connected residents’ who had beneficial links with others outside a place. This is point is addressed further in section 6.2.

**Place and informal networks: public space**

Within each of the case study locations, we considered the spatial dimension of interactions within informal networks. This was particularly important given that research exists to suggest:

- the significance of public space to social interaction and social activity; and
- a link between areas with opportunities for meeting others and higher levels of neighbourhood trust, cooperation and reciprocity.\(^{52, 53}\)

Crucially, the literature suggests that it is the quality of the public space which appears to predict its usefulness as a social site.\(^{54}\)

**Having amenities within walking distance and making the time to use those amenities affected casual social interaction**

Our findings showed the importance of local amenities and employment: when people had no choice but to leave a place to carry out activities such as shopping, schooling and working, they noticed that this prevented them from getting to know one other. The same was true of people who spent little time where they lived. Casual social interaction that arose from walking around an area was an important contributory factor to how friendly a place seemed.

“I’m always down at the shop getting more bread. The banter’s good down there you know.”

(South East village, Female, 30-44, DE)

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\(^{52}\) Wood, op. cit. p16


\(^{54}\) Cehl, J, (1996), Life between buildings: using public space, quoted in Williams K and Green, S, (2003), Literature Review of Public Space and Local Environments for the Cross Cutting Review, p12
“It’s not because I don’t want to know them, it’s just that our paths don’t cross. And that’s because, being a village with no amenities, everybody gets in their car and goes out.”
(Yorkshire village, Male, 65+, C1)

**Having a safe and pleasant local environment encouraged incidental socialising**

On the whole, participants felt that there were opportunities to make incidental contact with people. Again though, there was an obvious need for people to want to walk around their areas for this to happen.

“Everyone seems to talk to everyone anyway […] Anyone who’s walking in the village and you’re walking past them, always stops and talks […] I couldn’t tell you their names but I’ve had conversations with all of them.”
(South West sparse parish male, 16-29, DE)

This was particularly linked to the rural nature of the case study locations, as many participants valued the access to open space and a pleasant environment, and so tended to use their local area for recreation.

The importance of feeling safe when out and about was often mentioned – and was in part related to the feeling that participants knew others where they lived and knew that they could be seen by other people when they were out and about.

“It’s safe here. It’s so small. You can be seen by everyone wherever you are. I’ve never felt worried.”
(South West sparse parish, Female, 16-29, C2)

There was rarely anywhere that participants felt unsafe within the case study locations – with the North East small town being the only exception. Here, there were two places (outside the doctors’ surgery, and around the side of the shop) where participants routinely reported feeling unsafe:

“Before you used to see the old women cross over before the shop, didn’t you? … now they’re not as bad because they know the cameras are there”
(North East small town, Female, 16-29, DE)

Research exists which suggests that optional activities (i.e. non-essential) are reduced dramatically in poor quality environments. The question of what
constitutes a 'good' environment is to some extent subjective, but on the whole, the literature points to the particularly damaging effects (from the perspective of social interaction in public space) of traffic, crime and the fear of crime.\textsuperscript{55}

“[there] has never been anything community because it’s a long village, the A[road] goes right through, originally it was virtually one street...it’s because it’s such a long village and there’s not much going off it...We keep screaming out for something to be done about the speed of traffic through the village.”

(Yorkshire village, Female, 45-64, C2)

“Three parks but only one’s got the swings actually attached because they won’t put the swings on the other ones because they get damaged. There’s the green where they could go out with a ball and stuff, but it’s just there’s that much dog fouling. It’s ridiculous down there. There’s no where clean where they can go and play without standing in dog muck or empty beer cartons and stuff.”

(North East small town, Male, 16-29, DE)

When such problems did occur, participants tended to notice the adverse impacts on social contact, particularly when such problems had developed over time, and the participants had witnessed a change for the worse. Indeed, this awareness of deteriorating public space was a defining feature of the 'lost communities' perspective and in the two case study locations that had undergone significant change. In these areas, relatively rapid housing growth was seen to be a contributing factor to participants feeling as though they did not know others in their area.

“We’re friends with people in the immediate area, but those new houses that have been built, I don’t know anybody in them. You only ever see people coming in and out in cars so you never get a chance to talk to them anyway.”

(Yorkshire village, Male, 65+, C1)

Where local amenities and a pleasant, safe environment existed, informal socialising was more noticeable

Where local amenities and events existed, they appeared to be generally well-used and valued. Pubs featured strongly as an important local venue for informal socialising for many participants and were crucial to the social

\textsuperscript{55} Williams K and Green, S, (2001), Literature Review of Public Space and Local Environments for the Cross Cutting Review, p11
networks of those subscribing to the ‘friends matter’ perspective (see section 5.3 above). For these participants, local social networks were particularly useful in fulfilling a wide range of needs: from finding work, to helping out with odd-jobs, and this was particularly true for male participants in the C2, D and E socio-economic groups. This finding on the usefulness of rural social networks is supported by other research.56

“[North East town] would melt down without its pubs ... It's what most of the community is based round” (North East small town, Male, 16-29, DE)

However, even some participants whose informal networks lay predominantly outside the local area liked to socialise in the local pub from time to time.

There were also participants, as described above, whose social networks tended to stem from belonging to formal clubs and societies. These participants often valued the village hall, church and even local newsletters as a way of making contact with like-minded people.

“We had this big thing about whether it [the village hall] was going to close down because it had no members on the committee, so we all went to the meeting, and out of the five of us, four of us ended up on the committee...we all went from playgroup...we all felt strongly that we didn’t want it to shut because then we’d have no playgroup at all.”
(Yorkshire village, Female, 30-44, AB)

Children’s informal socialising involved ‘playing out’ in many of the case study locations, and in most areas participants reported feeling that their children were safe because other residents knew who they were, and would be keeping an eye on them. The extent of the area considered safe, varied by place and participant though, with some restricting play to the street where they lived and others allowing their children independent access to the entire village.

“Children can play out. There are enough people who know who they are and who can make sure they’re safe.”
(South East village, Female, 16-29, C2)

56 Shucksmith, M, (2000), Exclusive countryside? Social inclusion and regeneration in rural areas, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
“A few people let kids out on bikes around the village. I’m a bit wary of that. I’ll have to wait until they’re a lot older until I can completely relax.”

(South East village, Female, 30-44, DE)

There may be a symbiotic relationship between local environmental quality and informal socialising

Researchers argue that the nature of the relationship between necessary (shopping, working, schooling etc.), optional (e.g. dog-walking) and social activities is mutually reinforcing/destructive. For instance: the number of social activities are said to increase in good environments due to the number of optional activities taking place; and decrease in poor environments, but without disappearing completely due to necessary activities continuing.57

This point may be of amplified importance in rural areas that suffer from both poor quality public space and a lack of local amenities, such as shops: residents have no reason to, or interest in, walking around such an area. In this instance both optional and necessary activities are reduced with the potential to dramatically curb social activities through the loss of opportunities for informal, incidental, social contact.

Place and informal networks: neighbourhoods

This section considers neighbourhoods and 'neighbourliness', as distinct from general public space, as a specific venue for informal networks. We have treated it separately for two reasons:

- neighbourliness was an important feature of informal networks across the case study locations and was valued by all but the 'place matters' perspectives. As such, it represents an area worthy of consideration in its own right;
- neighbourhoods have been used as a unit of analysis for the purpose of social capital research (albeit in an urban setting), and more generally for social policy purposes.58

Different rural neighbourhoods within the same place had different characteristics

We found that participants built up contacts with neighbours through incidental meetings when coming and going, and/or through more formal neighbourhood welcoming and bonding strategies. These ranged from

57 Williams, K and Green, S, op. cit.
58 McCulloch, A, (2003), An examination of social capital and social disorganisation in neighbourhoods in the British Household Panel Study, in Social Science and Medicine, volume 56, issue 7, April 2003, p1425 - 1438
neighbours arriving with ‘welcome packs’ for newcomers, to holding dinner parties and events together and people were often aware of their own neighbourhood as a distinct entity.

“On the day we moved in, there was a knock on the door and the villagers came with a welcoming pack and an invite to join short mat bowls. Now that’s what I do for this street.”
(South East village, Male, 65+, AB)

Neighbours sometimes socialised together as friends, particularly where formal strategies or events were in place, but more often relied on each other to help out with property-related tasks, such as looking after the house/plants/pets when on holiday, and carrying out odd-jobs. They also helped with caring responsibilities (for children, the elderly or when people were ill), fetching shopping and sharing lifts.

“I broke my wrist, didn’t I? And everyone was running around. We had potatoes peeled for us, and cakes – it’s a standard joke between us women that, you know, if one of us go down with something, our men live better than they do normal time”.
(South West sparse parish, Female, 30-44, C1)

“That you can knock on anyone’s door, to me it’s major…. [I can ask for] Calpol when the shops are shut, or borrow a phone if I’m out of credit. Simple things.”
(South East village, Female, 30-44, DE)

**Levels of neighbourliness were generally good, and valued – but there were exceptions**
Occasionally, participants reported problems with their relationships with neighbours, and where this was the case, it represented a source of difficulty and unhappiness in what might otherwise have been a general feeling of contentment with a place.

Only the ‘place matters’ perspective put little value on neighbourliness, and this in part may have stemmed from not being accepted by neighbours, due to a feeling of difference and not ‘fitting in’.

“I can’t be myself. It’s related to not being accepted. That’s much better now, but I probably had to prove myself: by having jobs, studying for
something at college. I brought up two kids who could have been nightmares. In a village you do get judged very much on your children’s behaviour.”

(South East village, Female, 30-44, DE)

This idea of ‘fitting in’ is an interesting one in relation to rural England. The ‘place matters’ perspective derived from our factor analysis of the Q-sort results is a notable exception to the others, which all shared a feeling of belonging and which all had (to varying degrees) social networks in the local area.

**Homogeneous rural neighbourhoods may be related to high levels of neighbourhood belonging**

One possible explanation for such high levels of neighbourhood belonging that were a feature of our rural perspectives is the homogeneous nature of residents in the case study locations. Such an explanation is supported by other research on social capital in urban areas which analysed the British Household Panel Study results. It showed that, among women in particular, affluence, residential stability and ethnic heterogeneity were linked to neighbourhood social capital, and that feelings of belonging and social networks were stronger, the greater the ethnic homogeneity of an area. Although it is outside the scope of our research to draw firm conclusions on this issue, it is worth noting both the extent of ethnic homogeneity in our case study locations, and that only those subscribing to one of the rural perspectives (place matters) reported that they did not belong, based on the feeling of an absence of shared values with others where they lived.

**Summary: the role of informal networks in social capital**

Informal networks – the non-organised, ‘organic’ relationships between friends, family members and neighbours – are often omitted from studies of rural social capital, which have tended to focus on formal structures and community participation. However, our research findings suggest that informal connections are a central part of people’s experience of living in a place: they are important in their own right to people’s quality of life; and they are important in their interrelationship with formal community networks.

The key findings from our research may be summarised as follows:

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McCulloch, A, (2003), An examination of social capital and social disorganisation in neighbourhoods in the British Household Panel Study, in Social Science and Medicine, volume 56, issue 7, April 2003, p1425 - 1438
There were many 'types' of local informal network: from small and closely bonded, to loser and more extensive;

The extent to which networks were place-based varied by person and place;

Bonding, bridging and, to a lesser extent, linking were all part of informal networks;

Having amenities within walking distance and making the time to use them affected casual social interaction;

Having a safe and pleasant local environment encouraged incidental socialising;

Where local amenities and a pleasant, safe environment existed, informal socialising was more noticeable;

There may be a symbiotic relationship between local environmental quality and informal socialising;

Different rural neighbourhoods within the same place had different characteristics;

Levels of neighbourliness were generally good, and valued – but there were exceptions;

Overall, the fieldwork shows the importance of people’s informal networks in understanding their experience of living in a place. It also demonstrates the interaction between individual perspectives and preferences and the opportunities for social interaction afforded by the amenities and environment of a place: in particular the importance of people walking around a place was noted. It also seems that patterns of perceived friendliness and sociability can become self-reinforcing cycles, even to the extent that certain types of people are attracted to certain types of place – whether that is people looking for social interaction or those who actively wish to avoid it.

6.2 The role of formal networks in social capital

As described in the introduction to section 6.1 above, formal community networks including participation in clubs and societies, volunteering, political action and governance, are often used as a measurement of social capital. This is partly due to Putnam’s emphasis on ‘civic life’ as the foundation of social capital and partly because organisations and their participants lend themselves to being counted. However, there is little consensus in the
literature about what should be included under the umbrella of ‘civic life’ and rural social capital has been variously measured by looking at:

- ‘networks of civic engagement’ (excluding formal political governance),\(^{60}\)
- ‘local development’, taken to include both community and political processes,\(^{61}\)
- volunteering and influence on decision-making.\(^{62}\)

We sought to include all the above manifestations of formal networks within our research, with a necessary compromise on the depth of issues covered in favour of the breadth of issues covered. We have set out our findings below under the headings of community and social life on the one hand, and volunteering and governance on the other, before giving final consideration to the relationship between such networks and the rural places we visited.

**Describing formal networks: local community and social life**

**Formal networks were not important to every participant, but very important to some**

A defining feature of the different rural perspectives outlined in section 5 was the degree of their involvement in formal networks. For example, community participation was a distinguishing characteristic of the ‘community champions’ and (to a lesser extent) those subscribing to the ‘I belong here’ perspectives.

> “We’ve always been joiners. It’s very important to join and be accepted.”
>
> (South East village, Female, 65+, AB)

The ‘happy bystanders’ perspective illustrated how formal community networks and structures functioned as a public good – despite not being involved themselves, those who showed this perspective derived benefit and pleasure from living in active communities.

The absence of such formal networks in certain places meant that people with the ‘lost communities’ perspective who liked the idea of community, and did want to join in, could not. Several participants expressed sadness


that there was nothing for anyone to do and that, whenever anyone tried to set something up, it always failed due to lack of support from local residents.

“I don’t think you’d get anything, social-wise, because people won’t commit to doing it. So they say they'll do it, they'll do it, they'll do it, and nobody does, or they do it for one day and think it wasn’t worth it.”

(Yorkshire village, Female, 45-64, C1)

Formal networks tended to bond around certain personal characteristics: life stage; available time; commitment to community ideals; and local/newcomer status were all important

- Life stage/cohort

Older people tended to be more involved in formal networks such as clubs and societies, whereas younger people, including those with families, felt they had much less time for such networks. Having said this, those with families were often involved in networks centred on their children, such as playgroups, schools, Parent Teacher Associations or Brownies.

“Generally, a lot of the people [who get involved] are the retired community. A lot of that is to do with the time involved. I would love to get involved in some but with a family, I can't commit... I’m hoping that as the kids get older I can do more, but a lot of these things take an awful lot of time that people with families or jobs, especially at this time in the economic climate, people can't commit to so much.”

(W Midlands market town, Female, AB)

- Commitment to community ideals

Some perspectives (particularly ‘community champions’ and to a lesser extent ‘I belong here’) revealed far greater commitment to the ideal of community and to the concomitant volunteering effort it required than did others.

With some participants their life stage and commitment to ‘the community’ created a worry that no one would step in to take the place of the current organisers and leaders:

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65 We have do not have the evidence to say whether the older people who were very involved in formal community networks were involved because of their life stage or because of a cohort effect. The latter would suggest that they had always been more involved than other cohorts at every stage of their lives. Putnam has noted a cohort effect in his study of American social capital: see Bowling Alone (2000), although we cannot simply assume that this is the explanation in this case.
“Younger people, anyone from 55 downwards, I know they’re bringing up families, but I just don’t think that generation wants to get involved. It worries me – all these committees that I’m on, I can’t see anyone coming up to take the place of the older ones…they mix with each other but they don’t do anything for the community.”
(W Midlands market town, Female, 45-64, C1)

Newcomers and locals
Involvement in formal networks sometimes divided along the lines of newcomers and long-time residents. During the fieldwork, we found that different case study locations had different dynamics: in some places, some residents reported that it tended to be newcomers who had the energy, drive and motivation to get involved in formal community structures, whereas in other places, residents stressed the importance of well-established village families.

“I think you come in and it’s something new and you have a lot of energy and I suppose too that you want to get to know people so you tend to get involved.”
(W Midlands market town, Female, 65+, AB)

“There are people who’ve lived all their lives here. There’s one family that’s devoted their whole life to the village…They work selflessly for lots of things.”
(SE village, Male, 65+ AB)

“It’s not as close as it was because the problem we’re finding is that a lot of people that we call incomers don’t join in.”
(South West sparse parish, Female, 45-64, AB)

The existence of these dividing lines along age, involvement and residency suggests that different cohorts of residents were dominant in the formal community structures in different places. It appears that the ‘ownership’ of community organisations by certain groups may, in the absence of bridging links between different types of people and groups, lead to ingrained patterns in terms of levels and types of participation.

Formal networks provided opportunities for bridging between different groups and seemed to foster local pride and general friendliness.
Some participants reported that formal community networks were important in that they brought people together who would otherwise not have met, and provided an opportunity for people to work together towards a common goal and to help each other out. This was particularly true where local fetes and festivals where concerned.

“You’re bringing the community together, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing, and integrating some of the people that haven’t had the opportunity to lend a hand or do any local work and voluntary stuff, and there were certainly some new people who I got to meet.”

(W Midlands market town, Male, 30-44, C2)

“The festival attracts over 20,000 people…. it makes the village better – gives it a real community spirit. I wouldn’t want to be without it.”

(South East village, Male, 45-64, AB)

Such events also gave participants an opportunity to feel proud of where they lived: a place where other people wanted to visit because it was attractive and welcoming. It may also have contributed to that intangible ‘character’ of a place, discussed in the informal networks section above. The festival talked about in the quote above, for instance, billed itself as ‘the friendly festival’, and participants in that place frequently made a point of describing what a welcoming and inclusive event it was.

In places where there used to be community events, but where that is no longer the case, longer-term residents noted the passing of such events with sadness and a definite sense of loss:

“Well there isn’t any [community events]. There used to be mind, years ago, mind. There used to be street parties and all sorts.”

(North East small town, Male, 30-44, C1)

In most case study locations we found a range of formal networks, such as churches, interest groups (for example, the Women’s Institute, sports clubs, art societies) and local activist or political organisations.
“There's so much to do already that we're spoilt for choice. There's bell-ringing, film, bowls, yoga, art, horticultural and historical societies. There's cluster care and there's the fete…. So often there are so many things we could do, but we can't do them all.”
(South East village, Male, 65+, C1)

An absence of formal community networks seemed to limit opportunities to get to know others, reduce the possibility of mobilising local support and increase feelings of disempowerment

However, the role of formal community networks in social capital was thrown into sharp relief by two case study locations where formal community networks were largely absent. In these places, residents' informal friends and family networks took on increased importance and social life tended to revolve around private gatherings. However, this increase in ‘bonded’ social capital appeared to be to the detriment of ‘bridging’ social capital: people in these locations tended to know their immediate neighbours and close friends but felt that they did not know most people in the village.

The absence of formal community structures seemed to be a contributing factor in making it more difficult for residents to meet each other and to mobilise the community to work together, either for local social events or for local political issues. The fact that people did not know each other meant that support for local initiatives was minimal and many people had feelings of disempowerment, apathy and general disinterest in community life.

“The place seems to have died. There’s no ‘get up and go’.”
(North East small town, Male, 16-29, DE)

Describing formal networks: local volunteering and governance

Involvement in formal networks of local governance and political participation varied by place, person and issue and was sometimes seen as a heavy burden on a few dedicated volunteers

Participants often observed that it was the same set of people who organised everything; this resonated with evidence from the literature that stressed the importance of individual leaders in facilitating community initiatives. However, there was also a sense from some participants that the burden they felt was too great.

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“Of course you need people to take charge. You can't run organisations along democratic lines. It would be very difficult. Yes, it is the same faces who run everything. Some people who want to, and some who don’t – they feel it's too much for them. I feel sorry that they can't bring themselves not to do it, if they don't want to.”

(South East village, Male, 65+, C1)

Participants’ experiences of local political processes also varied by person, place and issue

For example, in one location, most participants felt that the village plan had been done very well and reported that it gave an accurate reflection of the feelings of residents. This supports findings of other research on the success of the community led planning.65 However, in another location there was more ambivalence about the success of their plan, despite that place having very active and visible community networks. The following quote represents a reflection by one of the organisers of the plan in that place:

“People never quite knew why the village plan was being done. It just caused people to be more NIMBY. One was suspicious of it.”

(South East village, Female, 65+, AB)

In one location, some participants commented that their BMX track was a highly visible and welcome result of a community consultation that had been followed through. But in the same place, others felt uninvolved and alienated:

“You usually just hear that this is happened and that’s it. You know, you don’t get a, you don’t get a say up here.”

(North East small town, Female, 45-64, DE)

Such sentiments have not escaped the notice of policy makers, and various programmes and interventions have been implemented to improve involvement. However, interventions have not always been successful - for example, one study notes that initiatives to promote town, parish and community council elections have had little discernible effect in increasing participation.66 There is evidence to suggest that some interventions may even have negative unintended consequences: for example, the

65 http://www.acre.org.uk/communityledplanning_casestudies.html
introduction of new funding sources “may lead to competition and conflict”, and fundraising through official channels can be “a deeply disempowering process, necessitating huge amounts of volunteer time and technical understanding."

Related to this, proliferation of rural governance agencies has been cited as a factor impacting negatively upon the political aspect of formal networks: 175 were identified in a study of Gloucestershire alone in 2007. The combined effects of their interaction in terms of creating confusion and competition are said to be compounded by their generally unelected nature, creating a ‘democratic deficit’. A related sentiment was expressed by one of our participants:

“There are so many groups doing this and that and pursuing their own little ideas, it’s a shame we don’t work more together, it tends to be that somebody gets an idea and they go off on their thing and don’t liaise with other people, which is a pity because it’s a waste of energy.”

(West Midlands market town, Female, AB)

Some of the literature paints a picture of general apathy with local political processes: describing for example, that the proportion of parishes with contested elections has fallen, and at the same time, that the proportion with a shortage of candidates has doubled. However, there are also reports of positive experiences of local governance. These contradictory results reflect our own findings of differential experiences of local governance by the people and places in our sample.

Participants did not feel linked into the decision-making hierarchy beyond their particular place

As already outlined, linking social capital describes the mechanism by which resources and information flow vertically between different levels or types of network – including between formal social organisations such as clubs and societies, local political governance structures, and beyond, up the hierarchy of political power.

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67 Ibid., p6
69 Countryside and Community Research Institute (undated), Public Decision Making in Rural Areas, Research Summary No.3
70 Note that these kinds of finding must be treated with caution and contextualised with local background information, since similar outcomes may have different explanations in different places; for example, uncontested elections could be an indicator of apathy, but also of consensus or of the dominance of a patriarchal elite.
71 Woods, M et al, (undated), Participation, Power and Rural Community Governance in England and Wales, Full Report of Research Activities and Results for ESRC p4
72 http://www.acre.org.uk/communityledplanning_casestudies.html
A common sentiment expressed by participants across all the rural locations studied, was that local parish or town councils had little power and were often overruled by higher authorities. People often felt that local political structures were little more than “talking shops” and, although local people may have opinions, little was done about them.

“You try and make decisions or make suggestions but they don’t take them up, so it’s pointless. You just feel as though you’re banging your head against a brick wall...they want you to be there because they have to be seen to be taking notice of what other people want, but they don’t take any notice.”

(Yorkshire village, Female, 30-44, AB)

Echoing findings from the literature, some participants thought that they were invited to local meetings because local authorities had to be seen to be consulting residents, but in reality, that their participation was tokenistic and their opinions were not taken into account. Others felt that their areas were neglected and forgotten about by the distant authorities who held the real decision making power.

“What we say doesn’t necessarily make any difference. We can voice our opinion, but as it goes up the ladder, they have their own decisions, and what they say goes...sometimes the parish council can get things done, but the big council has often already made their decision.”

(Yorkshire village, Female, C1)

These feelings of powerlessness resonate with the literature on rural social capital; for example, on Defra’s indicators of social capital, the sparsest communities score highest on all measures with the exception of “people feel they can influence decisions in their locality.”

Some participants, however, recognised that their disaffection from local politics was partly their own responsibility:

“This is our own fault because we don’t go to the meetings...we just sit in our own little boxes and say things shouldn’t be done but we don’t get up and do anything about it.”

(Yorkshire village, Female, C2)

Shucksmith, M, (2000), Exclusive countryside? Social inclusion and regeneration in rural areas, JRF p7
The findings above point to a deficit in linking social capital in many rural locations. Evidence from the literature points to differences between ‘highly networked’ (i.e. well connected) ‘socially entrepreneurial incomers’, who are successful in promoting rural community initiatives, and ‘committed residents’, who organise around specific issues and tend to be less successful in accessing resources. Our case study locations appeared to have more of the latter and none of the former: when we asked participants about whether their place benefited from having any well-connected individuals, the response was overwhelmingly negative.

Volunteering in formal (and informal) networks was often observed, but rarely recognised as such, being seen rather as simply part and parcel of rural life

When asked specifically about volunteering, participants were generally able to recall organisations and events that relied on ‘volunteer’ effort. But this often had to be coaxed out during interview, and the following example was only offered after much thought, despite the fact that the participant and his family were heavily involved in the volunteering efforts in question:

“A lot of stuff here is run by volunteers: I mow the village green. Then there’s luncheon club, mother and tots, cluster care. There were big events for the Jubilee and there’s the Church fete. The village hall is run by volunteers too.”

(South East village, Male, 45-64, AB)

It may be that in some rural places, ‘D.I.Y’ service provision is so common, and perhaps so necessary, that rural participants barely thought it worth mentioning, and that people did not see themselves as doing good consciously, but rather accepted ‘volunteering’ as part and parcel of rural life.

However, it was not always formal community networks that acted in to help out those in need: there was a general sense in most places that people would be looked after in an informal way by other locals, and there were plenty of examples of this having happened:

“The majority of people tend to have cars. Friends of people who don’t will take them round. It’s mainly elderly widows, but it works out fine. No one’s

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Woods, M et al, (undated), Participation, Power and Rural Community Governance in England and Wales, Full Report of Research Activities and Results for ESRC, p45
ever without a lift. We all help each other out. One person will take and another will pick up. We’ll do it because we know they’d do it for us.”

(South East village, Male, 65+, AB)

The literature suggests that intervention in such spontaneous and organic ‘volunteering’ within networks can lead to more formalisation of community action which in turn can lead “to disengagement with community leadership and a reduction in the facilities or services delivered.”

This echoes findings from our expert workshop, which highlighted the vulnerability of horizontal webs of trust and mutual support, which were considered liable to damage by ill-judged, top-down interventions.

Place and formal networks

There may be a self-reinforcing relationship between people and place that helps to define the extent, nature and even existence of formal networks

There were marked differences in the types of social networks (both formal and informal) that existed in the different rural case study locations. This presents the possibility of an interrelationship between person and place, as discussed in the informal networks section above.

In support of this possibility, it is interesting to note that the perspectives resulting from our fieldwork were not evenly distributed across places: for example, the ‘community champion’ perspective was almost wholly absent from those interviewed in the places that did not have formal community structures.

It is our hypothesis that the social norms of existing residents affect the type of newcomer a place does (or does not) attract. The self-reinforcing nature of the interaction between individual preferences, place characteristics and the types of social networks that develop can be illustrated by comparing two case study locations:

- The first, a well-serviced market town, attracted large numbers of affluent retirees, who told us that they had moved there for the active community life, the rural location and the excellent amenities. These older newcomers were often involved in community social life, which was a large part of what had originally attracted them to the place.

75 Woods, Ibid., p8
76 The greatest factor 5 loading for those interviewed in this area being 0.23 (see table 25, annex H).
The second location had several new housing developments around the outskirts, was close to the motorway and had few amenities. Newcomers to this place were attracted by the rural location, the good road connections and affordable new housing. They tended to be young families and commuters who drove out of the village for work, shopping and recreation and reported having less time for community social life.

One of the mechanisms that may help to explain how cycles and patterns become established in a place are differing images of countryside life. Evidence suggests that urban and rural residents alike hold constructed images of what life in rural England is (or should be) like in terms of the people who live there, the way social networks (‘communities’) function, and what rural places look like.

These different images of countryside life, whatever their origin or form, may influence rural residents’ motivations and goals for community participation. In this way, constructed images of ‘countryside living’ can become self-fulfilling; for example, an incomer with values similar to the ‘I belong here’ or ‘community champions’ perspectives, and who has purposefully chosen a place with an active community, may strive to realise their image of rural life by getting involved in and even creating formal networks. In this manner, they perpetuate and (re)create their image of rural life.

“I joined the WI when we moved here because I thought, I need to get to know people, we didn’t know anybody...we started bridge group and in WI we’ve got a wine tasting group now.”  
(West Midlands market town, Female, 65+, AB)

Places without historically strong formal networks, that are under pressure to change and expand (or indeed may already have done so), perhaps because they are strategically located, may be more exposed to an influx of new arrivals who are not interested in formal community life or do not have the time to participate. This appeared to be true of the village described in the example below:

78 Shorthall, S (2006) A “Green and Pleasant Land?” Public Attitudes to the countryside in Northern Ireland, Research Update 47, ARK, Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive pp 3-4  
“I just drove in and out, I was working away…. It is quite hard [to meet people].”
(Yorkshire village, Female, 30-44, AB)

Volunteers are necessary for the provision of some of the amenities which provide shared spaces that benefit both formal in informal networks

As we saw in section 3.3, there is a strong argument that place makes a difference to the outcome of social processes. As discussed in section 6.1 above, evidence also suggests that the characteristics of a place have an effect on social capital.

One of the key facets of place that relates to formal community networks seems to be the presence or absence of community venues and shared spaces.

Although it is outside the scope of this research to study the relationship between community asset ownership and social capital, it should be noted that many community assets in rural areas are owned by local volunteer trustees, and therefore that any wider benefits to local networks brought by such community assets are in turn reliant on the existence of sufficient formal community networks to provide the necessary volunteer personnel.

Research by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) has highlighted the role of the village hall as a site for social interaction, covering both our formal and informal network definitions, since it provides a venue for:

- governance and participation (events open to the public, including community events and festivals, etc);
- social benefit (functional delivery of services to individuals);
- social support (youth clubs, playgroups, luncheon clubs etc);
- social interest (clubs related to specific interest, such as sport, art or drama);
- private events.\(^{80}\)

“The village hall’s needed. We’ve used it for private parties. It needs to be there.”
(South East village, Female, 55-64, C1)

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\(^{80}\) ACRE (2003) The role of the community building, A pilot research project undertaken in the North East of England into the methodology of data collection on community buildings
Other research suggests that shared spaces increase opportunities for meeting people, which is linked to higher levels of trust, reciprocity and cooperation. Our fieldwork observations indicated that shared spaces, including but not limited to village or community halls, played a part in the types of social networks that developed. In the case study locations with active and organised formal community networks, community halls and venues were well used by a range of different groups.

Private spaces used for community events were also important for formal networks, such as fields where festivals, fetes and other special occasions could take place. Most locations made use of such space, but in one village, the field where the annual bonfire was once held had been sold for housing development. Participants we interviewed who lived in the new houses on the site were used to other villagers talking about them living on “our field”.

Shared community spaces may help formal networks to thrive, but they are not a sufficient condition for the existence of such networks

The mere presence of community buildings was not, however, a sufficient condition for the existence of formal community networks. In two case study locations, community social life and formal networks were absent, despite the existence of a community building, and in another, whilst there was an identifiable formal community, the village hall was not used as its focal point due to its inconvenient location and poor state of repair:

“That is the one thing we’re lacking, is we’ve haven’t got a community building in any way. There is the parish hall but it’s not a building that’s a pleasure to be in… so socially you’d meet in other peoples’ houses.”

(South West sparse parish, Female, 45-64, AB)

A number of factors appeared to combine in the areas without formal networks that inhibited the use of the local halls. These included a lack of opportunity for informal interaction due to an absence of shared spaces such as local shops; the layout of the village along a main road; and rapid housing growth associated with the dominance of certain demographics - as discussed in the section on informal networks above.

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81 Wood et al (undated), op. cit.
“There’s a community centre at the top, but there’s nothing like advertised to do, is there?... We never hear anything that’s going on.”

(North East small town, Male, 16-29, DE)

Summary: the role of formal community structures in social capital

Formal community networks and involvement have long been assumed to be an important part (and in some cases the defining part) of social capital. Our fieldwork suggests that formal community structures and networks are indeed a component of the kinds of relationships that develop between members of place-based networks in rural areas. However, although formal networks have a role in their own right in contributing to social capital, they are also important due to their interrelationship with informal networks. In the fieldwork locations we often observed a kind of positive spillover between formal and informal networks, with each providing further opportunities for the other.

Our key research findings are as follows:

- Formal networks were not important to every participant, but very important to some;
- Formal networks were found in some places and not in others;
- Formal networks tended to bond around certain personal characteristics: life stage; available time; commitment to community ideals; and local/newcomer status were all important;
- Formal networks provided opportunities for bridging between different groups and seemed to foster local pride and general friendliness;
- An absence of formal community networks seemed to limit opportunities to get to know others, reduce the possibility of mobilising local support and increase feelings of disempowerment;
- Involvement in formal networks of local governance and political participation varied by place, person and issue and was sometimes seen as a heavy burden on a few dedicated volunteers;
- Participants did not feel linked into the political decision-making hierarchy beyond their particular place;
- Volunteering in formal (and informal) networks was often observed, but rarely recognised readily by participants as such, being seen rather as simply part and parcel of rural life;
There may be a self-reinforcing relationship between people and place that helps to define the extent, nature and even existence of formal networks; Volunteers are necessary for the provision of some of the amenities which provide shared spaces that benefit both formal in informal networks; Shared community spaces may help formal networks to thrive, but they are not a sufficient condition for the existence of such networks.

The history, socio-economic characteristics, location and morphology of a place all seemed to have an impact on the types of social networks (both formal and informal) that developed, and these networks interacted with the individual and group characteristics of both existing residents and incomers and fed into the choices that people made about where they chose to live.

It would be incorrect to say that people and places without formal networks did not have, or had 'less', or 'worse', social capital. However, an absence of formal networks may have, alongside other conditions, reduced opportunities for 'bridging' between different groups. This, along with other social and spatial characteristics may have contributed to the development of smaller and more closed personal networks, which in turn seemed to be linked to a lack of what could be summed up as 'community spirit' and 'local pride'. Although this may have suited some people, it seemed to cause feelings of unfulfilled needs and even loneliness in others.

In summary, the formal community dimension of social capital may be thought of as conducive to self-reinforcing cycles: where an absence of formal community structures may gradually undermine the possibility of new formal structures developing, and the presence of formal networks may lead to new ones springing up. This in turn is likely to have implications for other dimensions of social capital such as informal networks discussed above, and norms and shared values which are discussed in more detail below.

### 6.3 Emergent properties of rural networks: values, trust and norms

An analysis of networks by themselves does not provide a sufficient understanding of social capital. As outlined in the introductory section to the report, social capital is also about the emergent properties that come from...
and feed into networks, and in particular it is concerned with trust, values and norms. This section considers such properties.

Although there were explicit statements in the Q-sort about values, trust and norms, these were not concepts that participants were able to respond to with particular ease. However, it is clear from looking at the six rural perspectives in the previous section, and by analysing the qualitative interview data, that informal networks seemed to have certain emergent properties that were common across the sample.

Values, trust and norms have been addressed under separate headings below for readability, but we are aware that the distinctions are artificial and that the notions relate closely to one another.

**Values**

Participants shared enough values in common to enjoy everyday interactions with others where they lived, but some suspected that deeper-held values were not widely shared

Participants generally felt, with the exception of those subscribing to one perspective (*Place Matters*), that they had enough in common with people in the places where they lived to get along well on a day-to-day basis.

“I’m on a similar wavelength to most people… It makes for a nice, cosy existence in many ways. Unchallenging even.”

*(South East village, Male, 65+, AB)*

Some participants felt that they probably held different values to others in their area, perhaps when it came to politics or religion. Those who expressed such an awareness sometimes felt that they were prepared not to place too high an importance on these values, so as to maintain convivial relationships within their local network.

“This is a conservative area and I’m an out and out socialist… But basically they’re decent people... it doesn't stop me feeling like I belong here… You can't have a bust-up.”

*(South East village, Female, 65+, AB)*

However, values held in common that oiled the interactions of every-day life were not necessarily enough to sustain deeper relationships. As one participant succinctly put it:
“I’m an independent thinker and I do question things. I think it can be extraordinary how different people are, who seem similar on the surface. It’s very hard to make a categoric [sic] statement about what other people think.”

(West Midlands market town, Female, 45-64, C1)

Deeper held values, when exposed or challenged, could create tension: the issue of change in rural places was particularly divisive in this respect

It was not always possible for participants to brush aside such differences, particularly when they were exposed and perhaps exaggerated by the threat of change. This phenomenon was especially noticeable in the case study location which had been subject to a proposed wind farm. All participants interviewed who had lived in the location during the planning application reported the way in which it had split local networks by setting up opposing values that could not be reconciled.

“...there was an issue down here with wind turbines, which I’m sure you’ve heard about. And that split the community ...There was a huge feeling of mistrust which ran very, very deep.”

(South West parish, Male, 30-44, C2)

However, divided values were exposed across all the rural case study locations when participants discussed issues involving change in their area. There was a range of such issues, for example: farmers facing opposition to fox culls; perceptions that some people wanted to keep community institutions but were not willing to support or get involved in any practical way; and divisions over the introduction of new forms of economic activity and development. We noticed that when some participants characterised proponents with opposing attitudes to change, they tended to attribute those opposing views to characteristics such as age or length of residency.

“Old people think it’s horrendous that they’re trying to build new houses. It’s a case of ‘I’m here, so pull the shutters down.’”

(South East village, Female, 55-64, C1)

“The biggest problem you get is people moving in, and like I explained, you know, they don’t get involved and then if they hear of a development or anything being built, they stand there and they say ‘we want it to stay just as it is’ but they forget to turn around and look at themselves, and look at the
property they live in, which is a new modern bungalow which has only been there for…”

(South West sparse parish, Female, 45-64, AB)

Some participants felt like outsiders even on a day-to-day basis
Occasionally, participants felt that their values were so different, and so important to them, that they were not prepared to brush aside differences, even without a major, divisive issue to galvanise them. These participants tended to hold the ‘place matters’ perspective and felt very keenly that they held different values from those around them.

“I don’t have that much in common with the people at all, my wife finds the same thing… I don’t necessarily think the people in this area value education.”

(North East small town, Male, 45-64, AB)

This links to the finding in the literature that an excess of bonding capital, in the absence of wider links and influences, can lead to a downward levelling of norms⁸² - that is, the strengthening of norms that operate to maintain the status quo and exclude outsiders. It also illustrates the point that social capital is neutral in the abstract and the importance of understanding social capital from the perspective of the individual: while some residents clearly derived great pleasure from involvement in local networks, the very existence of those networks may have contributed to the feelings that others had of not belonging.

Trust
Participants did not feel strongly either way that “Most people can be trusted round here”
In most locations, participants did not feel strongly about trusting others. This was reflected by the fact that the statement “most people can be trusted round here” was a ‘consensus statement’, which meant that participants showed very little variation in where they placed it on the sort-grid.⁸³ While we cannot be certain about the reason for consensus (it could have been due to anything from apathy, to agreement, to confusion), some seemed to adopt a pragmatic view of taking people as they found them, from a starting point of assuming a basic level of trustworthiness.

⁸³ It was the ninth most consensual statement out of 47.
“People are generally trustworthy, and nice and good the world over. It’s not necessarily related to the village specifically.”
(South East village, Female, 65+, AB)

On the whole, as discussed above, levels of trust grew between neighbours and friends who were willing to let each other look after their houses, lend and borrow from each other, and shop for one another. Some participants also suggested that community events and societies were important because they gave people the opportunity to help out and to work together, which in turn gave people fulfilment and enjoyment. The feeling that they were making a contribution often increased participants’ sense of pride and belonging and provided an opportunity for further cooperation and reciprocity.

One location was noticeably different in exhibiting higher levels of distrust amongst participants
There was one notable exception to this general picture, where levels of trust were significantly lower than in the five other case study locations. This location was also different to the others in its socio-economic make-up, having more unemployment and having previously been an industrial town. Participants in this area gave us examples of trust being betrayed and expressed generally higher levels of distrust in those around them.

“I can open [the person’s] garage and walk in, and I can walk in with somebody I know and they’ll clock everything what’s in there and break in and take it. Aye – we’ve had generators, the lot took out of there.”
(North East small town, Male, 16-29, DE)

A general picture of deteriorating levels of trust and rising crime was painted by some participants in this area:

“They took away all the parks round here. They got vandalised. There’s nothing. That’s why [the young people] hang around the streets I think. Because there just isn’t anywhere for them to go. There’s nothing to do.”
(North East small town, Male, 45-64, DE)

Norms

Behavioural norms were respected by most participants
Many participants felt that standards for acceptable behaviour were well-understood and even high in their areas – particularly if they had moved there from somewhere they perceived to be different. They may have been aware that not everyone maintained local standards, but thought that those who deviated from the norm were generally a small minority, perhaps not even worth worrying about at all.

“I’ve not experienced it [bad behaviour]. In my eyes, where I’ve lived, up and down Britain, it’s not much to write home about.”

(South East village, Female, 30-44, DE)

However, those who were different from the norm appeared to be excluded (or perhaps wanted to exclude themselves) from dominant mainstream networks.

“I think sometimes, there are some people who just don’t seem to…they don’t seem to fit, it’s almost like there’s another level of life going on somehow…. you never see them, except big fat lumps of women pushing prams around…you think they must just be stuck in front of the telly all the time.”

(West Midlands market town, Female, 65+, AB)

Some participants acted as standard bearers for local norms, and these people were often heavily involved in formal community networks

Some participants appeared to be upholders of local norms, and in particular, subscribers to the 'community champions' and 'I belong here' perspectives took on this role. These participants tended to have clear, traditional values, they placed great importance on cohesiveness and they used formal networks to put these values into action. Maintaining high standards in terms of appearance and behaviour were important to them, combined with a certain amount of worry for the future, and resistance to change.

“Standards have generally deteriorated, slowly diluted through generations. We need to go back to old values.”

(South East village, Male, 45-64, AB)
However, even those who had appointed themselves responsible for upholding standards of behaviour, sometimes felt the strain of that responsibility:

“We can’t fit holidays in. The anonymity of living in a town has a lot to be said for it - you’re not at everyone’s beck and call.”
(South East village, Male, 65+, AB)

Acceptable behaviour crystallised around particular issues that impacted public space: for example, the behaviour of young people in rural areas

One good example of how norms tended to crystallise around certain issues was clear in attitudes towards the behaviour of children and the approach of their parents. This was mentioned in several locations.

Such deviations from acceptable (adult) local standards of behaviour, were often played out in public space (although sometimes they did have implications for private property). This resulted in participants having a variety of responses to that public space, ranging from wanting to exclude the children in question, to feeling excluded themselves, or, very rarely in our locations, feeling unsafe in the space in question.

“The kids used to play football outside [a small green in the middle of a cul-de-sac]. No one ever complained to me about it, but then a no ball games sign was put up. That issue doesn’t matter to me now, but at the time for them to be able to play outside where I could see them was important. No one plays ball games now. They [the elderly residents] would probably complain if they started.”
(South East village, Female, 30-44, DE)

But, even in this case, as with participants in other locations, there was a gladness that local people were willing to enforce norms. This was used as an aide to parental authority.

“Other people are my eyes and ears. There are too many people who are willing to moan. I can say that ‘you can’t get away with anything here, I’ll hear about it.’…. Dropping litter is nothing in a town. Here it’s hot news.”
(South East village, Female, 30-44, DE)
Fears

Several of the rural perspectives welcomed modest change in their areas, but all feared large-scale change

There was a general fear of large-scale change across the six rural perspectives. People tended to feel very attached to where they lived and did not want the character of their local areas altered. This said, a limited amount of change was viewed in a positive light in some cases:

- for 'lost communities', any change which could bring back what they felt they had lost was seen as positive;
- amongst 'friends matter' there was a desire to improve local areas, particularly by creating more to do for young people and improving the availability and affordability of housing;
- for 'happy bystanders' there was a fear of stagnation – particularly its capacity to gradually erode a vibrant local community life – so some change was welcomed as a result.

Involvement in formal community networks appeared to be linked to higher levels of fear around change to the area

'Community champions' and those with an 'I belong here' perspective were far more negative towards change than the other perspectives. For the 'I belong here' perspective in particular, any change was viewed in a negative light: they feared large-scale development, but also social change such as people with different values moving in and behavioural standards falling. They loved their areas and wanted to preserve them as they were. This meant they did not want to see further development (and as a result had a rather 'Not In My Back Yard' attitude).

"The quality of life would be spoilt if the village grew too big – people will feel like they're surrounded by strangers. They'll feel like a small fish in a big pond. No one in a village wants to be a like a faceless person in a town."

(South East Village, Male, 16-29, C2)

Certain participants seemed particularly negative towards changes in the population

This was above all noticeable when talking about change with people who belonged to very bonded networks, particularly in the rural North East town.

M “All these [foreign owned] shops.”
F “They’re taking over. Aye, that’s what was in my mind an’ all but I didn’t want to sound...”
M “Not being racist.”
F “I’m not.”
M “But 10 years ago there was never anybody like that” [...] Interviewer “How do you feel about it?”
F “I’m not bothered.”
M “Well we don’t use them.”
F “So long as we don’t get over-run. You know what I mean? I don’t mind a few but I don’t think I would like it if it was loads of them. Would you?”
M “No, not really. We’re not racist but.”
Interviewer “But what would worry you about that?”
M “Just the change in culture.”
(North East Town, Male and Female, 45-64, DE)

Similar views were also expressed in the affluent, well-networked, South East Village around the fear of immigration to rural areas.
Summary: emergent properties of rural networks
A central dimension of social capital is the emergent properties which arise from and feed into networks - in particular trust, values and norms. The key findings from our research on the emergent properties of rural networks can be summarised as follows:

Values
- The degree of shared values was great enough for participants to enjoy everyday interactions with others where they lived, although some suspected that deeper held values may not have been widely shared.
- Deeper held values, when exposed or challenged, could create tension: the issue of change in rural places was particularly divisive in this respect.
- Despite the general picture of cohesiveness, some participants felt like outsiders even on a day-to-day basis.

Trust
- Overall, participants did not have strong feelings in relation to trust.
- However, one location was noticeably different with higher levels of distrust amongst participants.

Norms
- Behavioural norms were respected by most participants.
- Some acted as standard bearers for local norms, and they were often heavily involved in formal community networks.
- Acceptable behaviour crystallised around particular issues that impacted public space: for example, the behaviour of young people in rural areas.

Fears
- Several of the rural perspectives welcomed modest change in their areas, but all feared large-scale change.
- Involvement in formal community networks appeared to be linked to higher levels of fear around change to the area.
- A proportion of participants seemed particularly negative towards changes in the population.
7 Perspectives on social capital in urban areas

This section sets out the Q-sort results for the two urban case studies. Section 8 draws out the similarities and differences that emerged from our analysis of social capital in rural and urban areas.

A five factor solution for urban areas

The optimal factor solution for understanding the experiences expressed by those living in urban areas was a five factor solution, which accounted for 61% of the variance in responses. Please see annex H for the factor Q sort values for each statement (table 24) and the factor matrix (table 25).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Factor Name</th>
<th>Variance explained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Community-spirited enthusiasts</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Live and let live</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cheers!</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Place over people</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Happy in my own four walls</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Q-set was designed to be suitable for both rural and urban residents. However, some small changes were unavoidable: the wording of three statements was slightly altered for the urban Q-set to make them more suitable for urban residents, while keeping the sense of the statements the same. The changes are indicated in italics in table 12:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement number</th>
<th>Rural version</th>
<th>Urban version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td><em>The church is at the heart of the community</em></td>
<td><em>Places of worship are at the heart of the community</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td><em>This town/village should stay as it is now</em></td>
<td><em>This area should stay as it is now</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td><em>People who live here are proud of the town/village</em></td>
<td><em>People who live here are proud of the area</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

84 As stated above for rural areas, it should be noted that the factor analysis was performed on the card sorts, rather than on those who sort them. The variance figure therefore signifies that just over 60% of the ways in which the cards have been sorted are accounted for by the five factors. As a result it would be wrong to say that 25% of the sample (least still the overall population of urban areas) shares the perspective expressed by factor one.
Figure 6 Illustration of urban perspectives on social capital
7.1 Urban factor 1: Community-spirited enthusiasts

“People are so pleased to live here.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Female, 45-64, DE)

Table 13 Background characteristics of factor exemplars: Urban Factor 1 (number of people)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Residence (years)</th>
<th>SEG</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>16-29</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suburb, W Mids</td>
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<td>4</td>
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This perspective was that of a sociable group of people (s3, +5) who happily talked to those living around them.

“You always see people chatting in groups of twos and threes...”
(Suburb, North West, Male, 45-64, C2)

They felt able to trust those living in their area (s27,+4) and to rely on them when they needed to (s7,+4). In some cases they were members of tightly-knit, locally-based networks in which events at each other’s houses were commonplace, but this was not always so. Some made a deliberate attempt to give those living around them their space. Either way, they sought strong and positive local relationships (s41, +1) and did not feel that people got left out of community life (s4, -2).

“People are friendly but they don’t live in one another’s’ pockets, you know, they keep their own distance but they’re available in times of need or worry or upset.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Female, 65+, C1)

It was being able to ask for help (s7,+4) and having trust and confidence in those around them (s27,+4) which made this perspective different from the others described. This showed itself in a number ways - neighbours looking after each other’s plants and pets during holidays, having keys to one another’s houses, putting bins away after the rubbish had been collected, looking after each other in times of need, offering know-how (often acquired in their professional lives e.g. providing health advice) or simply being in the habit of giving and taking.
“People offer to do things for you, and you don’t necessarily end up repaying the same people, but you get into a bit of a rhythm of, it’s just what you do, you offer to help your neighbours [...]”
(Suburb, North West, Male, 30-44, AB)

Just as importantly, the fact that that this group knew and liked those around them seemed to be linked to the exemplars having little fear of bad behaviour (s28, -5) and a general perception of safety (s30, -1), which also set their perspective apart from the other urban factors.

“My neighbour across the road could tell you where I am and what I’m doing and when I’m back, [...] I have got an alarm but, I mean, I don’t have to use it if I don’t need to because he doesn’t miss a trick!”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Female, 65+, C1)

Another feature which differentiated this from the other urban perspectives was the feeling of living in a settled area (s18,-5).

"[The neighbours] haven’t moved for a reason [...] There aren’t any for sale signs around.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Male, 30-44, C2)

Some of those who shared this perspective were involved in formal community structures but this was by no means always the case. Neither was it the case that they had always known people in the area prior to moving there themselves - many had moved into the areas in which they were living in a deliberate attempt to buy into the lifestyle on offer. Good schools and amenities, green spaces (s31,3), quiet neighbourhoods and access to road and rail links were all part of the draw.

“Schooling more than anything brought us to this side of the city [...]. We hunted this area down for quite a while [...] We absolutely love it over here. Just the amount of green space and people generally.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Male, 30-44, AB)

Those who shared this perspective often felt there were common values amongst those living in their areas (s9, 4). Some talked about ‘traditional’ values such as politeness and respect for each other. Many commented on the pride people took in keeping their properties clean and tidy.
“All the gardens are immaculate.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Male, 30-44, C2)

This trait was sometimes linked to an element of snobbery – neighbours not being happy at the presence of a white van on their street, building materials in driveways, or even of the type of people who had moved in.

“The comment [when I arrived] was ‘oh my God, that woman has got an Irish accent and she will deliver like a fly’ ... I felt terribly alone. [...] However, on one night maybe three years later ... all the nosy neighbours ... saw me getting out of an ambulance. They said ‘she was in a uniform!’ so from that next day I was accepted into the community [...] I was a professional person.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Female, 65+, C1)

“It’s nice around here, and you do get well educated people […] [but] there are a few neighbours who think they’re a cut above the rest.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Female, 45-64, DE)

On the whole they also felt that local people were able to influence local decision making (s23,1) on issues from planning to licensing – partly because of the type of people living in the area.

“If you know people have got clout you have to take notice of them.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Male, 30-44, C2)

Overall, the group was extremely positive about their local area. ‘Community-spirited enthusiasts’ felt they had a good quality of life (s20,5) and they shared a strong sense of wellbeing.

“For this stage in my life and his life, it’s pretty perfect really.”
(Suburb, North West, Male, 30-44, AB)

Although there was no pattern amongst the exemplars in terms of their gender, age or period of residence, it was noticeable that many were teachers and public sector workers.
7.2 Urban factor 2: Live and let live

“There’s a nice couple over here, you don’t see them that often but when you do they always smile and say hello, that’s all you need, you don’t need a big conversation.”
(Suburb, North West, Female, 65+, C1)

Table 12 Background characteristics of factor exemplars: Urban factor 2 (number of people)

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<th>Place</th>
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<th>Residence (years)</th>
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Participants subscribing to a ‘live and let live’ perspective liked where they lived and felt they had a good quality of life (s20, +3). They enjoyed a sense of community around them, knew a lot of people in the local area, at least on a superficial level (s1, +1), and placed great importance on community life (s46, +4) which distinguished this from the other urban factors. However, they preferred to maintain a safe distance and did not get too deeply involved: they generally did not participate in formal community structures, groups or societies and wouldn’t be the ones to organise community events.

“I try and do my bit for the community but I don’t go further than that.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Male, 45-64, C1)

Linked to this, this group tended to disagree that local people had a say in local matters (s23, -4), and tended to get involved only in things that affected them directly, such as the closure of their children’s school or a planning issue that would affect their own properties or lives.

This group did not view their areas as ‘close knit’ (s26, -4) and did not feel part of a strong community. However, they tended to maintain a small group of close friends and family around them and felt strongly that there was always someone they could rely on (s36, +5). They enjoyed the company of their close friends but were not overtly sociable - they strongly disagreed that pubs and churches were at the centre of the community (s40, -5; s24, -4). Although they thought it very important that people should get to know their neighbours (s41, +4), they didn’t want to get to know most of theirs too well.
“People tend to know the people at the front and sides of their house but we don’t spend all day chatting over the fence. I just make time for the people I know.”

(Suburb, W Midlands, Male, 45-64, C1)

This group had a positive view of where they lived but they certainly did not idealise their areas: they were aware of faults and room for improvement. For example, they often felt very strongly that there should be more to do locally (s44, +5), especially for older and younger generations (s32, +3) and agreed that they would not feel welcome in some of the places where people meet up (s22, +2), all of which differentiated this perspective from the other urban factors.

“Unless you’re attached to a church, there’s nothing for the elderly...for the young ones as well, when the school holidays come, there’s nothing for them... my son in law tried to [get a football team going], but they couldn’t get anywhere to do it.”

(Suburb, North West, Female, 65+, C1)

Their perception of a good quality of life was strongly linked to having open spaces nearby (s31, +4) and to having everything they needed on their doorstep. This group of people appeared to gravitate towards an easy, uncomplicated life and liked to feel settled where they were.

“Everything is natural and easy to do.”

(Suburb, North West, Female, 65+, C1)

“I do like that feeling of feeling like we’re settled.”

(Suburb, North West, Female, 45-64, AB)

As table 11 shows, the exemplars of this perspective tended to be female, ABC1 and over 45 years of age.

7.3 Urban factor 3: Cheers!

“Everybody always meets in the pub... everybody knows everybody in the pubs.”

(Suburb, North West, Female, 16-29, DE)
People with this point of view tended to be younger and newcomers to their areas – the exemplars had all lived in their area for less than eight years. They all came from the NW suburb and seemed to have been attracted by the lifestyle available there: they often had formed a highly positive opinion of the area even before they moved there, and continued to enjoy living in what they perceived to be a friendly, relaxed and lively environment.

An active social life was the single most important factor in the quality of life of this group, and this was reflected by the time they spent in and the importance that they placed on their local pubs (s40, +5) – something which was distinct from all the other urban perspectives.

As well as regularly attending pub quizzes, karaoke evenings and other informal events, they tended to be involved in local groups and societies. This group of people was highly sociable and found it essential to have lots of friends close by and to be involved in what was going on.

“I'd feel lost if I didn't have a network of people living here...to live somewhere and stay in your house would be to shoot yourself in the foot.”
(Suburb North West, Male, 30-44, AB)

"I wouldn’t like to live somewhere where there were no community, no get togethers. When we first moved here and we didn't know anybody, it was a bit like, god, what have we done? But we've got to know people.”
(Suburb, North West, Male, 30-44, C2)

People with this point of view liked the idea of community and valued other community structures as well as pubs.

“[The community centre] provides a focal point for the community, it brings different age groups together, people with disabilities, it gets people out of their homes who might stay in their homes, elderly people...people can meet each other.”
(Suburb North West, Male, 30-44, AB)

This group tended to be quite streetwise: they recognised that there were areas where local people might feel unsafe at night (s30, +4), and all the...
exemplars mentioned the local drug problem. However, they did not feel that these issues affected their own quality of life. Although not particularly interested in local politics, this group of people tended to be proactive on issues that affected them (for example, ringing the council about the bins) or stated that, if they did have a problem, they would know what to do or whom to speak to.

They liked where they lived because there were many people like them there:

“I feel this area has a greater sense of community for young professionals than most areas.” (Suburb North West, Male, 30-44, AB)

However, they also agreed strongly that people from different backgrounds got on well together (s34, +5). Perhaps linked to this, they strongly disagreed that housing should be made available first and foremost to local people (s42, -4), which differentiated this perspective.

The 'Cheers!' group enjoyed living somewhere where they could stop and chat to people they knew in the street (s3, +4) and this contributed to the great sense of community they perceived around them. They mentioned many examples of practical help and support they had received from friends and neighbours; however, they were also realistic about the scope of their more casual acquaintances and stated that they would be more likely to look for emotional support from their close friends and family, than those they chatted to in the street.

7.4 Urban factor 4: Place over people

“My relationships here aren’t as important as elsewhere.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Male, 16-29, C2)

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<th>Table 12 Background characteristics of factor exemplars: Urban factor 2 (number of people)</th>
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Those in this group felt they had a relatively good quality of life (s20, +3) but were very much outsiders. Unlike the other urban factors, they strongly agreed that most of their friends did not live locally (s17, +5) and disagreed
that most of the people they knew lived in the local area (s1, -5). Even when they did know people locally, their local relationships took second place.

This sense of being one step removed from the others living in their areas though was accompanied by the perception that there was little by means of a community for them to be part of. They did not feel that their communities were close-knit (s26, -5) or that people looked out for one another (s2, -4) and agreed that some people didn’t get on (s35, 4). Neither did they feel particularly able to call on others (s36, -1). All of these set their perspective apart from the other urban factors.

“You never see a group of people chatting on this road.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Female, 45-64, DE)

In fact, two of the three factor exemplars had found it difficult to make friends or settle in and felt it had taken a while to be accepted (s13, +1).

“Everybody’s in their own little clique and won’t talk to you.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Female, 65+, DE)

“Because I was a single mum when I moved in, I think I was judged.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Female, 45-64, DE)

There were mixed feelings about people keeping themselves to themselves though. For some, there was a sense of sorrow that closely-knit communities had been lost. Others were pleased to have their own space and be able to develop their own identity.

“When I was little, we used to be in each others’ houses. Now people won’t have it... Now, once their doors are shut, they’re behind closed doors and that’s it.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Female, 65+, DE)

“You haven’t got people round all the while [...] although it would be nice to go out and have a few pleasantries.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Female, 45-64, DE)

“I read dear Deidre and I think it’s funny. They [local people] read it and think it’s true to life [...] I’m not trying to shun them but [...] you get to uni and meet different people.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Male, 16-29, C2)

What those sharing this perspective did value were the open spaces they had access to (s31, +5) and the peace and quiet of their local areas. This was positive for both them and for local children since it gave them the freedom to play outside (s29, 4).

“It’s peace of mind [...] you don’t worry about them walking around.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Female, 45-64, DE)

Their perception of a good quality of life came from a combination the access to open spaces and the local shops and services they had access to – good schools, good doctors and so forth.

It is interesting to note that all the factor exemplars for this factor came from one of the case study areas, and that none of them were from wealthy backgrounds.

7.5 Urban factor 5: Happy in my own four walls

“A lot of people keep to themselves...but they know it’s a nice area, they look after everything, their gardens, their housing, they try and keep up the standards.”
(Suburb, North West, Male, 65+, C1)

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<th>Place</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Residence (years)</th>
<th>SEG</th>
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<td>0-14</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Suburb, NW</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>25+</td>
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<td>Suburb, W Mids</td>
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The two exemplars of this point of view were elderly gentlemen who liked where they lived and felt they had a high quality of life (s20, +5), but led very private, even insular lives which made them quite distinctive. In general, people with this perspective did not know many people around them and felt they did not have many friends; however, they did not consider this a problem – they preferred to keep themselves to themselves.

“I’m quite happy in the garden and living the way I’ve always lived.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Male, 65+, DE)
This group of people was particularly concerned with maintaining high standards: their quality of life was strongly linked to living in an area that was “clean and tidy”, well kept and in which “you get a better type of person” – they commented that you never got “hoodies” or “trouble” in their areas.

“People round here like it clean and tidy, you don’t have gangs of young people, you don’t feel threatened.”
(Suburb, W Midlands, Male, 65+, DE)

In this context, they not only felt comfortable and safe but also felt very strongly that they were free to just be themselves (s8, +5). They took great pride in where they lived and stated categorically that their local area should not be allowed to change (s43, +4).

This group of people was not very sociable. They disagreed that people should make an effort to get to know their neighbours (s41, -2), did not stop and chat with people in their area (s3, -3) and tended not to be involved in formal groups, societies, or community structures such as pubs and churches (s40, -4).

“They used to come to the door and invite me to the book club. I did go once. But I didn’t feel right there somehow...whether it was me, I don’t know.”
(Suburb, North West, Male, 65+, C1)

Despite not having a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, these people did tend to have neighbours whom they felt they could rely on. For example, when one gentleman had decided to tidy up his rose bushes (they had started overhanging the pavement),

“...the bloke from the bottom of the road came and said, ‘I’ll hold the ladder for you; better still, I’ll go up the ladder for you and you stay down there.’ It makes you feel old but that’s what they do, they don’t walk past you on the other side of the road...but I may not speak to him again now for months.”
(Suburb, North West, Male, 65+, C1)

It was striking that, despite preferring not to get involved in the community, people with this point of view had a strong sense of belonging (s15, +4) and firmly felt that they shared values of respect and high standards with those
around them (s9, +4). However, they were different from all other urban perspectives in the strength of their view that people from different background did not get on with each other (s34, -5), perhaps indicating fear or discomfort with the unknown or the unfamiliar.

“They’ve got their way of life, same way as we have, and I think they keep to themselves”.

(Suburb, W Midlands, Male, 65+, DE)
7.6 Note on the distribution of urban perspectives

The urban perspectives are distributed unevenly across the case studies. In fact, the extent to which the exemplars of particular factors were concentrated in one or other of the case study locations is striking. Eight of the nine 'community-spirited enthusiasts' exemplars and all the 'place over people' exemplars came from the West Midlands suburb. Meanwhile most of the 'live and let live' and all the 'Cheers!' exemplars were from the North West suburb.

The study team is confident that a good spread of interviews was achieved in both locations (i.e. that participants reflected a good cross section of those living in each area). In some cases, the concentration of particular perspectives should not be surprising. For instance, one of the attractions of the North West suburb was its atmosphere and nightlife, so it might be expected to be the kind of place where the young, sociable subscribers to the 'Cheers!' perspective might want to live. Similarly, 'community-spirited enthusiasts', who valued people getting on with each other but also wanted peace and tranquillity and access to open spaces, might well have moved to a quiet, leafy suburb which provided excellent access to green spaces and amenities.

Regardless of the reasons for the pattern of participants' loadings onto the different urban factors however, the pattern in itself adds weight to the theory that place does matter - at least for certain dimensions of social capital.

In terms of the socio-demographic spread of those subscribing to each of the exemplars, it is only the fact that exemplars of the 'Cheers!' perspective were relatively young, and those of the 'happy in my own four walls' perspective who were relatively old, which stands out.
7.7 Summary of the main differences between the urban perspectives

As with the rural perspectives, there were many nuanced differences between the five urban perspectives, but once again, we found they could be grouped most clearly along the same two major axes: involvement in local networks (either formal or informal) and attitudes towards change. We have aimed to represent these key differences between the perspectives in the diagram below.

![Diagram showing the summary of main differences between urban perspectives.](image)
Perspectives on social capital in urban areas
8 Discussion: comparison between rural and urban England

As described in section 4, the urban component of the research was conducted in two case study areas in the North West and West Midlands. The purpose of this component is not to give a complete picture of social capital in urban England, but to establish whether there is anything materially different about how it is experienced in the urban context. With this aim, we chose areas which could be deemed roughly equivalent to the rural areas investigated in terms of size (<10,000) and demographic profile. This only represents a narrow spectrum of urban England though and, as such, our research is just one part of the bigger picture of life in urban England.85

Findings from the literature on comparisons between urban and rural social capital

‘Formal’ community organisation is more apparent in rural areas

Researchers have made a number of observations regarding qualitative differences between rural and urban areas which point to a material difference in the nature of social capital between the two and, in particular, a stronger level of community organisation in rural areas:

- Rural areas have, proportionately, larger numbers of voluntary groups whilst neighbourhood watch schemes and credit unions are more common in urban areas.86
- Rural areas have produced relatively more applications to funding bodies such as the National Lottery and received a greater share of funding than urban areas.87
- Turnover of councillors is lowest in rural areas and social networking is highly significant in identifying and recruiting new councillors.88

Overall though, there is strong bias in the examination of rural/urban distinctions towards talking about what we have called ‘formal’ community issues rather than individual experiences of social capital.

Settlement size may impact upon social capital

85 See e.g. Power, A and Willmot, H (2007) Social Capital within the Neighbourhood for work on low-income, inner city areas.
86 Woods, M et al, (undated), Participation, Power and Rural Community Governance in England and Wales, Full Report of Research Activities and Results for ESRC p5
87 Ibid
88 Ibid p7
Theoretical work does point to potential differences in individual experiences of social capital according to settlement size. In his discussion of small communities, Jared Diamond describes the increased potential for conflict between strangers as communities increase in size. As an illustration, he explains that a community of 20 people would only involve 190 two-person interactions (dyads), whilst a settlement of 2,000 involves 1,999,000. He argues that this ‘unrelatedness’ affects the willingness of other people to step in and mediate conflicts for the benefit of the community as a whole and comments on the difficulties that it presents for communal decision-making.

This general point raises interesting questions about the relationship between settlement size and social capital, and the possibility of such a relationship is noted in some of the social capital literature. Robert Putnam, for instance, refers on several occasions to research showing differences in social capital between rural and urban areas, suggesting that “size of community makes a difference”: but he offers no suggestion as to what might be either an ‘ideal’ or a ‘problematic’ settlement size for the existence and development of social capital. Any significant difference in the nature of social ties, according to Jared Diamond’s work, would be expected between settlements of greater or fewer than ‘several hundred’, rather than 10,000 - the cut off point at which a community becomes ‘urban’ according to Defra’s Rural and Urban Area Classification 2004.

**Attachment to locality may be stronger in rural areas**

The *State of the English Cities* study sheds some light on potential urban and rural differences in how social capital is experienced at the individual level. It analyses data from the British Social Attitudes Survey by five types of area, dividing England both regionally and along urban/rural lines. The only unambiguous finding along rural/urban lines relates to feelings of attachment to the local area - people living in non-urban areas were more likely than people living in urban areas to feel closely attached to their locality.

This question of attachment links to the clear difference in the prevalent images or ‘constructs’ of urban and rural England. This is significant because the self-image of people and places both bring about and influence social interaction. In particular, it is argued that incomers’ socially

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89 Diamond, J (1997), Guns, Germs and Steel, Vintage p286-287
90 R. Putnam (2000), ibid p119
91 Chapter 7
constructed idea of rural life influences their motivations and goals for community participation (and may be a source of conflict between incomers and originals)\textsuperscript{92} and that there is belief in strong rural communities, both amongst those living there\textsuperscript{93} and amongst those in urban areas,\textsuperscript{94} even if this belief is not necessarily reflected in other measures of social capital.

Overall, the picture painted by the research reviewed is one of complexity in terms of regional, urban and rural differences with very little to suggest a division in social capital along straightforward urban/rural lines.\textsuperscript{95} Indeed, researchers from the LSE contend that there might be significant similarities between urban and rural social capital at the individual or informal level (in terms of family and social networks), but point out that little of this kind of comparative work has been undertaken.\textsuperscript{96}

**Introduction to findings from the research on urban/rural comparisons of social capital**

**The findings from the Q analysis showed strong similarities between urban and rural experiences**

As was the case for the rural perspectives identified in section 5, it was noticeable that most of the urban perspectives reflected very positive experiences of life in their areas. All five were favourable towards experiences of place and, with the exception of the 'place over people' perspective, they were also positive about the people where they lived.

The resemblances between the rural and urban factors were striking. In particular, there were very strong similarities between the two dominant perspectives, ‘I belong here’ (rural) and ‘community-spirited enthusiasts’ (urban), pointing to similarities between how social capital is most frequently experienced in both the rural and urban case study areas.

There were also strong similarities between ‘friends matter’ (rural) and ‘cheers!’ (urban); ‘happy bystanders’ (rural) and ‘live and let live’ (urban); and ‘place matters’ (rural) and ‘place over people’ (urban). In fact, the only perspectives not to have an equivalent were ‘lost communities’ and

\textsuperscript{92} As reviewed by Woods, M et al, (undated), Participation, Power and Rural Community Governance in England and Wales, Full Report of Research Activities and Results for ESRC p1
\textsuperscript{93} Defra's Social Capital and Quality of Life Indicators
\textsuperscript{94} Shorthall, S (2006) A “Green and Pleasant Land?” Public Attitudes to the countryside in Northern Ireland, Research Update 47, ARK, Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive pp 3-4
\textsuperscript{96} Power, A and Willmot H, (2007,) Social Capital within the Neighbourhood Study, LSE, ESRC CASE
'community champions' (both rural) and 'happy in my own four walls' (urban).  

Looking at the common patterns across where on the grid urban participants positioned each of the Q statements (see table 24 of annex H), there seemed to be general agreement (or lack of disagreement) that living in their area provided a good quality of life; that having open spaces was important to that quality of life; and that living in the area gave a feeling of being at ease, and of belonging. As in rural areas, places of worship were generally not seen as being at the heart of the community. However, something which contrasted with the rural experience was that young people were seen as being able to get away with bad behaviour and this is explored further below.

It is worth noting that many participants saw the urban case study areas as relatively settled and that they made an explicit link between that settled nature and a willingness to get involved locally.

“*You’re not going to put down roots here if you don’t get out and meet people. Because I know I’m going to be here for a while, I want it to feel like my home.*”  
(Urban suburb, North West, Male, 30-44, AB)

“I just thought we’d move here and carry on our social lives we had at the time, I wasn’t really thinking about community at all […] I think as you get older and your kids get older you start to realise that it is quite nice, knowing people.”  
(Urban suburb, North West, Female, 45-64, AB)

The spread of different types of perspective was more marked between the two urban case study areas than it was between the urban and rural areas overall

As highlighted in section 7.6, there was a clear separation in the spread of factor exemplars across the two urban case study areas: eight of the nine

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97 n.b. We are conscious that the two urban case study areas looked at were very settled areas which were seen as desirable places to live. The fact no equivalent to the ‘lost communities’ perspective was uncovered may simply mean that these were not the conditions which might make this perspective prevalent. It certainly does not mean that such a perspective does not exist in (sub)urban England.

98 ±20 Q-sort values between +2 and +5 for all the factors

99 ±31 Having open spaces nearby is important for my quality of life has a Q-sort value of between +1 and +5 for all the factors

100 ±48 ‘You can just be yourself round here’ has a Q-sort value of between +1 and +5 for all the factors

101 ±25 ‘Living in a small place can be claustrophobic’ has a Q-sort value of between -5 and 0 across the urban factors

102 ±15 ‘I feel I belong here’ has a Q-sort value of between 0 and +4 for all the factors.

103 ±24 ‘Places of worship are at the heart the community’ has a Q-sort value of -4 to 0 across the factors.

104 ±37 ‘Young people can’t get away with bad behaviour round here’ has a Q-sort value of -3 to 0 across the factors.

105 Awarding Q sort values of between -5 and 0 to the statement “people don’t stay here long enough to put down roots”.

108
'community-spirited enthusiasts' exemplars and all the 'place over people' exemplars were found in the West Midlands suburb; while most of the 'live and let live' and all the 'Cheers!' exemplars were found in the North West suburb.

On the face of it, these two suburbs were very similar – they had an analogous socio-demographic profile, good access to road and rail links and a mix of housing. However the North West suburb was known for its lively atmosphere and nightlife whereas the strength of local schools and quality of open spaces seemed to be particular draws in the West Midlands.

As already argued, the stark geographical split between the distribution of the urban perspectives goes some way to showing that place does contribute people's experiences of social capital. There is a legitimate question about whether the morphology and character of these places determined the perspectives they gave rise to though, or whether the places attracted people looking for a particular type of experience. We would argue that both are true.

8.1 Informal networks – comparisons between urban and rural case study areas

Informal networks in urban and rural areas shared similar characteristics

The urban perspectives gained from the factor analysis of the Q-sort results show participants had a wide range of informal networks. This was also true for the rural perspectives:

- Three of the five urban perspectives – 'community-spirited enthusiasts', 'Cheers!' and 'live and let live' depicted a relatively high level of integration in the local area, while 'happy in my own four walls' and 'place over people' had far smaller networks (in the case of the former) or networks which were largely based outside their local area (in the case of the latter).

- The nature of the networks that participants were part of varied, but interestingly, the variation was very similar to that seen in the rural areas: the community spirited enthusiast perspective was that of a highly sociable group of participants with extensive networks of local contacts; the 'Cheers!' perspective was that of people with highly bonded, friendship-based networks while those with a 'live and let live' perspective enjoyed positive but arm's length relations with those around them. Meanwhile, subscribers to the 'place over
people' point of view considered local family relationships as important but generally kept away from close relationships with other local people, and those with a 'happy in my own four walls' perspective had very insular networks.

Bonding, bridging and linking capital were all part of informal networks in urban areas but bonding capital dominated people’s experience

As discussed in section 6.1 in relation to rural areas, the urban areas showed evidence of bonding, bridging and linking capital as part of the informal networks.

- Bonded groups included friendship groups stemming from schools, universities and workplaces as well as family groups;
- Bridging capital included links that were formed when explicit attempts were made to welcome newcomers into the area, when friendship groups came together, during social occasions (e.g. festivals) and when support was galvanised around big issues; and
- Linking capital was evidenced by people putting others in touch with people in positions of power.

Despite examples of all three types of social capital being present in the contexts looked at, bonded capital appeared the most commonplace, and it seemed that examples of linking capital were more frequently based around formal community structures than was the case in rural areas. However, there were also examples of informal networks using residents to make links into local governance: for example, one person’s skill as a solicitor being used by a close-knit group to a fight planning application.

As in rural areas the ability of different groups to make bridges with others varied by place and person, as did the ability to link vertically. For instance, certain jobs allowed people to have access to a wide range of contacts.

“Everybody speaks to everybody. I’ve only been working in that café a week and everybody already knows my name…it’s really, really nice.”
(North West suburb, Female, 16-29, DE)

Bonded networks were based round age, life-stage, common interests and length of residency, as was the case in rural areas. There did seem to be a difference between the two urban case study areas in the extent to which it was expected that people would integrate into the local area. In the West
Midlands case study city there seemed to be little expectation that relationships with those living in the area would take precedence over relationships with those outside it, and people maintained close links to existing (bonded) friendship groups. This may have been due to the fact that many people had moved to the area from other parts of the city so it was very easy for them to remain part of existing networks.

“I’ve got a few friends in this street but my really close friends are a ten minute drive... A lot of my friends tend to live the other side of town, but that’s not a problem...I’ve got my car and they come here and I go out regularly with them. A lot of my socialising tends to be the other side of town too.”

_Urban suburb, West Midlands, Female, 45-64, DE_

Many examples of neighbourliness were found in both urban areas
There seemed to be a general atmosphere of active involvement in local networks in both of the urban case study areas which seemingly fostered a certain expectation that people would get involved.

“It’s one of those areas where they don’t just get in from work and close the door.”

(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Male, 45-64, C1)

“I quite like making new friends, and when I lived in Leeds... I knew a lot of my neighbours there because I used to smoke outside and speak to them... I’ve always liked to get on with my neighbours.”

(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Female, 16-29, AB)

However, as in many of the rural areas though, people seemed appreciative of the fact that this neighbourliness was not unsolicited. Indeed, on a number of occasions, this was contrasted with the types of relationships that people had in less affluent areas of the same cities where, for instance, nipping round for a cup of tea was commonplace. This implies that personal characteristics, such as how highly an individual values privacy, play an important part in understanding peoples’ experiences of social capital.
“I know everyone on this street and they’ll say hello to me, and if you wish to stop, they’ll talk to you, if you want anything, they’ll help you...but no one ever pushes themselves on you, no one ever comes knocking on the door wanting a cup of tea with you.”

(Urban suburb, North West, Male, 65+, C2)

Levels of neighbourliness were generally good, but where they were not this presented a barrier to the formation of an individual’s informal networks

As we have seen, urban participants were generally very positive about relations between those living around them. Problematic neighbours were cited as barriers to interaction in the few instances in which participants had experienced issues.

“Because all those houses over the road are rented, although some of them are very nice, one lot over there are drug addicts, and you never really know, there’s a lot of people who come and go, in this day and age you just don’t think it’s safe to let children go out and play in the street. That’s the one thing – if we could make it into a nice cul-de-sac where the kids could play out safely, it would make it a lot nicer.”

(Urban suburb, North West, Female, 45-64, AB)

That the aggregate picture of social capital in any given place is not necessarily a reflection of experiences at the individual level was repeatedly confirmed during the fieldwork. One example of this is a comparison between two interviewees living within a few streets of each other in one of the urban case study areas. The first was part of an intensely bonded, street-level network in which a group of neighbours saw each other several times a week and had regular social events. The second had hardly any contact with her neighbours and a dramatically different experience of social capital.

“I stop and chat with people round here - all the time. You can’t really leave your house without talking to somebody so you have to sometimes be quite careful when you leave the house because otherwise you’ll be there for twenty minutes when you’re in a rush.”

(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Female, 16-29, AB)

“She [the neighbour] has come round shouting at me, like if the kids have got the noise up, the music on, and things like that, she comes out
swearing at me. The people round here, I mean, some people just smile and that’s it, but I’ve never got beyond that really. They just keep to themselves. [...] It’s the weirdest place I’ve ever lived in, but it’s safe, that’s why I’m here.”

(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Female, 45-64, DE)

Practical benefits were derived from local, informal networks in both rural and urban areas

As in rural areas, urban participants listed a whole range of ways in which they had helped or been helped by neighbours and others in their local networks. This included looking after plants, pets and homes when neighbours were away, signing for parcels, lending tools, helping elderly people with bags and bins, assisting in medical emergencies and so forth. Almost everyone spoken to – even those with relatively limited local networks – was able to rely on someone’s help without having to draft people in from outside their local areas.

As in the rural case study locations though, family was the first port of call in certain circumstances and for certain people:

“I’ve got my family so the community doesn’t really matter to me ‘cause I’ve got quite a lot of support anyway.”

(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Male, 16-29, C2)

For most others, neighbours had an important role and were the first port of call in times of need. This was particularly true for people without their own family nearby to help.

“It’s quite nice to know that I’ve got a few people, you know, if I need the little one taken to school or if I’ve got a problem with the older one...that’s important to us because we haven’t got family up here.”

(Urban suburb, North West, Female, 45-64, AB)

One thing that was interesting in the examples of reciprocity given was the extent to which people used the skills acquired in their workplaces to benefit those around them. This was also the case in rural locations, but perhaps because of the socio-demographics of the urban case studies, it was particularly noticeable in this context. Several participants talked about using their skills as nurses or midwives to help those around in emergencies, and plumbers, IT professionals, solicitors and others were
also mentioned. Most skilled employment seemed to offer some sort of practical benefits to those in peoples’ networks.

“My dad’s a car designer so he always helps anybody with a problem with their car, and then, you know, my mum’s a nurse so she’s always being called upon and the same with quite a lot of people round here. Quite a few teachers round here as well, so they help out with stuff.”
(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Female, 16-29, AB)

There was a general feeling that these skilled professionals held clout, and ample proof of this was provided. This is perhaps a key difference between the urban and the rural case study areas: in the latter, participants struggled to think of any instances in which they had benefited from local knowledge or influence whereas in the former, people knew they were taken seriously.

“I work for the city council you see... so you generally get to know that the councillors have quite a lot of say in what goes on... in their areas, and it’s obviously quite well spoken in this kind of area [...] Unfortunately it’s probably a way of life that people who are p’raps living in a little bit more affluent areas generally put themselves forward in a better way than p’raps other areas, and get results, unfortunately. It’s part and parcel of life”.
(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Male, 30-44, AB)

As with rural areas, having shops and amenities within walking distance seemed to affect casual social interaction
Research suggests that public space can be a site of exclusion for the old, young, women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities due to a combination of factors specific to the site in question and specific to the person in question. However, shops, parks and open spaces are said to have the particular advantage of being relatively neutral in not excluding individuals who are not part of existing networks.

Our findings showed that the presence of local shops and services was a major draw for residents in both of our urban case study areas. They were seen as having a positive impact on the quality of life of people who used them, both because their existence made life easier for people, and because of the social benefit gained from the human interactions they gave rise to.

107 Ibid
“To me the advantages [of living in a place like this] is the shops and everything... we’ve got everything... we don’t really use our car very often.”
(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Female, 65+, DE)

It was clear that the presence of local amenities did, in and of itself, give rise to casual social interaction, and it is hard to see how that interaction would happen, or happen as frequently without them.

“You just feel part of a community, not out on your own. I’ll probably walk down to the shops and see a few people I know, family are here, quite a few relatives in the area. So I know most people, it feels more comfortable I think. You’re not a stranger, are you.”
(Urban suburb, North West, Female, 30-44, C2)

“You can go to the shops and people know you and talk to you.”
(Urban suburb, North West, Male, 45-64, C2)

There was also evidence that the presence of amenities affected the feel of areas and encouraged people to identify with them. This in turn influenced how places developed because (as mentioned in respect to the rural case study areas) newcomers were drawn to places with a particular feel and which offered a particular lifestyle, and they interacted with those places accordingly.

“It would be dead as a dodo around here without [the shops].”
(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Male, 45-64, C2)

Having a range of facilities was important in allowing everyone the possibility of casual social interaction
Shops were not the only services that gave rise to casual social interactions. People spoke about parks, pubs, cafes and other places offering them the chance to bump into people they knew.

“Everybody always meets in the pub...they’re always packed, all of them...all the cafes and the shops shut quite early, so if people want somewhere to meet, they go to the pubs, so they’re always always packed and everybody knows everybody in the pubs as well.”
(Urban suburb, North West, Female, 16-29, DE)
Having said this, we do not wish to suggest that particular shared places are ‘better’ for fostering particular aspects of social capital. The analysis in section 7.3 suggests that different perspectives valued different types of places: the importance of pubs as a venue for social interaction featured strongly in the 'Cheers!' perspective for instance, while open spaces were more important for 'community-spirited enthusiasts' and local shops and services for 'happy in my own four walls'. It seems likely that a local environment needs to encompass a mix of these to provide a framework which allows each of the different perspectives the possibility of casual social interaction.

There were indications of a symbiotic relationship between environmental quality and informal socialising
As was the case for the majority of rural areas, both the urban case study locations were areas in which participants generally felt safe, and which were pleasant to be in and to walk around. Similarly, both provided access to good local amenities and at an overall level, for some people at least, these conditions were right for fostering social interaction.¹⁰⁸ As such, our findings would tend to concur with the findings from the rural case study areas that there may be a symbiotic relationship between local environmental quality and informal socialising.

This theory is also supported by the fact that, at a more localised level, particular conditions seemed to foster or, conversely, to block informal socialising.

- **Busy roads** were often cited as a barrier if they were in the immediate vicinity to participants’ homes, particularly in relation to children:

  “Up our way, you wouldn’t dare let the children out. The traffic goes tearing up the road.”
  *(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Female, 65+, DE)*

- **Building design** and urban layout was spoken about in relation to fostering social interaction – a particular example being a U-shaped block of flats credited with enabling residents to know each other and, through that, look out for one another.

¹⁰⁸ Although we cannot comment on what impact different conditions would have had.
8.2 Formal networks in urban areas

The urban and the rural case studies had substantial differences in the extent and nature of formal community networks, and this variation is supported by the literature reviewed.

There were lower levels of participation in formal networks amongst urban participants

It is well documented (as outlined above) that, proportionate to their size, urban areas have smaller numbers of voluntary groups and lower rates of volunteering. Our findings echoed this general picture of lower engagement in structured civic life: although some respondents were involved in church groups, youth groups and a smattering of other community organisations, this involvement was limited and there was much less evidence of individuals being involved in several different clubs and societies at the same time than in some of the rural areas. In addition, fewer people seemed to be involved in organising the groups that they belonged to.

There were plenty of examples of local festivals and other events taking place in the urban case study areas and of them being well attended by local people. Amongst others, these included music festivals, Christmas festivals and fairs. On the whole though, these events were organised by the council, local businesses and other bodies rather than by local residents.109

The limited involvement in formal community structures in the urban case study locations was further evidenced by the lack of an urban equivalent to the rural ‘community champion’ perspective (a perspective shared by people who want to get actively involved in community life and formal networks). Most of the other rural perspectives identified had far stronger equivalents in an urban setting.

109 n.b. This should not be taken as proof that local people would organise them themselves if councils or other organizations delegated this responsibility.
The most involved of the urban perspectives in terms of formal community and governance was that of the ‘community-spirited enthusiasts’, roughly equivalent to the rural ‘I belong here’. Those with this perspective valued formal community structures and saw them as part and parcel of a strong community, but might not have been directly involved in them.

Where formal community and governance structures were prominent in the rural case study areas, they were seen as playing an important role in bringing people together (and in doing so, providing a sense of fulfilment, belonging, cooperation and reciprocity). These opportunities seldom seemed to present themselves in the urban areas. In fact, it was often the case that urban participants struggled to think of anything that had really galvanised their communities other than petitions against planned developments. In one area, there had been a petition against using the site of a burned down pub for a discount supermarket, and in the other there had been a fight against using a stretch of greenbelt land for a new tram link into the town centre.

“Everybody was up in arms and everybody made the effort to go and do that.”

(North West suburb, Female, 65+, C1)

**Urban governance structures were seen as being more powerful than rural structures**

There are institutional differences between the systems of governance in urban and rural areas and in particular a lack of urban equivalent to the unit of governance most commonly spoken about in the rural case study areas: the parish and town councils.

In rural areas, as described in section 6.2, there were frequent complaints about how easily local decisions were over-ruled by principal authorities. These complaints against local power and governance structures were generally not echoed in the two urban areas. Although still reporting some apathy and disaffection, the urban participants we interviewed tended to have more confidence in their ability to influence local issues and appeared to have a clearer idea of the channels of power and communication open to them, including influential people living in the area such as councillors and MPs.
“If I had a problem I’d take it to my MP or ask in one of the local shops – they’d know what to do or who to get in touch with.”
(North West suburb, Male, 30-44, AB)

“A few councillors live here and they’ve got a lot of sway.”
(North West suburb, Male, 65+, C1)

This is not to say that people necessarily thought their views would be listened to – various people complained of ‘strong’ councils who did what they pleased, but this certainly was not a unanimous view. What can be said with confidence is that the feeling present in rural areas, that local decisions were over-ruled, seemed wholly absent for the urban case studies. With only two urban case studies, it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions as to whether these differences reflect a wider rural/urban divide. At first glance, it seems that urban residents did feel more empowered than rural residents; however, other variables may also help explain the differences.

Political engagement could also be correlated with the relative affluence of the areas looked at. We did deliberately pick urban areas which could meaningfully be compared to the rural areas and it was striking that many of those we interviewed were very conscious of how favourably their area compared to other areas around them. With this in mind, it is perhaps less surprising that they felt their areas were well served and had clout, both politically and in terms of the general provision of services.

The role of meeting venues in helping or inhibiting the formation of formal networks in urban areas was more difficult to gauge in urban areas than it was in rural areas
This difficulty may have been due in part to the fact that there was less active involvement in formal networks (as confirmed by the lack of an urban comparator to the rural ‘community champions’ perspective) and in part because the urban areas were larger and less discrete than the rural areas. As such, the venues of formal interaction were dispersed (participants could get involved at any one of a number of venues across their wider area. For example, participants chose to go to worship in the city’s Cathedral rather than the local church, use the youth club in the town centre rather than the one in the local area and so forth).
8.3 Emergent properties: values, trust, norms and fears

The overlap between the values expressed by the urban and rural perspectives identified was striking.

- For both the urban 'community-spirited enthusiasts' and the rural 'belong here' perspectives it was important that people should help each other. They valued people getting on and being respectful of each other, saw those around them as trustworthy and felt they shared similar values with them.

- For the urban 'Cheers!' and the rural 'friends matter' perspectives, a great deal of importance was attributed to human contact and reciprocity.

- For the urban 'live and let live' and rural 'happy bystander' perspectives, privacy and personal space was valued but there was also a desire to get on with those around them. They saw formal community as important even though they were not actively involved in it and would happily have been of assistance to anyone needing help (and conversely were able to draw on neighbours for support) though their preference was to keep themselves to themselves.

- For urban 'place over people' and rural 'place matters' subscribers, a lack of shared values with those around them and the negative impact of local experiences led to local relationships being at arms' length, although there was sometimes a desire for this not to be the case.

As is evident from the above, reciprocity and mutual support were strongly valued in both urban and rural case study locations, across the majority of the perspectives identified. As far as the urban perspectives were concerned, only 'happy in my own four walls' was materially different in this respect, with emphasis put on space and privacy, peace and tranquility. This last perspective notwithstanding, people in both urban and rural areas generally had a desire to help and to be helped. Participants understood the benefits a relationship of interdependency offered both parties - not only for the person being provided with support, but also for the person providing that support who may have gained a sense of purpose, fulfilment and/or self-worth from their actions.
“The lady across the road offered [to look after my cat while I was away], because her children love stroking the cat, but my other neighbour has always done it, he lost his wife in November...I don’t like to say no.”
(Urban suburb, North West, Female, 65+, C1)

Values were something that many participants found difficult to talk about, but the very fact that the rural and urban perspectives were so comparable leads us to the conclusion that on the whole, people’s experiences did not vary markedly between urban and rural locations in this respect.

**Trust and social norms do not appear materially different from rural areas with the exception of attitudes towards young people**

As was the case with values, there was little to suggest that trust was materially different in our urban and rural case study locations. In both settings the overriding impression was that people had confidence in those around them and felt reasonably safe, both in their homes and in their local areas more widely. The issue of trust was not something our urban participants felt strongly about.\(^\text{110}\)

There were exceptions to this picture in both rural and urban locations. This was not only because people occasionally felt at risk of petty crime but also because they had sometimes lost confidence in each others’ judgements. Peoples’ overall perspectives highlighted many of these differences (e.g. those subscribing to a ‘place over people’ perspective show less trust in others than ‘community-spirited enthusiasts’ for instance) but do not explain the cause. In some cases it seemed to be linked to specific experiences (e.g. a soured relationship with a neighbour), and in some it seemed linked to particular places (e.g. fear of an underpass under a busy main road).

Where there did seem to be a subtle difference between urban and rural areas was in people’s opinion of and relations with young people: the fear of young people and the assumption that there was nothing reigning them in did seem to be stronger in the two urban case study locations.\(^\text{111}\)

“You do get frightened – you don’t know what they’re going to do.”
(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Female, 65+, DE)

\(^{110}\) Few either strongly agreed or strongly disagreed that “people round here can be trusted” -- s27

\(^{111}\) s37 “Young people can’t get away with bad behaviour round here” had a Q-sort value of -3 to 0 across the different urban factors and -4 to 1 in the rural areas but as noted in Annex K, some respondents did struggle with the double negative in this statement.
Trust varied so much by individual, though, that its relationship with place was hard to identify. We were told of the same area both that there was and that there was not a problem with young people ‘hanging around’ on the streets at night.

As with the rural case study areas, the homogeneity of the urban case study areas may have contributed to a general feeling of cohesion and harmony and a building of social norms which also seemed to impact on feelings of trust, echoing the McCulloch’s analysis of the British Household Panel Survey results.112

“We’re all working class, nobody’s better than anybody else, we’ve all worked, all had children, we’re all similar.”
(Urban suburb, North West, Female, 65+, C1)

For some, an absence of shared trust, values and social norms had a negative impact on quality of life

“My only regret with moving in here is the rented house next door. I’ve had two or three different lots, and obviously, rented accommodation people don’t look after it as well... It just wound me up - when you have all different crappy cars out the front, the front’s like a mechanic’s workshop, there’s fridges out the front and banging petitions up at three in the morning... I hated coming home, some nights, I hated coming home...I had to basically threaten ’em.”
(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Male, 30-44, C2)

As was the case in rural areas, some participants felt as though their values were in a minority in the place where they lived. This was particularly true for people whose networks lay outside the local area.

“I didn’t feel like a massive loss when I lost most of my school friends... When you get to uni you find all these people who are into things you’re into, who you like a lot better. I don’t really like my home friends as much. Some of them anyway. My best mate, I don’t talk to him anymore, because I’ve decided he’s horrible, racist and a bigot.”
(Urban suburb, West Midlands, Male, 16-29, C2)

112 McCulloch, A, (2003), An examination of social capital and social disorganisation in neighbourhoods in the British Household Panel Study, in Social Science and Medicine, volume 56, issue 7, April 2003, p1425 - 1438
The nature of long-term fears were similar in rural and urban areas, although there seemed to be less fear of large-scale change in urban areas

In both rural and urban areas, fears centred on change. In the urban case studies however, it was gradual rather than large-scale change that people worried about: areas going downhill because of the loss of local amenities (‘community-spirited enthusiasts’), people making trouble or ‘undesirable’ people moving in (‘place over people’, ‘community-spirited enthusiasts’), or simply a general decline in standards (‘happy in my own four walls’). Only the 'Cheers!' perspective was unconcerned. As with rural areas, the concern seemed to stem from an anxiety that places would lose their identity and that people would no longer feel at ease or would no longer feel that they belonged there, were the change to take place. There was acknowledgement though that the scope of change was more limited in the urban areas because of a lack of available land to build on and because the communities in question were so settled.

Summary: the differences between social capital in urban and rural areas

It is apparent that the different urban perspectives outlined in section 7 imply different experiences of social capital. In particular, formal community involvement was less prevalent in urban areas.

The lack of an urban equivalent to the ‘community champion’ perspective would confirm that there are differences between the rural and urban case studies that we have looked at. However, despite this, there was no sense from the interviews that people in the urban case study areas were less involved in what was going on in their areas. What was clear was that urban residents' involvement was to a greater extent conducted through events that had been organised by external bodies - such as their council – as opposed to events organised by local residents. It is not apparent that this difference made any qualitative difference to people’s relationships with others in their area, though.

What is also apparent is that subscribers to most of the perspectives identified benefitted from shared values and understandings, reciprocity and trust with people in their local area, regardless of whether they were actively involved in formal community structures. In some cases these benefits were gained from passive or ‘light touch’ involvement which was driven more by the attraction of a place than its people. For people with more active
engagement – be it in formal or informal networks – the benefits of where they lived revolved around personal interaction, reciprocity and having strong relationships with people around them.

Overall our research showed:

- Strong similarities between urban and rural experiences;
- That informal networks in urban and rural areas shared similar characteristics:
  - Bonding, bridging and linking capital were all part of informal networks in urban areas, but bonding capital dominated people’s experience;
  - Many examples of neighbourliness were found in both urban areas;
  - Levels of neighbourliness were generally good, but where they were not this presented a barrier to the formation of an individual’s informal networks;
  - Practical benefits were derived from local, informal networks in both rural and urban areas, although participants in urban areas seemed more aware of having benefitted from others’ status or connections;
- In both urban and rural areas, having shops and amenities within walking distance affected casual social interaction:
  - Having a range of facilities was also important in allowing everyone the possibility of casual social interaction;
- There were indications of a symbiotic relationship between environmental quality and informal socialising in both urban and rural areas;
- Formal networks and governance were two spheres in which we found quite substantial variance between the urban and rural experiences:
  - There were lower levels of participation in formal networks amongst urban participants;
  - Urban governance structures were seen as being more powerful and closer to hand by urban participants;
- The emergent properties of the informal networks observed in rural and urban areas were very similar:
  - the overlap between the values expressed by the urban and rural perspectives identified was striking;
  - Trust and social norms did not appear materially different with the exception of attitudes towards young people, which were
characterised by a greater degree of fear and mistrust in urban than in rural areas;
- Shared trust, values and social norms were important in ensuring quality of life in both settings;
- The nature of participants' fears about their local area was similar, although there was less fear of large-scale change in urban areas.

### 8.4 Comparative summary of the urban and rural perspectives

The figure below represents the main differences between the urban perspectives and the main differences between the rural perspectives overlaid on one diagram so that an overall comparison can be made between perspectives in the two types of location.
Conclusions and implications

9.1 Introduction

Rural social capital is often held out as ‘better’ or ‘more plentiful’ than social capital in urban areas. This is in large part due to the proliferation of what we have called ‘formal community networks’ in rural places. The assumption may then be made that ‘better’ social capital in rural areas causes rural residents to experience a better quality of life than that of their urban counterparts.

Our desk-based research created the expectation that we would find rural case study locations full of well-attended community organisations and offering a busy schedule of community events. Conversely, we were also led to expect that our urban locations would be lacking any comparable version of community life. Indeed, to some extent, and in some places, that expectation turned out to be accurate.

However, if we had stopped there and had failed to consider those who were not involved in formal community life, we felt that we would have been unable to paint a sufficiently full and critical picture of place-based social interaction. We therefore also chose to include within our research the observations and experiences of those with few or no local networks at all, and also those whose local involvement was largely, or wholly, social and informal.

Our work comprised a detailed and extensive literature review, a workshop with a number of academic and practitioner experts, and a programme of case study-based fieldwork involving 96 in-depth, face-to-face interviews with members of the general public. The findings have led us to reach a set of conclusions rather different to those most often associated with ‘rural social capital’, and which given the limitations of our research, we offer below as hypotheses and not as definitive proof of the nature of social capital in rural England in general.

9.2 Conclusions

1. First and foremost, we are not persuaded that ‘social capital’ is a sufficiently stable concept to act as the basis for systematic analysis or intervention.

The concept of social capital is theoretically ‘muddy’; many elements of social capital are subjective rather than objective; and the term ‘social capital’ appears in many settings to be no more than a proxy for whatever is of interest for a particular study - ‘social trust’ or ‘political participation’ or
'volunteering' and so on. In a rural context in particular, research into social capital can translate into a study of 'community initiatives' and little else.

As a result of these difficulties, we have looked very broadly at the following dimensions of social capital:

- local formal community networks, including participation in 'community life' such as clubs and societies, volunteering, political action and governance;
- local informal social networks, including friends, family and neighbours; and
- the emergent properties of those networks, such as trust, norms, reciprocity and co-operation.

All references in this section to 'social capital' refer to these dimensions of human interaction.

Despite our best efforts to break the concept of 'social capital' down into a set of manageable and researchable components, we continue to find it an unsatisfactory notion and we remain persuaded of its limitations as a concept for policy intervention. As well as summarising our overall findings, the following conclusions set out why this is the case.

2. Even if social capital were a more reliable concept, we are not convinced that direct policy 'inputs' would necessarily lead to beneficial social capital 'outputs'.

Given the organic, highly subjective nature of social capital, there would seem to be no reason _ex ante_ to suppose that town A or village B, which according to some set of metrics or other appeared to have ‘less’ social capital, would develop ‘more’ social capital with the help of directed, external ‘social capital’ prompts. Even if this were to happen, the social capital 'created' would not necessarily be 'better', nor would it necessarily be accessed by more people in a more inclusive way.

Our analysis of the Q-sort data showed that people’s networks and the values and mutual benefits that emerged from those networks (i.e. ‘social capital’) were highly variegated, even within a given place. This point was illustrated clearly by the differences between the different ‘perspectives’ that emerged from our analysis, which showed that people chose to participate in different kinds of network to varying degrees.
In particular, involvement in either formal or informal networks appears to be related to socio-economic group and age group: our findings showed that those who relied more on informal networks tended to be younger and from lower socio-economic groups; whereas those who were more involved in formal networks tended to be from higher socio-economic groups and tended to be older.

This is particularly significant given that most intervention/expenditure, for obvious practical purposes, is aimed at ‘formal community’ life. Clearly there are reasons to hope that investment in formal community networks will have positive spillover effects into the wider community. On the one hand there will be direct benefits in the case of funding to volunteer organisations who offer support to disadvantaged groups. On the other hand, less tangible benefits may also flow from promoting local formal community networks. This is particularly relevant in the rural context where volunteers own and manage community amenities (such as the village hall, the playground and the sports field): such amenities are not only important for the people who make direct use of them, they also increase the number of opportunities for local, casual social interaction.

However, whilst not wishing to detract from the importance of ‘formal community’, particularly in the rural case study areas, our findings indicate that many of our participants did not join in formal community networks. For the most part, they did not join in because they did not want to join in – formal community life wasn’t for them. In particular, the likelihood of formal networks developing to include many younger and less affluent adults seems fairly remote. At best, such groups are only likely to receive indirect benefits from the funding and support given to the formal community.

This finding on the socio-demographic divide that seemed to characterise involvement in formal and informal networks also deepens our understanding of the nature of rural deprivation: those interviewed from the lower socio-economic groups rarely considered themselves to be deprived in terms of their social capital – they were often well-networked and well-supported locally (albeit as part of informal networks). Although some people were ‘excluded’ from local networks (which may or may not have been their choice), there were no clear-cut findings to suggest a correlation between that exclusion and other, conventional measures of deprivation.

3. The nature of the perspectives on social capital among residents showed many similarities between urban and rural locations, with the one exception that our urban locations had no equivalent to the rural
‘community champions’ perspective, which strongly favoured involvement in local formal networks.

We suspect that given the historic tendency for researchers to equate social capital with more formal community activity at the expense of informal socialising, rural places have seemed to have ‘more’ or ‘stronger’ social capital, simply because of their more obvious formal communities. Indeed, had we decided to use involvement in ‘the community’ as a proxy for social capital, we may also have come to the same conclusion: there was no equivalent in our urban areas to those rural residents most heavily engaged in formal community activities. However, our inclusion of informal networks in the research of social capital has allowed us to reach a different conclusion: that places without formal community groups still value very similar types of contact with those around them; and they do so for very similar reasons.

Therefore, whilst there may be rural residents who experience social capital in a specifically rural way, it is not rurality per se that defines the experience of social capital for the majority of people living in rural areas.

People make of their lives what they will, given the opportunities available to them where they live, and there seems no reason – on the basis of our research – to conclude that social capital, in terms of both the density of local networks and of values and norms emerging from local networks, is ‘better’ or ‘stronger’ in rural areas than it is in urban areas. There may, however, be reason to conclude that some areas (both rural and urban) offer more opportunities for residents to become involved in local networks (both formal and informal) than other areas.

4. The vast majority of people valued reciprocity, and acted accordingly; but not explicitly as ‘volunteers’ doing good works, rather as neighbours helping one another out.

The values that emerge from social networks are fundamental to definitions of social capital. These values, in turn, are of particular policy interest, given that higher levels of social trust, reciprocity and co-operation, for example, are seen as desirable policy outcomes (whether for their own sake or for more utilitarian reasons). Even more specifically, certain policy arguments suggest that people’s desire to do good can be harnessed to deliver more volunteer activity.
In all of our research locations, numerous examples were given of how people helped each other out and took care of vulnerable people in the places where they lived. This was usually based on a clear understanding of reciprocity: that people could both give and receive help if needed.

However, whilst some of this activity could be understood as ‘volunteering’, particularly if it was delivered by local formal organisations, it was not usually seen as such: it often fell more generally within people’s feeling that they simply helped each other out. This applied across the perspectives, but was far more important to people with strong local networks, regardless of whether their networks were largely formal or informal.

In particular, we found that neighbourliness was especially important in understanding values within place-based social networks. This finding illustrates that place, and more specifically neighbourhood, is a venue for developing values such as trust and reciprocity. It does not, however, confirm any relationship between those values and volunteering, although further work would need to be done if that relationship is to be better understood, given that it was not the particular focus of our research.

5. There is no necessary link between social capital and quality of life but, for most people, a 'friendly' place is a good place to live.

It is not possible to say with any certainty that ‘increased’ social capital could be associated with either an increase or decrease in an individual’s quality of life. Again, the different perspectives emerging from our analysis illustrate this: most people interviewed tended to participate in local networks to some degree; some people wanted to participate, and may have felt happier if they could have done, but did not have the opportunity where they lived; whereas a small minority of participants did not want to get involved in local networks of any kind.

However, most people did value the opportunity for social interaction with others where they lived, and they did feel as though this general local friendliness was a good thing in that it gave them both tangible and intangible benefits that contributed in some way to their quality of life.

The type of interaction that seemed to act almost as the foundation for local networks and that was closely associated with the feeling that somewhere was a ‘friendly’ place to live, was the incidental, everyday contact people had with others. Opportunities for such contact were created almost exclusively by
residents walking around a place and ‘bumping into’ one another. In turn, for this to happen, residents needed a reason to walk in their local area (for example, to go the shop or the school) and to go where they pleased, free from the constraints of traffic or fear of crime. This feel good factor about a place seemed to be cemented during opportunities for local celebration, such as community-wide events like fetes, fairs and festivals.

We contend that there are a number of policy interventions which could either actively promote, or remove barriers to the opportunities a place affords its residents for this type of basic friendliness. But these interventions are most often structural and indirect, as much related to the characteristics of a place as its people. (Please see section 9.3 below for suggested interventions.)

6. The social capital in a given place may be adversely affected by circumstances beyond the control of its residents, and where this is the case, it makes more sense to address those circumstances rather than the social capital.

A complex inter-relationship exists between place and people and over time that relationship may become self-reinforcing. In this way it is possible to understand how, for example, wealthy places with an ageing population and replete with community organisations, attract wealthy, older, community-minded incomers, thus perpetuating and feeding the growth of those organisations.

However, for other places, exogenous shocks such as the loss of the major local employer(s), or rapid housing growth, to name but two examples, may alter completely any such historic place/person trajectory.

Understanding social capital in this way suggests that it may not always be within the gift of people in certain places to ‘grow’ or ‘improve’ local social capital, and that under such circumstances funding community initiatives, for example, appears an unlikely panacea. In other words, it may be unhelpful to assume that changes in social capital are both the cause and effect of worsening social relations or deteriorating community life: there may be other underlying causes at which any policy intervention would be better directed.

### 9.3 Implications

This set of conclusions pushed the research team to consider the issue of quality of life more generally, in the context of the kinds of measures that could conceivably be pursued in rural communities, and the political context
within which such measures do or might take place. The following points summarise some of the implications of our conclusions for place-based social capital.

1. **It is our hypothesis that in many places, given the opportunity, perfectly ordinary human interaction will deliver a mix of formal and informal networks, trust and reciprocity.**

In such places the task is to avoid interventions that would undermine what already works.

The notion of ‘opportunity’ is, we think, particularly important. Places where people have the opportunity to meet with each other, and from there the opportunity to build trust, reciprocity and cooperation with those around them, may be better placed to cope with the many future changes that rural England will have to face. This appears to be true of social changes (new arrivals; changing socio-demographic profiles), economic changes (new industries, different patterns of employment) or environmental changes (the impacts of climate change).

Networks are organic entities that ‘evolve’ over time and for most the opportunity does exist to take part in local networks, if that is what any given individual so chooses (and, as the findings show, this is not what everybody necessarily wants).

If this is the case, then the role for the State is rarely to interfere directly in ‘social capital’ at the local level. Human beings will develop their own local networks for their own reasons, so long as the enabling infrastructure, the opportunity, is in place.

2. **However, in a minority of places with fewer opportunities for social interaction, we found that there were fewer and smaller place-based networks, and a more noticeable distrust of others.**

In a small number of places, the opportunity for social interaction either never existed or had been slowly eroded over time. For some people who are able to develop networks outside the place where they live, or who have family resources to draw upon, this may not have a great impact. For others, the impact may have a significant effect upon their quality of life.
Furthermore, the place as a whole, its ‘character’ and the perceptions of it as a ‘good’ place to live, could be altered dramatically by improving the infrastructure that affords opportunity for social contact.

The kinds of problems that our respondents recounted in relation to their local quality of life and their inability to interact with others locally were:

- loss of shared space;
- absence of local events such as fetes, fairs or festivals;
- poorly maintained public spaces;
- lack of surveillance in areas of petty crime and vandalism;
- absence of local amenities (in one case connected to the building of an out of town super-store with free buses from outside the (now closed) village shop);
- heavy, fast, unmanaged traffic flow;
- proliferation of un-connected residential developments.

This list of potential barriers to the formation of local social capital is striking only in the resemblance it bears to the long-standing liveability agenda. We feel that by concentrating on the relationship between social capital and place—rather than social capital in some aggregate, rootless sense—that the importance of locality to human relationships, and in turn to quality of life, has re-emerged.

3. **We are not persuaded that there is significant additional scope for expanding a generic, top-down programme that attends to ‘social capital’ as a way of creating opportunities for social interaction and promoting certain values and norms.**

Rather, as an adjunct to the effective and accountable delivery of established services, and to the removal of (or the avoidance of creating) the kinds of barriers to social interaction listed above, there is scope— for a small number of places (or neighbourhoods within places)—for interventions that may help to nudge those places onto a trajectory whereby they will, in time, develop their own opportunities for further social interaction and the benefits it might bring. Such interventions may look very like those that are commonplace in urban areas: for example, the delivery of local community-wide occasions (for example, fetes, fairs and festivals).
Creating these opportunities would, we contend, be the means by which communities could achieve, maintain and protect their quality of life: and their social capital would be a self-determined component of that quality, not an externally-driven input to it.

However, this is not to suggest that support for those volunteers who deliver local services, who own and manage local community amenities, and who provide local governance are not be valuable: such activities can be an important component of place-based social networks – particularly in rural areas.

4. **Our findings suggest that the role of the State with respect to place-based social capital is to act in an enabling fashion, either to remove barriers that prevent the natural, organic development of social capital, or to provide services and/or infrastructure that facilitate it.**

We should also accept that not everyone will either want or be able to join in to the same extent. In terms of social justice, this means developing policies which aim to provide a level playing field for all, so that poverty and poor local environments cannot conspire against the ability of people to develop convivial, rewarding and beneficial relationships with those around them. This may necessitate:

- improved strategic planning that has a better understanding of how decisions might impact upon local social interaction within a place;
- strategic planning with a more effective means of accounting for decisions that have been taken at the ultra-local level, in an attempt to address the fear of change felt by people who feel they have no control over the destiny of the place where they live;
- improvements in the levels and quality of service delivery in places where there are clear barriers to social interaction (examples are given in the bullet-point list under point two above), driven by effective performance management and accountability systems.

In short, it would seem from the research that a fairly limited number of basics are probably required if ‘quality of life’ is to be maintained or enhanced at the generic level. On the one hand, people want a nice, safe place to live, and a job. On the other hand, people are afraid of profound and/or large scale change being unleashed on the place where they live; change which they are unable to predict or even to influence, let alone to control.
Therefore, trying to input directly into ‘social capital’ appears, for the most part, to be something of a red herring. The real job of work lies in nurturing the socio-economic, civic and environmental conditions which give people the opportunity to build relationships with one another in the places where they live.

9.4 Reflections on the likely impacts of future trends affecting Britain’s rural communities

Many of our findings touch on subjects that may become increasingly pertinent as rural areas progress further into the 21st century.

A number of studies have been published which consider the changes that rural Britain may face in the coming years. In some cases these changes are common to all parts of the country, and in some cases they are particularly significant for rural communities. Of particular relevance to rural England is: our ageing population; increasing migration to rural areas; decreasing numbers of service outlets in rural areas; increased polarity of disadvantage; poor accessibility to services for those without cars; increasing issues around housing affordability; and climate change.

Together they point to likely physical and demographic changes in rural areas as well as changes to the availability and accessibility of services. It is also likely that there will be a need to adapt to a changing climate and a low carbon economy, with all the implications this has for rural areas. Our closing reflections on what impact this might have on people’s experiences of networks, norms and values in rural areas are detailed below:

1. Loss of amenities may make the formation of particular types of informal networks more difficult. Almost all those we interviewed had positive interactions with those living immediately around them. However, the loss of local amenities may make wider casual interaction less commonplace and the loss of rural schools and other services may impact on the ability of new groups to form and to bond.

2. Formal networks may be boosted by demographic shifts. We found a propensity for older people to become involved in formal society – for reasons both of time and of inclination. Unless what we found was a cohort effect rather than a life-stage effect, it is likely that

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113 See for example, Carnegie UK Trust (2007), The Shape of Civil Society to Come; Commission for Rural Communities (2008), State of the Countryside 2008 (pg 155) and Ward, N. and Ray, C. (2004), Futures, analysis, public policy and rural studies quoting the unpublished Strategic Futures exercise conducted for MAFF by the Henley Centre in 2001

114 The possible impact of these on social capital in rural areas were considered during the expert workshop and more detailed findings from this session are included in the interim report
the ageing rural population may favour interaction through formal networks.

3. **Some future trends affecting rural communities may expose potential differences in deeply held values, with possible detrimental consequences for place-based networks.** We found that although participants shared close enough values to enjoy everyday interactions, deeper held values, when exposed or challenged, could create tension, and that the issue of change in rural places was particularly divisive in this respect. Many of the trends outlined above may bring these to the fore.

4. **Rapid and large-scale change is likely to present a particular challenge for rural communities.** As outlined above, large-scale change was the one thing that was feared by all the rural perspectives that we identified.

5. **Social infrastructure needs to be in place for newcomers to become part of existing networks.** Migration to and from rural areas is not recent and social networks in rural areas have long been assimilating newcomers. It is important that this continues to be the case. In particular, even if rural populations do not remain as homogeneous as they are now, it is important that place-based rural networks are able to remain welcoming and inclusive: this will have benefits not only for the members of those networks, but more widely for any given place as a whole. The pace and scale of rural development is likely to be key in determining the extent to which rural communities are able to adapt and to welcome newcomers into their networks.
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