

Rural Policy Revisited

Key messages for future sustainable communities,
enterprise and land use



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Introduction

The Centre for Rural Economy (CRE) was founded as a Newcastle University research centre in 1992, with funding based on an endowment generated by funds raised following an appeal in memory of the 10th Duke of Northumberland, a former Chancellor of the university.

We specialise in interdisciplinary social science and applied policy research oriented towards achieving sustainable rural economies, land management systems, and food production in the UK and overseas. We have a strong presence in European and international research centres and policy environments.

We are particularly fortunate to have a large international cohort of postgraduate researchers, who contribute much to our understanding of rural communities and agricultural practices. In this report, however, as we mark the 30th anniversary of CRE and look to the future, we focus on the concerns of our core audience in the UK, with a series of policy notes grounded in research and practical innovation with communities and businesses across the North East of England and beyond.

When we look back at our previous attempts to address the challenges of rural policy, we do so with some frustration. Despite their many strengths and innovative possibilities, rural areas in the UK face a range of seemingly intractable, inter-related and long-standing challenges. Rural disadvantage continues and the deep-rooted problems of rural poverty and the provision of affordable rural homes are both discussed in our report. Many rural communities are ageing, with the consequent knock-on effects for the availability of services and facilities.

There are, as our work has shown, two types of rural areas. First, the elite, ageing, unaffordable rural with declining services. Second, the left behind rural areas, such as the former mining villages, with high unemployment and poor housing stock. Digital connectivity remains a major concern for rural, and especially remote, areas, increasingly given its necessity for smart business and energy transitions. Policy and development responses to these challenges need to be sensitive to the highly-differentiated circumstances of rural places in order to meet their needs, but also to nurture their many contributions to resilience, prosperity and wellbeing.

For those whose lives or livelihoods are affected by the future health and prosperity of rural areas, the present is marked by considerable policy uncertainty. For agriculture, the ending of the Basic Payment Scheme is particularly challenging. The transition to Environmental Land Management schemes has been marked by frustrations about a lack of detail and clarity of goals. In the UK, and particularly in Northumberland, tenant farmers feel very uncertain about their future.

While agricultural subsidies are being phased out, the rural development fund closed abruptly leaving considerable uncertainty about future funding. It is important that the new wave of UK Shared Prosperity, Levelling Up funds and devolution investments meet the needs and realise the contribution of rural communities and businesses. Here, in the North of Tyne area, we have the opportunity to fulfil this potential, with a rural lens having been brought into the investment planning process, notably through a Stewardship and Rural Growth Investment Plan.

CRE has had many recent successes, not least in its coordination of the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE), which brings together a partnership of researchers, businesses, policy makers and stakeholders across the UK to develop the rural economy and, is working with regional partners to catalyse practical solutions to the challenges facing rural communities and businesses.

We have also made important contributions to Rural Commissions, the Northumberland Future Farming Enquiry, the evidence-base of the North of Tyne Stewardship and Rural Growth Investment Plan, provided evidence to the House of Lords, and prepared reports for Defra and all the devolved regions. Our experiences working with rural stakeholders on these, and other projects, convince us that a bright future is possible for rural areas, underpinned by the green economy, interlinking climate, agriculture, and rural communities, to deliver thriving rural places. Over coming years, we see a real possibility for positive progress in the rural economy and each of the contributions to this report identify policy recommendations on how this can be achieved.

The short pieces included here, which cover a range of topics important to the future of the rural economy, including communities, rural business and enterprise, and land management, reflect our understanding of the rural in the round and how its many components are interconnected. CRE remains deeply committed to knowledge exchange between stakeholders, industry, researchers, and policy makers and we believe that positive change to the rural economy of the UK can be achieved if there is a strong and sustained policy commitment to the goals identified in this report.



His Grace, the Duke of Northumberland (centre) celebrates the 30th anniversary of CRE with (left to right) Dr Carmen Hubbard, Director of Agriculture, Food Systems and Rural Development, Professor Nigel Harkness, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Professor Guy Garrod, Director of CRE, and Professor Sally Shortall, Duke of Northumberland Chair of Rural Economy.

The future of rural communities

... Rural areas are unique. We can't have a 'one size fits all' mentality, be that central government or local government - rural areas are different...



Poverty and social exclusion

Poverty is often perceived as an urban problem, but our analysisⁱ of the British Household Panel Survey found that in the two decades before the financial crisis in 2008, 50% of households in rural Britain experienced poverty at some point. Moreover, our 2021 Rural Livesⁱⁱ study explored hidden poverty and financial vulnerability in rural Britain more deeply, finding that many rural dwellers face fuel poverty, higher costs of living, insecure employment, a lack of access to services as these become centralised and digitalised, and a lack of affordable housing opportunitiesⁱⁱⁱ. People turn for help to charities and voluntary organisations because the state's welfare systems are poorly adapted to rural contexts, with lower rates of benefit take-up reflecting additional obstacles faced by rural citizens.

Fuel poverty is particularly prevalent in rural areas because many properties are not connected to mains gas, having to rely instead on more expensive and less regulated sources such as oil and liquified petroleum gas (LPG) or less efficient electric heating systems. Houses tend to be older and poorly insulated, and difficult and costly to retrofit with insulation. On top of this, rural households incur higher transport costs travelling to services and employment, often with no public transport available. We warned that the imminent cost of living crisis along with rising inflation would hit rural households especially hard^{iv}.

Changes in markets alongside welfare reforms have individualised social risk, redistributing risk and precarity towards the most vulnerable, with young people, lone parents and people with mental or physical illness particularly disadvantaged. While the state's support has faltered, voluntary and community organisations have provided crucial support in time of need, despite challenges of reach into rural areas and funding pressures.

Key policy messages:

- Many rural residents are at risk of poverty, but poverty is imagined as only urban.
- The welfare system is not well adapted to rural lives.
- The cost-of-living crisis is hitting people in rural areas especially hard.
- Centralisation and digitalisation of services and support affect rural citizens unevenly with damaging impacts on the wellbeing of the most vulnerable.
- More support is required for voluntary and community organisations to continue to reach into rural areas and to maintain essential social infrastructure.
- A lack of affordable housing opportunities ensures an exclusive countryside.

Local community development

A recent study^v led by CRE found that community action across rural England is alive and well, but the value of this work is not fully understood by policy makers. Community action makes a vital contribution to many aspects of rural life, including health, household food security, wellbeing, and a sense of community.

Rural communities wish to undertake activities and have capacity to do so. They cannot do this alone, they typically do not want things done 'unto' them and they do not wish to have a dependency relationship with government. They are best placed to identify solutions for long-standing or emerging challenges, but they need support from central and local government. That support ought to empower, rather than restrain, rural communities. We found that co-designing solutions ensures that actions are tailored to address issues that are particular to an area.

Challenges and solutions are often interconnected. For instance, in rural tourist areas, lack of access to affordable housing impacts on the ability of people to live close to their work. It means that extended families no longer live close to one another. It can also create demand for second homes which means that many houses remain vacant for long periods, thus having a negative impact on the viability of certain core services and on a wider sense of community.

In communities that are especially proactive, there is often an individual or a small group of individuals at the centre of activity. They take the lead in initiating and developing local projects. These community 'entrepreneurs' appear in various guises across the community and provide an invaluable resource. Their contribution to a community can be difficult to quantify and is not always appreciated by policy makers.

Key policy messages:

- Community action and engagement should be promoted. Communities must have significant input into decision-making in their area. This involves nurturing trusting relations, recognising the value of voluntary activity, and radically recasting relations between government and local communities.
- Housing plays a critical role in sustaining dynamic and vibrant rural communities. Housing is a localised issue due to the specificity of all rural areas. Housing is an essential dynamic in the overall social and economic system of a rural community.
- The number of quality employment opportunities in rural areas should be increased. Rural businesses are predominantly family-owned and are important for the rural economy. Fostering aggregation of small business capacities, e.g. dynamic purchasing schemes, helps to make them more viable by creating economies of scale.
- Policy makers should understand how local services are interconnected. Civic actions galvanise the community and require ongoing support for core activities. This includes funds for basic services (not just new projects) and universal, accessible and affordable broadband.



Photo courtesy of English Rural, credit: Matt Pereira.

Supporting rural communities

Recent studies have shown that social infrastructure is as important as economic infrastructure to the UK's Levelling Up agenda when minimising inequalities between areas. Community hubs, cafés and recreational areas are important to quality of life, providing spaces to interact, and build trust. This has been confirmed in recent work in CRE focused on village halls and mining institutes in ex-mining communities^{vi}.

Our work looked at the role community infrastructure can play in helping to digitally connect remote rural areas. Village halls play many roles, providing courses, clubs, hosting events, funerals, birthdays, and other activities. Their role in keeping the community connected was clear during the Covid-19 pandemic, delivering meals to isolated older people and helping children from families in digital poverty to keep up with their schoolwork. Other halls provided iPads to older people so that they could stay in touch with their families. Village hall committees are innovative and forward thinking. One hall is seen as a potential secular space for humanist funerals, while another proposes digital connection as a way to replace their closed post office.

The difference between rural villages and ex-mining villages is symptomatic of the divisions within rural England. In general, rural villages are wealthier and older. This threatens their viability, as younger people often cannot

Key policy messages:

- Community social infrastructure is not simply about buildings. It is about having resources and the necessary skills to know how to use this infrastructure.
- Rural areas are diverse, some are wealthy, some are poor. Each face their own challenges and policy must be versatile to address different needs.
- Including the local community is critical to policy success.
- It takes time to build trust. Some communities need bespoke community development officers.
- Digital connection is a critical part of rural community social infrastructure to achieve equality.

afford the high house prices. This is not the case for ex-mining villages, where the housing stock is poor and people are generally poorer too. There is an equally strong sense of pride in their local community, and a commitment to trying to improve the lives of residents, but they lack the social, economic and cultural capital found in rural villages. It took longer to establish relationships of trust with the committees of ex-mining institutes. People have felt abandoned and told us that often they are promised support that comes to nothing. Our work led to digitally connecting three mining villages.



The future of rural business and enterprise

...Enterprises from all sectors are the cornerstone of rural economies and help support thriving rural communities...

Rural enterprise, resilience and Levelling Up

While time will tell the full extent to which the interlinked cost of living and doing business crises will affect firms based outside of urban centres, due to greater costs associated with transport and infrastructure issues we might anticipate that rural impacts will be more substantial.

The stark reality is that cost of business pressures are seriously challenging many rural firms whose financial resources and plans have already been impacted by Covid-19. Moreover, although rural businesses embrace the full breadth of sectors found in any location in the UK, many are connected to farming and land-based industries which are facing the biggest overhaul of agricultural subsidies in a generation.

However, there are grounds for optimism. Evidence from NICRE's first major enterprise survey in 2021 showed that rural businesses were more resilient during the pandemic than those in urban areas.

More than a third of rural firms in the North East, South West and West Midlands diversified their business in the wake of Covid, creating new sales platforms and finding innovative ways to reach existing and, crucially, new customers. Their efforts were helped by tremendous support from local communities and often backed by a strong family network.

This adaptation not only demonstrated the deep-rooted determination we've seen in rural areas during previous crises, such as the foot and mouth disease outbreak – which was itself a major research area for CRE – but evidence of business owners' desire to innovate and pivot their business model in response to market challenges and opportunities.

But we must not allow these findings to mask the need for ongoing support for rural enterprise as the Government continues its

quest to Level Up Britain. There's no denying that many rural economies are undoubtedly part of the Levelling Up challenge. However, given their scale, significance and unrealised potential, they are also part of the solution for revitalising non-rural areas and regions and addressing long-standing structural barriers that hinder economic performance and productivity. If Levelling Up is to be effective, at both a national and sub-national level, it will therefore require a new strategic focus on realising growth and innovation from all places rather than only cities, towns or specific sectors.

Key policy messages:

A rural-inclusive approach to Levelling Up should:

- Address systemic barriers to growth in rural areas;
- Invest inclusively and equitably across cities, towns and rural areas;
- Strengthen local business networks and clusters;
- Target skills and employment support to aid economic recovery and drive productivity;
- Strengthen support for rural economies from economic development institutions; and
- Enable the adaptation and contribution of rural areas to net zero goals.

Changing working patterns

The way that people work is changing, which may prove beneficial to rural economies. The Covid-19 pandemic had a dramatic effect on work patterns, with nearly half (47%) of the UK workforce operating from home, adopting remote and flexible work patterns. During the pandemic, many workers experienced well-known difficulties associated with remote homeworking: a lack of a dedicated workspace, distractions, IT problems, slow broadband speeds, care responsibilities, additional economic costs and a lack of work-life balance – all of which have implications for well-being and productivity. Many therefore wished to return to a dedicated office space, whilst avoiding long commutes to city offices. Others saw economic and wellbeing benefits from homeworking, realising that having an office base was less important than they thought. However, many rural areas currently lack the infrastructures required to facilitate homeworking^{vii}.

CRE research in the North East of England^{viii} has shown that physical infrastructures, in the form of Rural Enterprise Hubs (REHs) and co-working spaces, are one solution to allowing more people to work remotely from rural areas. REHs provide workspaces and meeting rooms, as well as additional services such as seminars, workshops and networking opportunities. Rural businesses are often

Key policy messages:

- Remote, flexible and hybrid work patterns are becoming the norm in rural areas.
- Policy makers need to look to how infrastructure can be created or upgraded to facilitate remote working in rural areas.
- REHs and co-working spaces are one option to provide businesses with essential facilities and services to grow.
- Upgrading broadband will also facilitate more remote working.

isolated and moving into a dedicated work environment can expand networks, learning opportunities and chances to collaborate. REHs follow two management strategies: 'hives' (business-to-business tenants) and 'honey pots' (business-to-customer tenants). The latter often house creative practitioners and sell goods directly to the public. These honey pots – or 'creative microclusters'^{ix} – could prove highly-beneficial to rural development, especially when linked to tourist initiatives^x. Aside from economic benefits of operating in a REH, the hubs also provide a community of fellow tenants, which can help business owners overcome social isolation and improve their wellbeing^{xi}.



Smart rural futures

Smart started to be used as an adjective in the 1990s as a synonym for 'digital and connected' when applied to physical objects, e.g. smart phones. By the mid-2000s the smart adjective began to be used in relation to geographical space, in particular cities. Smart was about understanding and controlling the systems within cities. If enough data was collected and enough processing power brought to bear on it, it would be possible to manage the city efficiently. Such ideas, however, neglected the human element, the social and cultural aspect of cities. Technology was often imposed without debate and consultation. Rural was mostly absent from these debates.

This began to change as broadband and better connectivity reached rural areas, many of which are characterised by sparsity and peripherality. Many of the challenges facing rural areas are around maintaining a sufficient level of services with dwindling resources. Greater digital connectivity for rural areas has held out the hope that these challenges could be overcome^{xii}. However, significant barriers remain for rural areas if they are to fully benefit from digitalisation.

The Covid pandemic brought renewed impetus to this debate, with homeworking, online teaching and tele-health all being used to cope with the restrictions imposed by lockdown^{xiii}. In other fields, such as mobility and energy, rural areas are arguably taking a lead in testing smart and connected approaches. Rural mobility, as a service, is being trialled in several countries and seems to offer a sustainable approach to delivering rural transport solutions^{xiv}. Smart energy grids are

also being developed to help smooth the decarbonisation of heating and transport in rural areas with the additional benefit of increasing resilience^{xv}.

Whilst digital connectivity in rural areas is improving, it is still a barrier to deploying smart technology. Many smart solutions to the key challenges of rural areas need a digital foundation to build upon. This is not just about digital connectivity, such as the availability of fibre and 5G. For example, autonomous vehicles require detailed digital maps of their environment, and it is unlikely that the market will deliver these for rural areas. There is therefore a need for government to step in to correct these market failures and ensure that rural areas can share the benefits that digitalisation can bring.

Key policy messages:

- Digital technology offers significant opportunities for rural areas if it can be harnessed properly.
- Governments need to ensure the final hard-to-reach rural areas a fully digitally connected.
- The foundational technology for digital services needs to be in place for rural as well as urban areas. This then creates a platform on which digital rural services can be built.
- Involving communities in smart rural projects from the outset is important. Smart projects should be co-developed where possible.

The future of land management and the environment

...There is still confusion about how best to support our farmers and land managers who work hard to deliver the nation's food and support the provision of public goods...

Land use strategy

Around 80% of the UK is officially classified as rural and about 20% of the population live in rural areas. As well as being the home to more than 6million people, our rural areas produce around 58% of the food that we consume in the UK^{vi}, contain infrastructure that supports transport, renewable energy generation and industry, and provide a vast range of public health, wellbeing, environmental and social benefits.

Within the devolved nations of the UK, different land use planning policies and guidance are in place, inevitably leading to variations in how the land resource is managed. For example, in Scotland, the nation's Third Land Use Strategy sets out a series of objectives and policies to achieve sustainable land use, while in England the National Planning Policy Framework provides guidance on development and other planning issues but offers no coherent land use strategy. Currently Defra is committed to establishing a Land Use Commission for England which will be responsible for publishing a land use framework, but will this provide an appropriate strategic basis for future land use planning? Without such a strategy for England it will be difficult to ensure that the needs of food security, connectivity and accessibility, wellbeing and public health, and economic growth are properly balanced, while at the same time meeting statutory net zero targets.

The UK also has over 40million hectares of protected land and sea, including National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Marine Conservation Zones, which between them fulfil a range of purposes including nature conservation and the provision of landscape and amenity benefits. This figure includes around 6.9million hectares of protected land, nearly 28% of our total land area.^{vii} Despite the protection offered by designation, much of this land is still not in good ecological condition and, since 2010, funding for the management of many of these protected areas has fallen.

Recent policy priorities around nature recovery, such as the 30x30 target that aims to ensure the protection of 30% of the UK's land and sea area by 2030, may be able to reverse this situation, but for this to happen, increased funding for nature recovery in protected areas and beyond must be prioritised and nature recovery measures should be given sufficient prominence in the planning system. Such investment should be supported by an active drive to make our protected areas more relevant to the public, many of whom seldom or never visit them. I

In England, the 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan has set ambitious targets to improve the environment and to ensure that everyone in the country is within 15 minutes' walk of green space or water. However, these targets are not yet supported by clear funding plans and there is no clear vision of how any new rights of public access necessary to achieve them might be achieved.

Key policy messages:

- England needs an effective land strategy to ensure that the needs of food security, economic growth, energy production, public health and wellbeing, and the environment are properly balanced.
- Protected areas and measures for nature recovery across the UK need to be better funded and given sufficient prominence in the planning system, to ensure that they can make the best possible contribution to meeting the UK Government's 30x30 targets.
- By ensuring that our protected areas are more relevant and accessible, we can increase the scale and scope of the benefits that we get from them.

Agriculture at a crossroads

Studies have used the crossroads metaphor at times when farming faces substantial transition, such as the current once-in-a-generation policy changes and unprecedented increases in the cost of key inputs – diesel, oil, fertilizer and pesticides. The phased withdrawal of the Basic Payments Scheme (BPS), the reduction and eventual elimination of import tariffs on food, and further incentivising 'public goods' are designed to create farm businesses that are 'profitable and economically sustainable without subsidies'. There is no denying the reality that after these changes have taken effect the number of farmers will, regrettably, fall.

The many farm-specific factors involved make it difficult to identify which individual businesses are most vulnerable, but much will depend on the farm's past and current profitability and the farmer's personal and family circumstances. Those farms not dependent on BPS and equipped with efficient machinery and buildings are likely to be the least vulnerable. Farmers who have recently invested in their business can use the cash inflow from depreciation to finance general farm costs and family consumption. Others will be able to sell, or borrow against, assets. Unprofitable farms, those still dependent on BPS, or farmers without recourse to internal or external finance will be amongst the most vulnerable. Data suggests these will be the smaller upland and lowland livestock farms, and mixed (livestock and arable) farms.

After appraising personal and family circumstances farmers may decide to farm part-time. Or to leave farming voluntarily, releasing any remaining equity. Or to enter contract farming agreements, remaining farmers in name but taking a first step towards their exit. In selling up, they will release land to the surviving farmers who will gain the additional economies of scale and scope needed to reduce costs and diversify their cropping should agro-ecological systems prove their worth. It will be those farmers who have already accepted that government need not always be involved in agriculture that will be the most likely survivors.

Key policy messages

- Defra should remove the £99,875 cap on the 'lump sum' paid to farmers who wish to exit and farmers in financial difficulty should receive additional support, e.g. debt write off and relocation grants and training to reskill.
- The scope of the Future Farming Resilience Fund should expand to help identify and assist vulnerable businesses assessed as being commercially viable.
- Grants should become available to businesses that provide the essential infrastructure farmers need to diversify, for example, livestock auction markets and hauliers, and small abattoir providers of 'private kill' services.
- There must be no 'funding gap' between the withdrawal of the BPS, the availability of technology and diversification grants, and the rolling out of Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes (the replacement agri-environment scheme).
- ELM must be environmentally effective so public money delivers significant environmental benefits including mitigating greenhouse gas emission from farming and land use.



Farm in Coquetdale, Northumberland National Park
- ©Alasdair Mackenzie



Co-designing environmental futures

At the heart of the 2020 Agriculture Act sit proposals for a comprehensive overhaul of subsidies and support for farmers. In England, Defra has set out how various initiatives, including a series of new ELM schemes, will replace the direct payments currently paid to farmers. Seen as an attempt to build on previous agri-environment schemes and avoid some of their failings, ELM focuses on paying farmers 'public money for public goods'. Priority public goods include thriving plants and wildlife, clean water and air, protection from environmental hazards, climate change adaptation, and beauty, heritage, and engagement with the environment. But how might farmers deliver these public goods and what might be needed to make this a success?

Recent work in CRE has explored this with a group of upland farmers in Northumberland working alongside Natural England and Northumberland National Park Authority as part of one of Defra's Test and Trial projects to co-design the new ELM schemes^{viii}.

The land managers in the group were responsible for holdings covering almost a third of the National Park area and were already experienced in public goods delivery. Through a series of 10 workshops they worked individually and then collectively to develop delivery plans

which identified existing and potential public goods delivery, priority actions, approaches to payments, monitoring, advice and support and opportunities for collaboration. Our research revealed the range of public goods already produced and untapped potential for land managers to produce more. Keen to avoid replicating the pitfalls of previous schemes, the land managers expressed a desire for a straightforward payment system, combining payment for activity with payment by result and which rewarded existing as well as future delivery of a range of public goods.

For land managers to understand existing public good delivery and potential opportunities, they require trusted sources of advice and support and timely and accurate data to assist their decision-making. Public good provision needs to contribute to a robust, vibrant, and profitable rural economy and sustaining and enhancing upland communities and livelihoods must play a major role in this.

Key policy messages:

- Public good delivery is a balancing act between public and private interests – understanding this is key to the design and implementation of future ELM schemes.
- A straightforward payment system is needed that adequately rewards both existing and future delivery of public goods.
- Farmers need trusted expertise and for their expertise to be trusted.
- Engaging farmers in scheme design as well as delivery could significantly assist uptake. It is important farmers see the influence they have had on development of ELM: this would lend credibility to current and future schemes and could positively influence others to engage.
- Prioritising ELM investment in upland National Parks could optimise return on the investment of public money for public goods. Farm livelihoods in these areas are inextricably linked to public good production and it is important that this is recognised and rewarded.

Managing endemic livestock disease

Endemic livestock diseases are costly, complex health problems, which negatively affect the welfare of animals, reduce farm profitability, increase the environmental footprint of agriculture, and can affect the quality of livestock products^{xix}. Addressing these is a priority issue for Defra, as outlined in recent proposals through the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway (AHWP), yet to do so effectively requires a better understanding as to why these conditions persist in the first instance. Recent work by researchers in CRE has explored why these conditions persist, and how their prevalence could be reduced in UK farming as part of a wider interdisciplinary project on endemic disease^{xxi}.

In-depth interviews were conducted with farmers and advisors based in the North of England, focusing on the persistence of endemic conditions in cattle and sheep, with a particular focus on Bovine Viral Diarrhea (BVD) and lameness, two conditions targeted for reduction in the AHWP.

For farmers, our findings indicate several physical, social, and psychological challenges to the implementation of best practice advice surrounding endemic conditions. Time and financial constraints often act as a barrier to implementation. Farm infrastructure/environment can prevent best practice management especially where outdated buildings and facilities or a lack of appropriate equipment make change difficult. Tailoring responses to local context is also important, as best practice measures may be inappropriate and their application may vary between farms.

The time needed to make sustainable change also needs to be considered. For some endemic conditions, like lameness, their chronic nature and cultural inevitability can make management feel like an overwhelming challenge.

For advisory professionals, our findings also indicate an evolving role for farm veterinarians as they combine reactive treatment and knowledge transfer with more proactive veterinary medicine based around behavioural change techniques such as coaching and mentoring, and the creation of specific protocols guiding how care for animals should be affected. Our findings also highlight concern regarding sufficient capacity and expertise of advisors in some areas which could make implementation of Defra's proposals in the pathway specifically regarding an annual vet visit more challenging.

Key policy messages:

Future schemes tackling endemic diseases need to:

- Consider suitable time frames to enable sustainable change and a realistic reduction in disease/condition incidence to be achieved;
- Be flexible to individual farm contexts whilst achieving minimally-acceptable levels;
- Support ongoing relationships between farmers and their advisors; and
- Be appropriately resourced to enable vets to deliver the level of service required and farmers to implement management change.



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A panel representing industry, local government, land stewardship and farming discussed the major challenges in rural over the next 30 years at the anniversary celebration.

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