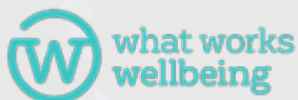# DEFINING AND MEASURING RURAL WELLBEING

GUIDANCE FOR DEFRA POLICYMAKERS AND EVALUATORS

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Creating Connections
Hopkins Van Mil

what works wellbeing

CENTRE FOR THRIVING PLACES

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past decade wellbeing has moved up agendas across all areas of government and civil society, a trend that has only been magnified by the recent global pandemic. There is growing evidence and understanding about the impact of policy and initiatives on the wellbeing of individuals, communities and even future generations.

The emerging body of research shows that our wellbeing is influenced by numerous factors. This apparent complexity has long been a barrier to consistently valuing and measuring wellbeing as an intentional and vital outcome of policy. There has also been little research focused on the specific influence of rurality on individual and community wellbeing, and in many cases less data to support better decision making in rural policy and practice.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) commissioned this research from Centre for Thriving Places (CTP) to begin to plug this important gap. The project set out to identify the particular aspects (domains) of the social and natural environment that influence the wellbeing of individuals living in rural areas, and their relative importance. The aim is to support a more rigorous and pragmatic approach to embedding wellbeing principles and outcomes in policy design and evaluation. The research had three specific objectives:

1. To identify domains of rural wellbeing, through assessment of existing academic evidence and engagement with rural communities to understand rural wellbeing.

2. To assess and review the use of secondary and primary data sources to measure the identified domains of rural wellbeing.

3. To assess the feasibility of developing a rural wellbeing evaluation guidance (or 'toolkit'); identifying further work which may be required to provide guidance, through testing with rural policy staff and wellbeing and rural experts.

Between October 2020 and March 2021 CTP worked closely with Defra to deliver these outcomes via a rapid evidence assessment and a broad consultation with diverse communities and experts and practitioners in the field.

Key findings

Many aspects of our wellbeing are shared between rural and urban settings. The basics of what we need to sustain life and to promote mental health and flourishing are largely shared across geographies. Almost all wellbeing frameworks, such as the [Thriving Places Index](#) which formed the baseline for much of this research, cover core elements including economic, social and natural capital. We need housing, healthcare, educational opportunities, access to transport, care and other key services, a source of income, clean air and green spaces, and a community to support us.

While rural wellbeing may not be unique, there are different influences across rural life that magnify common challenges or amplify the impact of particular local conditions. This report sets out in detail the findings from the evidence reviews, the available data and the consultation with stakeholders. This has resulted in a new Rural Wellbeing Framework (RWF or the framework) to support decision makers across all sectors to take wellbeing outcomes into account at every stage of policy planning and delivery.
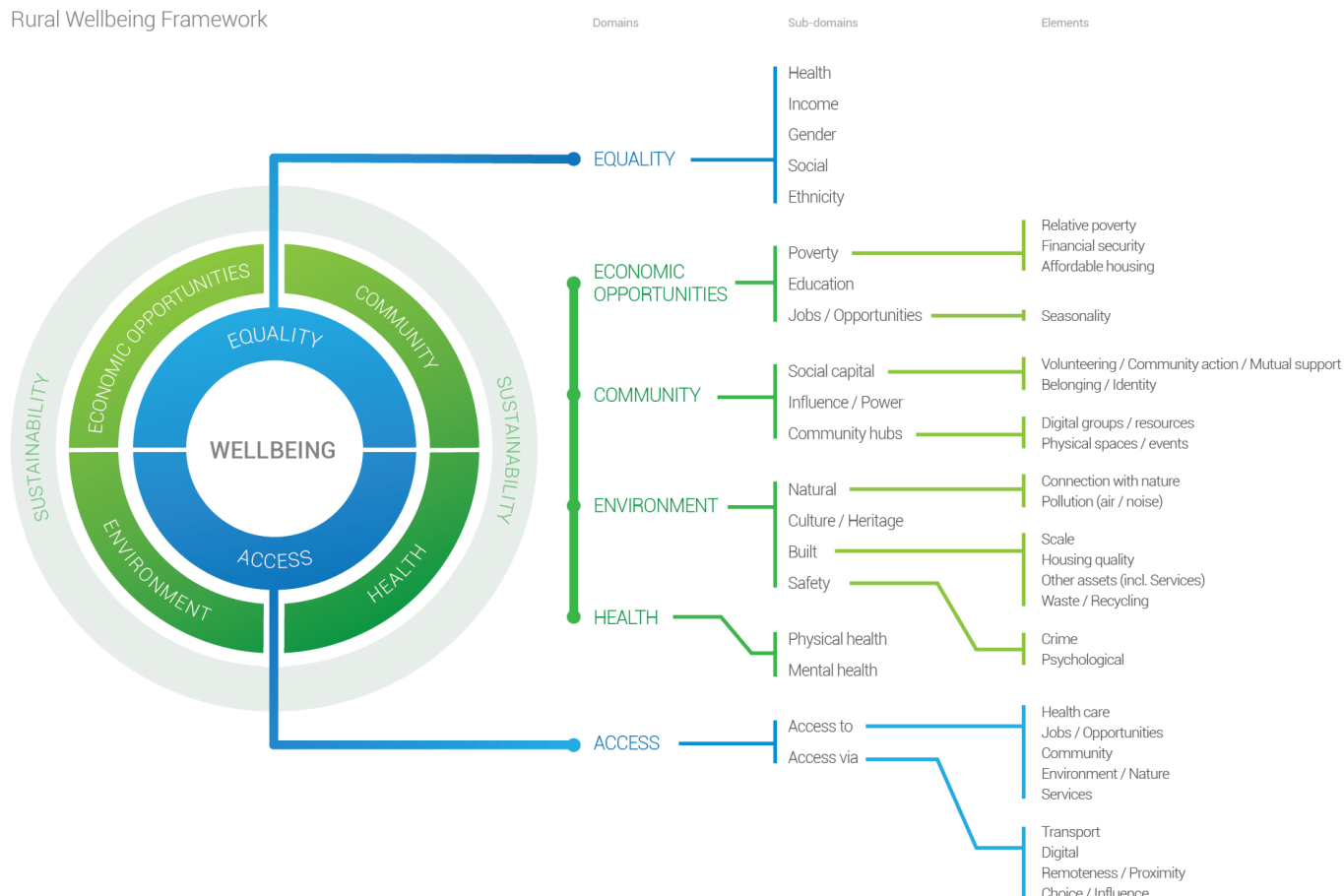
Figure 1: Rural Wellbeing Framework, domains and subdomains

The elements of this framework that are key to wellbeing in rural areas include:

Economic Opportunities: while the overall health of the economy is an important driver for rural wellbeing, it is having economic opportunities that mattered specifically to rural communities that participated in the research. Therefore, this domain summarises important factors around education opportunities, financial security and the specific impacts of rural poverty and seasonality on jobs, services and housing.

Community: a strong community is a universal driver of wellbeing, and this importance was reflected in all parts of this research. Both geographic and social communities were included, combining social capital, sense of belonging, participation and power and influence over one's life.

Environment: proximity to nature is a key driver in rural wellbeing as would be expected, but the research findings meant that this domain also encompasses culture and heritage, as well as the built environment and safety.

Health: physical and mental health are key drivers of personal wellbeing in rural areas (as they are in non-rural locations), so health is included in the framework.

Perhaps the most consistent and important finding across ALL elements of this new framework was the **vital role of access** (and equity of access both within rural and between urban and rural areas) when considering wellbeing in a rural context. It is both a key enabler and a regular barrier to wellbeing for rural communities. In this report (and within the framework) we have suggested Access and Equality are seen as lenses through which to understand wellbeing outcomes for policy.

Access needs to be considered both in terms of *access to* other domains of the framework (so access to services, jobs, support etc) and *access via* key enablers (to providing access via things like transport, digital connectivity etc).

In project delivery and policy development, both the existence and quality of access need to be understood and measured overall and in terms of how equitably they are delivered.

Equality – also referred to as fairness or inclusiveness – is another key enabler. Life stages, capabilities and characteristics all play a role in whether a person might or might not have equal access to what enables their wellbeing.

The evaluation guidance provided in this report explores how projects and policies can assess their level of access and equity.

Finally, the framework includes a lens of **sustainability**. Despite a lack of research on the direct impact of key sustainability metrics on the wellbeing of current rural communities, ignoring the sustainability of rural policy and practice risks undermining the wellbeing of future generations in rural areas so should always be considered.

Recommendations and next steps

This project started out as a feasibility study, to explore the scope for developing further research, guidance and toolkits to measure, understand and improve rural wellbeing. The urgency of the task to better place wellbeing outcomes at the heart of new policy, planning and practice for rural communities means that this report goes beyond that initial scope. It includes the RWF and the evidence behind it **and** initial guidance, tools and support for evaluators, policymakers and practitioners to use the framework in their work, and to find and use data to support that.

While there is a wide range of areas for further development of our understanding of rural wellbeing, including significant data and research gaps to be filled (outlined in Appendix 4) and many more opportunities for further development of the framework and a wider toolkit for practitioners (outlined below), it is important that wellbeing is considered now and we learn, develop, improve and embed the knowledge, data and processes from here.

For that to happen, this report includes focused chapters on the role and use of the RWF, background on the research findings in each domain, guidance and initial tools for using the framework for evaluation, and guidance on gathering and using better data to support wellbeing outcomes in rural policy. There is also a wealth of more detailed information and resources in the Appendices to ensure the rigour and findings from this research can be built upon and used by academics, experts, policymakers and rural practitioners in years to come.

We believe all of the following recommendations help with extending and maximising impact from this work.

- A Data Tool. The indicator bank could become a digital/online 'tool' or even an index to be of wider use. It could also be extended to become more like a policy advice data bank as seen in New Zealand's Living Standards Framework work. This would build on good practice already shown as far back as 2008/9 by Defra with its sustainable development 'stretching the web' spreadsheet tool.

- An accessible user-friendly roadmap. The final toolkit or roadmap; would benefit from additional design and inclusion of detailed case studies to improve usability and broaden and deepen use across diverse rural community work.

- Evaluation Navigation Aid. A detailed navigation aid for the evaluation process would greatly improve wellbeing measurement. This could be standalone or part of the final toolkit/roadmap.

- Community Engagement Guidance. Guidance on the level, type and quality of community engagement advocated by Defra for rural wellbeing projects will have a significant impact on how wellbeing success is/can be measured.

- Research to fill evidence gaps. The research unearthed a range of areas where there simply isn't enough evidence to fully assess the need or impact of work on rural communities in particular. It is recommended the future research projects focus on filling some of these key evidence gaps including:

  - Drivers of wellbeing of the working age population in rural areas: this includes more detailed data on employment, access to services, social capital
  - Education and Learning more broadly, over and above access to formal education
  - Belonging and identity across the adult age population
  - Rural pollution

- Collaboration for more rural data. Defra could work more closely with ONS or others on gathering more rural relevant data.

- Central Survey Boosting. It is worth exploring the scope for centrally boosting key surveys or collecting primary data at postcode level to support the filling of key data gaps for rural wellbeing. This is likely to be much more resource efficient than relying on each area to do this.

Supporting the capacity for individuals and communities to thrive, now and into the future, is the ultimate outcome of government and the wider economy. Ensuring that rural communities are enabled to access the means to their own wellbeing is an urgent and important task. We hope this report and the information and tools it provides, will be a helpful step towards that goal at this crucial time for the world.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Wellbeing has been rising up the agenda, across public, private and voluntary sectors in recent years. Understanding the impact of policy and initiatives on the wellbeing of individuals, communities and even future generations is becoming an increasingly important element of the policy cycle.[1]

Yet wellbeing outcomes are rarely simple or easily predictable. Our wellbeing is influenced by numerous factors including the context and environment in which we live and work. Our circumstances – personal, financial, social, physical and relational – all influence our ability to thrive.[2] Such complexity has for too long been a barrier to consistently valuing and measuring wellbeing as an intentional and vital outcome of policy.

Recent years have seen a growth in the understanding of the drivers of wellbeing to support better decision making across sectors and communities in the UK and beyond.[3] However, while there is increasing evidence that elements of rurality can have a significant impact on wellbeing;[4] much less research has been undertaken to understand the specifics of wellbeing of people in rural areas.

The Rural Wellbeing Framework (RWF) created through this project aims to start to fill this gap in understanding, to support a greater focus on wellbeing in rural policy and practice. Existing frameworks and measures for wellbeing exist, such as the Thriving Place Index (TPI).[5] Apart from a newly developed rural deprivation index,[6] based on a rapid evidence assessment, there are no existing established wellbeing frameworks or measures that address the particular needs of UK rural communities (see Appendix S1).

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) commissioned this research to identify the particular aspects (domains) of the social and natural environment that influence the wellbeing of individuals living in rural areas, and their relative importance. This project had three specific objectives:

1. To identify domains of rural wellbeing, through assessment of existing academic evidence and engagement with rural communities to understand rural wellbeing.
2. To assess and review the use of secondary and primary data sources to measure the identified domains of rural wellbeing.
3. To assess the feasibility of developing a rural wellbeing evaluation guidance (or 'toolkit'); identifying further work which may be required to provide guidance, through testing with rural policy staff and wellbeing and rural experts.

Between October 2020 and March 2021 Centre for Thriving Places (CTP) worked closely with Defra to produce the following:

A Rural Wellbeing Framework
This framework is designed to summarise the key drivers and conditions for rural wellbeing. It is intended to be used to support better understanding, planning, decision-making and evaluation of interventions in rural areas to maximise benefits to wellbeing. The framework is based on two rounds of Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), eight workshops with people from different rural communities and rural and wellbeing expert feedback (see Section 1.3 for an overview and Appendix 1 for full detail).

A Rural Evidence Review File

The evidence behind each domain and subdomain of the framework is captured in the Rural Evidence Review File. A summary can be found in Section 4, and the full file – containing all research papers reviewed as part of this project based on papers published since 2010 in the UK focusing on wellbeing in rural areas – can be found in the accompanying Evidence Review File.

An Indicator Bank
Following a comprehensive review of available data to match the RWF domains, a bank of suitable indicators was created. Within project evaluations, they can be used as proxies for a variety of rural wellbeing outcomes from levels of employment or volunteering to quality of housing stock and availability of community assets (see Section 5 and the accompanying Data Attribution Record).

Guide to Evaluating Rural Wellbeing
To ensure the RWF is aligned with existing evaluation guidance and to support its use for evaluation, Section 3 of this report also outlines a number of key exercises evaluators should consider when looking at the impact that rural interventions have on the wellbeing of communities and individuals.

We hope the findings of this report will support evaluators, policymakers and project planners to better understand the wellbeing implications of their work, measure their wellbeing impacts and learn and adapt their work to grow wellbeing across rural areas.

1.2   How to use this report

The report aims to support and guide people developing policies for rural areas and evaluators of rural projects or policies to incorporate wellbeing into their plans and evaluation. It is also relevant for wider policies that need to consider impact upon rural areas, especially with regards to wellbeing of communities and individuals. The type, scale, size and timing of a project or policy will mean that different elements of this report will be more or less useful.

Policymakers and those delivering projects in rural areas with a less technical interest in evaluation might be particularly interested in Section 2 of this report, which gives a practical overview of what matters most to wellbeing in rural areas. It goes into detail about what drives rural wellbeing; as such, the framework is relevant whether wellbeing is a specified project outcome or simply for any rural policy hoping to avoid negative impact on wellbeing. Section 3 gives more detail on the wellbeing evaluation of a project, including a worked example showing how the guidance can be used.

The findings and guidance should be used within the context of the whole report – individual aspects that underpin them should not be used outside their intended context (for example our qualitative research is designed to add valuable insights and reflections from rural participants, not to make generalisations to all rural communities).

Report contents by section

- Section 2 gives background information about wellbeing concepts in general and presents the RWF

- Section 3 suggests exercises that can be undertaken when evaluating wellbeing impacts in a rural area over and above standard evaluation guidance

- Section 4 details the research behind the domains of rural wellbeing based on a rapid evidence assessment, workshops with rural residents and feedback from experts

- Section 5 describes the process of reviewing secondary data to build an indicator bank for rural wellbeing as well as reviewing gaps

- Section 6 concludes the report

- The Technical Appendices is a separate document also available from the Defra website. It contains:

    - A1 Detailed overall research methodology

    - A2, A3 The Rapid Evidence Review in detail

    - A4 Detailed evidence findings all research

    - A5 Analysis of the Thriving Places Index by rural vs urban

    - A6, A7 Workshop outputs

    - A8 Recommendations

Report contents by interest

Understanding what drives rural wellbeing
        Limited time or looking for a general overview ➜ SECTION 2, PAGE 11
        More time or need to understand detail ➜ SECTION 4, PAGE 31; Appendix 4, PAGE 17

Understanding how your project or policy might impact on wellbeing
        For an overview ➜ SECTION 2, PAGE 11
        For exercises that will help you think it through ➜ SECTION 3.1 and 3.2, PAGE 16

Evaluating a project or policy with wellbeing as an outcome
        Go to ➜ SECTION 3, PAGE 16

How to evaluate the wellbeing of participants
        At individual level ➜ SECTION 3.3, PAGE 23 and 5.3, PAGE 53

How to measure conditions that enable wellbeing
        For an overview ➜ SECTION 3.4, PAGE 24
        For detail ➜ SECTION 5, PAGE 46

1.3   Method

Figure 2 gives a brief overview of the methods used in each stage of the research which resulted in all the project outcomes listed above. A detailed research methodology can be found in Appendix 1. Findings from each stage of the project (referred to as S1 to S7 below) were presented to Defra and their feedback, along with regular internal progress meetings, informed each step alongside the specific workshops highlighted in the graphic below.

Figure 2: Summary of research methodology

S1 Rapid Evidence Assessment
- Protocol agreed with Defra
- 2,508 studies screened
- Evidence extracted from 51 papers / 5 grey literature

Informed development

Rural wellbeing domain framework v1
TESTED

S2 Rural Communities Workshops
- 56 people, 4 different rural topologies, attended 2 workshops
- (1) inductive workshop and (2) building on findings from workshop 1 alongside framework

Informed refinement

Rural wellbeing domain framework v2
VERIFIED

S3 Further Evidence Review
- Further focused searches based on workshop findings
- Evidence extracted to update framework

Informed refinement

Rural wellbeing domain framework v3
TESTED

S4 Workshops with Experts
- Workshop held with 17 policy practitioners and experts
- 5 additional experts consulted
- Framework reviewed and feedback captured

Informed refinement

Rural wellbeing domain framework v4
Informed development

S5 Data Attribution
- Over 20 data providers reviewed inc. Thriving Places Index
- Longlist of 145 indicators, prioritised to shortlist of 54
- Recommendation made for survey boosts to fill gaps

Development

Indicator bank v1
TESTED

S6 Testing
- Workshop to test framework with 3 interventions
- Workshop also fed back on usability of indicator bank, wider approach and toolkit concept

INFORMED REFINEMENT

S7 Final Report
- Methodology
- Domain evidence summary
- Toolkit feasibility

FINAL OUTPUTS
- Indicator bank
- Rural wellbeing domain framework
- Evidence review file

Findings reviewed internally with Defra feedback at each stage

2.0 RURAL WELLBEING FRAMEWORK

The RWF is the key outcome of the research undertaken by Centre for Thriving Places (CTP) for Defra. If you only have time to read one section of the report, this framework provides an overview of the learning from this research. Below is an introduction to wellbeing, a summary of the RWF and guidance on the role(s) of a wellbeing framework.

2.1   An introduction to wellbeing

The broadest definition of wellbeing is how we are doing as individuals, communities and as a nation, and how sustainable our wellbeing is for the future[7]. While this is an important frame for thinking about wellbeing, for the purposes of this research we have focused on the narrower definitions of personal and community wellbeing below in order to draw out with more clarity the key *drivers* of rural wellbeing, the local conditions and contexts that most influence individual and community wellbeing, as distinct from wellbeing itself.

We use personal wellbeing as defined by What Works Centre for Wellbeing as 'how satisfied we are with our lives, our sense that what we do in life is worthwhile, our day to day emotional experiences (happiness and anxiety) and our wider mental wellbeing'[8]. This definition aligns with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) definition and underpins our design and execution of the research.

While the drivers of individual wellbeing of those living in rural areas may have many similarities with those for urban areas, our hypothesis was that local conditions moderate the relationship between the drivers and wellbeing outcomes in these very different settings. In the context of rural projects or policies it is important to recognise and consider how external conditions or personal resources for individual wellbeing might be influenced (see Figure 3).
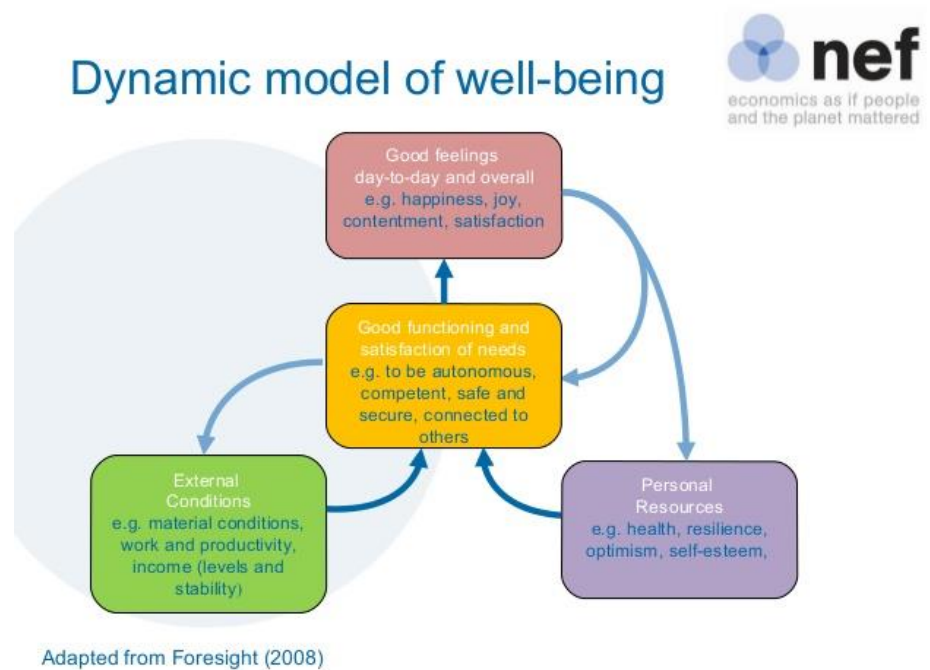

Figure 3: The Dynamic Model of Wellbeing, NEF[9]

Individual wellbeing differs from community wellbeing, which is seen as 'the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential'[10]. As the model *Theory of Change for Community Wellbeing*, developed for the What Works Centre for Wellbeing shows, in addition to the things that drive individual wellbeing, when we think about the collective of a community there is evidence to show that how individuals relate to each other within their community and the level of influence that that they have over decisions for their community also influences collective wellbeing.

This model includes a focus on creating long-term outcomes, which aligns with the Green Book approach of creating Public Value.

Note: by **community** this report refers to the geographical community, or place, which is represented by a geographical output area – these are small area statistics used primarily for census analysis by the ONS; or ward – the primary unit used for electoral geography. Although the use of such geographical definitions of community may leave out individuals' personal perceptions of what their community is, it will likely allow for representations of small towns and villages, and a rapid and consistent identification of communities across the UK.

Figure 4: Theory of Change, Community Wellbeing, Source: What Works Centre for Wellbeing

2.2 The Rural Wellbeing Framework

A wellbeing framework can be a powerful tool in itself. With or without the detailed data picture behind it, a framework can act as a conceptual model to understand what drivers support people and places to thrive. A key outcome of this project is a way to visualise and understand rural wellbeing. Our research found that this is not a singular set of outcomes in terms of life satisfaction, but drivers that can support the growth in capacity for wellbeing in rural communities.

As well as supporting evaluations, the RWF can help to assess local needs, map local strengths, engage stakeholders and communities and galvanise local partnerships and collaborations to maximise rural wellbeing.

It outlines the 'what' in terms of the local conditions for wellbeing, and adds to that the vital lens of 'how' we are delivering those conditions. Are we providing the best chance for individual and community wellbeing to grow in this place, and are we doing that in a way that widens access, reduces inequality and protects the planet so the wellbeing of future generations is also enabled?

The research into rural wellbeing (see Section 4) found that while the drivers of wellbeing are largely the same in rural areas as they are elsewhere, their weighting and priority are different. In the absence of comprehensive quantitative studies into the weighting of drivers for rural wellbeing, the framework highlights the domains and subdomains which were identified as most important through the research undertaken as part of this project and detailed in Section 4.

The key domains we identified from our analysis of existing evidence for rural wellbeing are depicted in Figure 5 below. A detailed description of the domains and subdomains in the framework and how they were derived can be found in Section 4.

Economic opportunities: while economy is an important driver for rural wellbeing, it is having economic opportunities that mattered specifically to rural communities that participated in the research. While the economy itself is still important, this domain summarises important factors around education opportunities, financial security, rural poverty and seasonality impacting on jobs and housing.

Community: this domain reflects the importance of both a geographic and social community, combining social capital, sense of belonging, participation and power.

Environment: proximity to nature is a key driver in rural wellbeing, but this domain also encompasses culture and heritage, as well as the built environment and safety.

Health: physical and mental health are key drivers of personal wellbeing in rural areas (no different to non-rural locations).

Figure 5: Framework for Rural Wellbeing

Alongside these wellbeing domains sit two vital lenses through which to view wellbeing:

Access plays a key role in rural areas to enable wellbeing. Access needs to be considered both in terms of *access to* other domains of the framework (services, jobs, support etc) and *access via* key enablers (transport, digital etc). In project delivery and policy development, both the existence and quality of access need to be understood.

Equality – also referred to as fairness or inclusiveness – is another key enabler. Life stages, capabilities and characteristics all play a role in whether a person might or might not have equal access to what enables their wellbeing. In Section 3.2 below, the evaluation guidance explores how projects and policies can assess their level of equity.
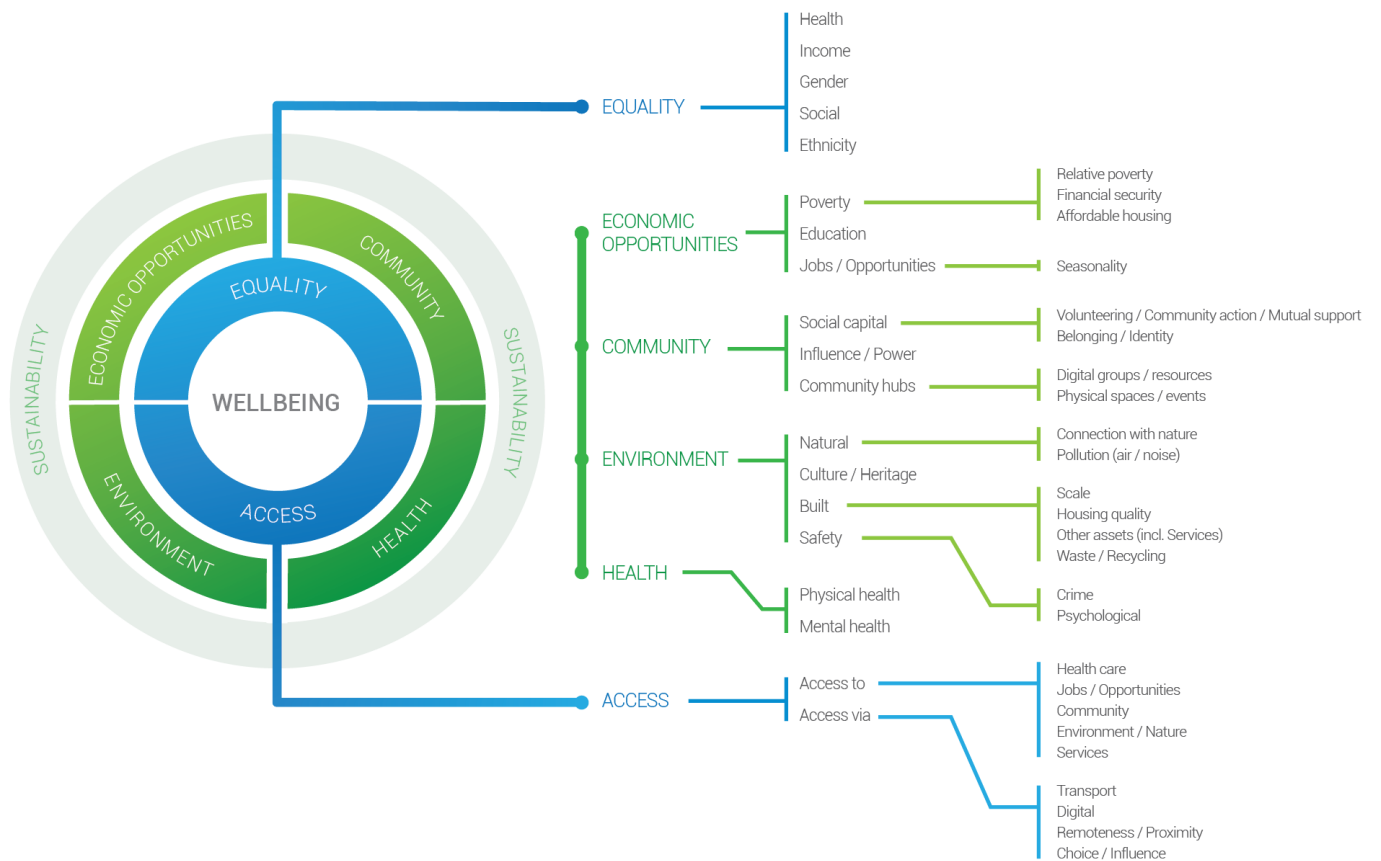
Figure 6: Rural Wellbeing Framework, domains and subdomains

2.3   The role(s) of a wellbeing framework

A wellbeing framework can have a wide range of roles within policy development, delivery and evaluation. One of the roles of the RWF is as a lens to use at the start of policy or practice development: focusing on the end goals of what matters to individuals, as well as the known drivers and influencers. This can elevate elements of the local context that need to be included in design to maximise end impact. The Treasury's Green Book[11] advises that considering wellbeing at the strategic case stage of the appraisal process can help to broaden the focus beyond monetary benefits to a more holistic case.

This RWF is intended to be used as part of the ROAMEF (Rationale, Objective, Appraisal, Monitoring, Evaluation, Feedback) Cycle, as set out in the Treasury's Green Book. The framework can help reflect on how to use wellbeing in appraisal in the following ways:

- Rationale: when reflecting on the question 'why is the government intervening?', answering based on the impacts on wellbeing or the known drivers of wellbeing across the four domains, can highlight impacts that may not be considered if viewed from a top-down economic, environmental or social lens. Wellbeing data and evidence, as well as conceptualisations of equality and access, can also broaden the insight that is available to define the essence of the problem.
- Objective: articulating success through a wellbeing lens asks those in policy to view the end goal of a policy or intervention from the perspective of the community in question. It foregrounds their voice, using an established theory and framework – such as the RWF to guide how questions of priorities are asked. The indicator bank and measurement guidance that accompany this framework provide insight into how drivers of wellbeing, or subjective wellbeing itself, can be measured.
- Appraisal: planning a policy or intervention from the perspective of the wellbeing of communities can help to think through an issue in broader terms. What Works Centre for Wellbeing has a series of policy appraisal tools[12]. The Treasury's Green Book also now includes guidance[13] on appraisal of non-monetised impacts. Supplementary guidance on valuation of wellbeing is due to be published in May 2021.
- Monitoring: as in objective setting, the accompanying indicator bank can provide data sources and tools for ongoing monitoring against wellbeing subdomains.
- Evaluation: the guidance in Section 3 of this report, alongside the indicator bank, Magenta Book[14] as well as guidance from What Works Centre for Wellbeing[15] can be used to design evaluation activities which understand the extent to which policies and interventions have impacted on subjective wellbeing, as well as the individual domains of relevance.
- Feedback: the Magenta Book provides a comprehensive overview of how to use the findings of evaluation.

As outlined in Section 2.1, wellbeing is complex; the Complexity Evaluation Framework used by Defra sits alongside the RWF. The drivers of wellbeing are non-linear and subject to the characteristics of complex systems, such as feedbacks, path-dependencies and adaptations. The Complexity Evaluation Framework provides detailed and additional guidance on how to structure evaluation activities within complex systems.

3.0 WELLBEING EVALUATION GUIDANCE

Drawing on the RWF, this section proposes a series of exercises to undertake when planning an evaluation involving rural wellbeing. However, the section will also help those seeking to assess the potential wellbeing impact of a new rural policy, or retrospectively understand what wellbeing impacts an intervention might have had.

Each subsection has exercises to help embed wellbeing outcomes above and beyond the general evaluation guidance provided by Defra or other government departments. Testing conducted with Defra project teams confirmed the exercises are a helpful contribution to rural wellbeing evaluations both in the planning and delivery stage, as well as assessing or reviewing unintended wellbeing impacts.

The evaluation guidance is in beta form to reflect that, whilst further work could be done to quantify relative weighting of factors, including in different rural contexts, it is one that we have confidence in people using to identify key areas to consider when implementing and evaluating policies in rural communities, and to identify where engagement with rural communities might be focussed.

The final subsection (3.5) contains a worked example of the exercises based on the MANY project focusing on digital access in rural Yorkshire.

Appendix 7 contains additional recommendations that emerged through the testing. The exercises suggested here make the RWF practically useful, but additional work (as outlined in the appendix) is needed to provide a more definitive evaluation toolkit.

> Blue boxes highlight tips and useful tools within and outside of this report

> Orange boxes outline specific exercises that will help to relate evaluation work to the RWF. These should be seen in addition to other, more generic evaluation guidance.

3.1 Wellbeing context

Understanding context and infrastructure around local rural wellbeing

The first step in evaluating wellbeing impacts is to assess and understand the context and conditions in which interventions are planned. To fully understand the local context and priorities of rural communities, policymakers and practitioners should engage the community in the planning stage of wellbeing projects, policies and interventions. A specific project summary focusing on wellbeing helps to clarify the key points in relation to wellbeing and evaluation (see exercise below).

- If you are at the beginning of your project, you might not have clarified the evaluation plans for your project but your answers to the questions below will help you identify what is needed (which might initially be only 'understanding the context').

- If your project is further developed and you have more clarity on elements, evaluation guidance such as the Magenta Book will help you make appropriate method choices for the scale and type of your project.
- If wellbeing is a key outcome of your project but it is not measured or you have not undertaken any community engagement for example, you might want to consider doing so.

In all cases, consider your project impacts in direct relationship to the RWF domains to understand what matters most to rural communities for their wellbeing.

An example of both exercises is illustrated in Section 3.5 below.

EXERCISE

This exercise is intended to be undertaken at the planning stage or start of a project/policy, ideally involving both project delivery and evaluation teams. However, it is also recommended when reviewing the wellbeing impacts of a project during project delivery or after completion.

Project Wellbeing Summary Checklist

☐ Aim: *In a short sentence, what is the aim of your project, how does this include wellbeing?*

☐ Context: *Geographic area, participants/beneficiaries, wellbeing challenges, project scale*

☐ Community engagement: *Wellbeing priorities are best understood through communities, outline what if any community engagement has been done*

☐ Timeline: *Start and end of the project*

☐ Wellbeing: *Is this explicitly part of your project/policy? If not, how does it fit in?*

☐ Evaluation: *Is there an evaluation programme? Does it incorporate wellbeing?*

Impact on rural wellbeing

Which of the rural wellbeing domains will your project impact on? Start by circling the domains where you are expecting direct impacts as well as indirect ones. Using the table below, provide further detail about the impacts, e.g. is it the domain/sub-domain exactly or something closely related, will you be able to measure these etc.

Rural Wellbeing Framework

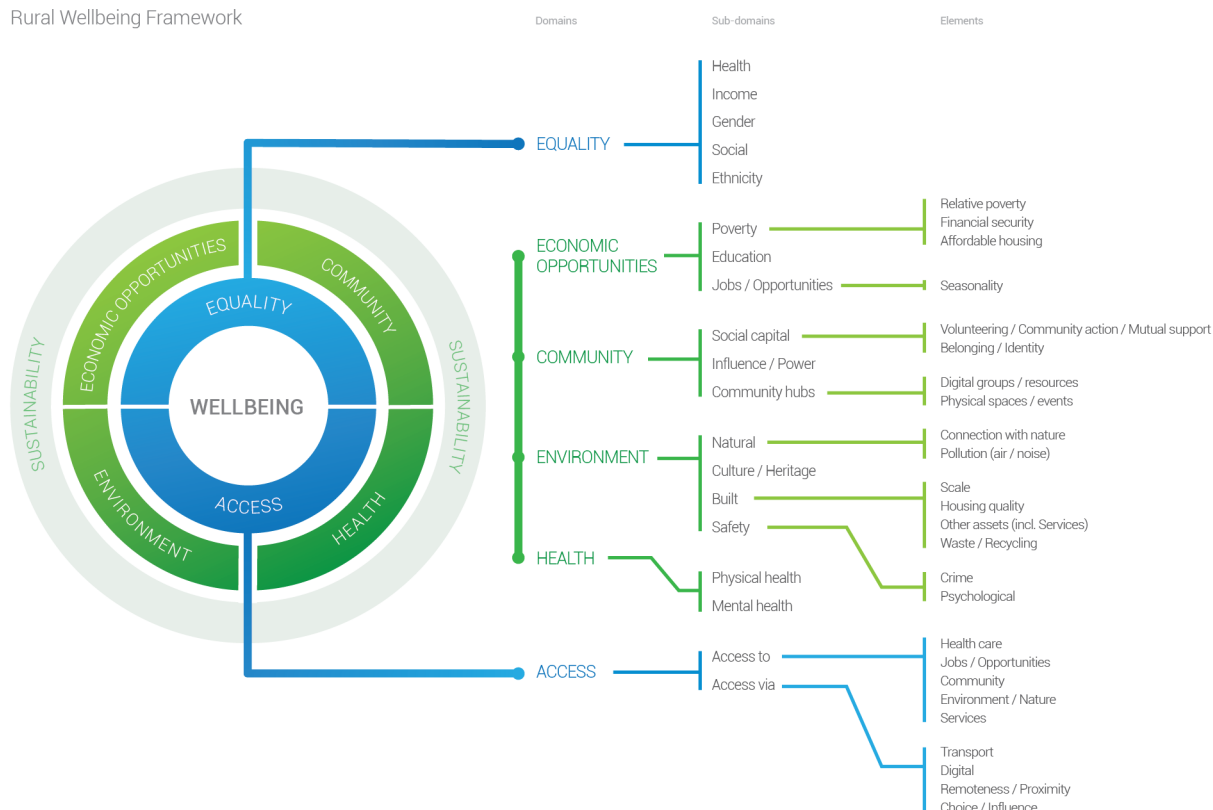| Domains	Sub-domains	Elements
EQUALITY	Health	
	Income	
	Gender	
	Social	
	Ethnicity	
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES	Poverty	Relative poverty / Financial security / Affordable housing
	Education	
	Jobs / Opportunities	Seasonality
COMMUNITY	Social capital	Volunteering / Community action / Mutual support / Belonging / Identity
	Influence / Power	
	Community hubs	Digital groups / resources / Physical spaces / events
ENVIRONMENT	Natural	Connection with nature / Pollution (air / noise)
	Culture / Heritage	
	Built	Scale / Housing quality / Other assets (incl. Services) / Waste / Recycling
	Safety	
HEALTH	Physical health	Crime / Psychological
	Mental health	
ACCESS	Access to	Health care / Jobs / Opportunities / Community / Environment / Nature / Services
	Access via	Transport / Digital / Remoteness / Proximity / Choice / Influence

Figure 7: Rural Wellbeing Framework

Please note the key areas of impact, which can be at any level of the framework. Differentiate between direct and indirect outcomes or impact[1]. If your project has a lot of

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[1] For example, your direct outcomes might be improving digital connectivity (access digital) in a rural area, indirectly this might impact on traffic flow (access transport) if digital connectivity is used to manage transport better.

impacts on wellbeing, it might be useful to concentrate where it is likely to have the highest impacts which are likely to be measured (see Section 3.2).

Domain	Subdomain	Element	Notes
Economic Opportunities	Poverty	• Relative poverty • Financial security • Affordable housing	
	Education		
	Jobs/ opportunities	• Seasonality	
Community	Social capital	• Volunteering/ Community action/Mutual support • Belonging/Identity	
	Influence/ Power		
	Community hubs	• Digital groups/Resources • Physical spaces/Events	
Environment	Natural environment	• Connection with nature • Pollution (air/noise)	
	Culture/Heritage		
	Built	• Scale • Housing quality • Other assets (incl. Services) • Waste/Recycling	
	Safety	• Crime • Psychological	
Health	Physical health		
	Mental health		

3.2   Interconnections

Interconnections in rural wellbeing

This step gives a couple of key activities/reflection tasks that can help you to better understand the interconnections and (un)intended outcomes between wellbeing domains. The research detailed in Section 4 suggests that in rural settings, unintended outcomes can have an amplified negative effect due to remoteness and sparsity[2]. There are [established methods](#) to assess impacts on individual wellbeing, even if they can be perceived as complex[3].

The **Access via/to reflection exercise** can help projects clearly identify what role access has in interventions. Access is a core driver for rural wellbeing (see Section 4) and it is recommended to consider it even if it is not an outcome of the project or policy.

The Equity impacts exercise below is based on research (detailed in Section 4) that showed specific rural equality challenges. It can be expanded to help think about where projects might have their key impacts, or work to mitigate negative outcomes related to wellbeing.

An example of both exercises in practice is illustrated in Section 3.5 below.

EXERCISE

This is intended to be undertaken at the planning stage or start of a project/policy, ideally involving both project delivery and evaluation teams. Both exercises can help clarify future evaluation and measurement plans, e.g. where the delivery effort is concentrated and where the most wellbeing impacts might be seen. The Equity Impacts Exercise is also recommended when reviewing both positive and negative wellbeing impacts during project delivery or after completion.

Access via/to exercise

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[2] For example, participants in research for this project highlighted that being priced out of a rural area where their family lived could mean either accepting seasonal or inappropriate accommodation or moving much further away.
[3] For those interested in more detail about complex evaluation see Defra's [Complexity Evaluation Framework](#).

What role does access play in your project/intervention?

Access plays a key role in rural wellbeing. Please capture whether you project will create, improve, scale[4] or reduce either:

Access TO the key domains for wellbeing

Please consider whether your project creates, improves or reduces access to any of the following framework domains or subdomains therein

	Creating access TO	Improving access TO	Scaling access TO	Reducing access TO
Health				
Economic Opportunities				
Environment				
Community				
Safety				

Access VIA the reduction of barriers

Please consider whether your project is creating or improving access via certain means (proximity, transportation, digital, social/cultural, sustainability).

	Creating access VIA	Improving access VIA	Scaling access VIA	Reducing access VIA
Proximity				
Transportation				
Digital				
Social/cultural				
Sustainability				

---

[4] Scaling a project usually refers to taking it from a small example to a larger rollout. In access this could be scaling digital access after proof of concept, or expanding community bus services etc.

Equity Impacts Exercise

We recommend that you consider the quality of existing access in relation to your project/policy. Insufficient quality might translate into effectively no access for certain groups.[5]

Does your project impact positively or negatively on these drivers?

Group	Key Drivers	Your Project	Comments
Children and young people	Access to education and prospects		
Employment Age	Access to jobs/ secure employment		
Parents/carers	Care/ childcare options and safety		
Older People	Easy/appropriate access to health and social care		
Ethnic Minorities	Feeling welcome and belonging		
LGBTQ+	Feeling welcome and belonging		
'Lower' income households	Access to suitable/ affordable housing		
Rural community	Sense of influence and power		
National	Pride in heritage/culture/ identity		
ADD MORE	IF NEEDED		

Please score using:

+ +   Definitely positive
+   Probably positive
0   No change
-     Probably negative
- -   Definitely negative
?   Unclear

---

[5] This checklist should be used together with considerations teams will already be undertaking to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty

> Please note that 'No change' or maintenance can be a good thing. If your project is small you might want to repeat the exercise only looking at impacts you will be able to measure.

3.3   Measurement of individual wellbeing

If you are clear that individual wellbeing impacts should be measured as part of your project, then this section highlights the existing guidance and research available to help you implement this. As with all projects, it is important to collect process monitoring data throughout the delivery of a rural project with wellbeing impacts. In particular any changes, deliberate or not, affecting drivers of rural wellbeing should be monitored and recorded to understand individual wellbeing impact data. We would recommend those working in policy to use the Magenta Book, which provides an in depth approach to scoping, designing, implementing and sharing evaluation.

This is a quick overview of measures used to collect primary data on individual wellbeing; more detail can be found in Section 5. In the UK, the ONS measures subjective wellbeing using four questions, also referred to as the ONS4: life satisfaction, happiness, sense of worthwhile/purpose and anxiety. Another measure is the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale WEMWBS, which is a well-researched and used questionnaire. More detail about primary data collection related to wellbeing can be found in Section 5.3.

Section 3.4 goes into more detail of what secondary data are already available in relation to the RWF.

> ### Wellbeing Evaluation Guidance
>
> The What Works Centre for Wellbeing Wellbeing Evaluation Toolkit helps with the planning and implementation of wellbeing evaluation and is aimed at project level.
>
> The What Works Centre for Wellbeing has also produced a series of participation and community engagement tools: Wellbeing public dialogue.
>
> ProBono Economics have also developed guidance on Wellbeing Cost Effectiveness Measures. While the primary audience for this report was charities, it can still provide guidance for other sectors.

3.4   Data on the Domains of Rural Wellbeing

Data for rural wellbeing

There are a number of existing data sets that may be helpful for your evaluation. Existing or secondary data enable comparisons of existing indicator values in one area to a similar, neighbouring area, national average or change over time without the need of additional data collection – for example, population density, broadband coverage or indicators related to population health. While these indicators might not always enable attributing change to a specific project, they can be triangulated with project data and findings to tell a stronger impact story. Below we have provided focused options for secondary and primary data collection to detect the most important and valuable wellbeing impacts of interventions. We concentrated our search on public data, often collected by different government departments, the ONS or other reputable organisations.

Secondary data indicator bank

The indicator bank (or Data Attribution Record) that accompanies this report was created to catalogue potential indicators and data sources that could inform rural wellbeing policy and intervention appraisals and evaluations. These indicators relate to the domains and subdomains in the RWF that emerged from the REA and workshops. Suggested potential indicators and data sources available at postcode, ward, and output area level for those indicators are included. As evident in Table 1 below there are not always indicators readily available for all subdomains.

Section 5 contains detailed information about the indicator bank, including the method that was used to put it together. Please also download the indicator bank (filename: Data Attribution Record) from the Defra website.

An example of the type of indicators that are available is illustrated in Section 3.5 as part of a project example.

Table 1: Rural wellbeing indicators by domain and subdomain

Domain	No. of indicators	Subdomain	No. of indicators
Health	11	Physical health	7
		Mental health	4
Economic Opportunities	15	Poverty	6
		Education	4
		Jobs/opportunities	5
Community	7	Social capital	6
		Influence/power	1
		Community hubs	0
Environment	11	Natural	5
		Culture/heritage	1
		Built	2
		Safety	3

Boosting surveys

The secondary data available is patchy for some of the subdomains or might not be available at the level needed for a specific project. As part of this project, we investigated existing surveys that would have relevant questions to make indicators for the RWF but are not currently available at the required lower geography. Boosting existing surveys is not a new method; commonly used methods are to increase the sample sizes of an existing survey and/or add questions in order to meet evaluation needs.

Work on the Community Life Survey by [Power to Change](), and by the Canal & River Trust for their outcomes work, shows how effectively this approach can be used to demonstrate wellbeing related impacts at a hyperlocal level. The ONS has also boosted its Opinion and Lifestyle Survey during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Below is a summary table of existing surveys which have questions that are relevant to the RWF and could potentially be used to boost survey respondents to enable analysis at an appropriate geographic level for a specific intervention. Boosting of any existing survey requires working with the organisation that commissions the survey and the data collection agency (if they are two separate organisations). Different surveys will have different options or rules of how this can be done, some surveys can add new questions at a cost as well as increase the sampling in a very specific local area, others might only be able to increase the sample at a larger geography and not add additional questions at all.

In Table 2 we have identified some particularly relevant surveys and specific indicators which relate to the

RWF, specifically areas where there is currently not a lot of secondary data. Please note that the data available from these surveys might be useful for specific projects in their current format but was not available at local authority level at the time of writing this report.

Table 2: Potential surveys to boost in line with Rural Wellbeing Framework. Key: APS: annual population survey; OPN: opinion and lifestyles survey.

	Understanding Society Survey	The People and Nature Survey	Community Life	Labour Force Survey	English Housing Survey	Other
Health	x	x				
Economic opportunities	x			x		
Community	x		x		x	
Environment		x			x	
Access	x					National Transport Survey
Safety	x				x	
Wellbeing	x					APS/OPN

Additional information about the surveys and questions screened for this project can be found in Section 5.3.

Other resources available

At a local authority Level, Thriving Places Index provides a Wellbeing Framework for understanding and measuring the conditions for wellbeing (England and Wales).

Footprint evaluation provides guidance potential and actual environmental impacts of interventions that do not have explicit environmental objectives.

3.5 CASE STUDY: The MANY project

In this (sub) section, we follow the process set out above using a current Defra supported project. Mobile Access North Yorkshire (MANY) is about connecting people in rural communities of North Yorkshire using mobile technology. By enabling the latest mobile technology, the project will highlight how connecting people together can improve lives and enhance wellbeing and at the same time, influence government in its future rural connectivity policies. By exploring this, the project aims to prove that mobile access can support the recovery of the social and economic fabric of rural communities.

ILLUSTRATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (see Section 3.1 for details)
The MANY project used the 'Project Wellbeing Summary' exercise above to highlight the need to understand the community and its needs.
The MANY project undertook qualitative research to highlight the struggles communities face relating to mobile access and how it impacts on their day to day lives. A research team at Lancaster University undertook semi-structured interviews in November 2020, aiming to answer the following questions:
- What are the key challenges that a lack of connectivity presents you with in your everyday life?
- What would be your key aspirations and/or concerns/questions about your community becoming connected?
- What would you do differently if you were better connected?

The interviews sought to ascertain interviewees' current levels of connectivity, ownership and use of digital devices. Emerging findings were used to inform the technical team and to ask them to look for solutions for common experiences.

ILLUSTRATING IMPACT ON RURAL WELLBEING (see Section 3.1 for details)
The key aim of the MANY project is to provide reliable digital access in remote locations. Through their four use cases (health improved access, tourism, environment and flooding, mountain rescue) the impact of the project will affect a number of domains and subdomains in the RWF. The key direct impact is on digital access, all other impacts are enabled through the digital access.
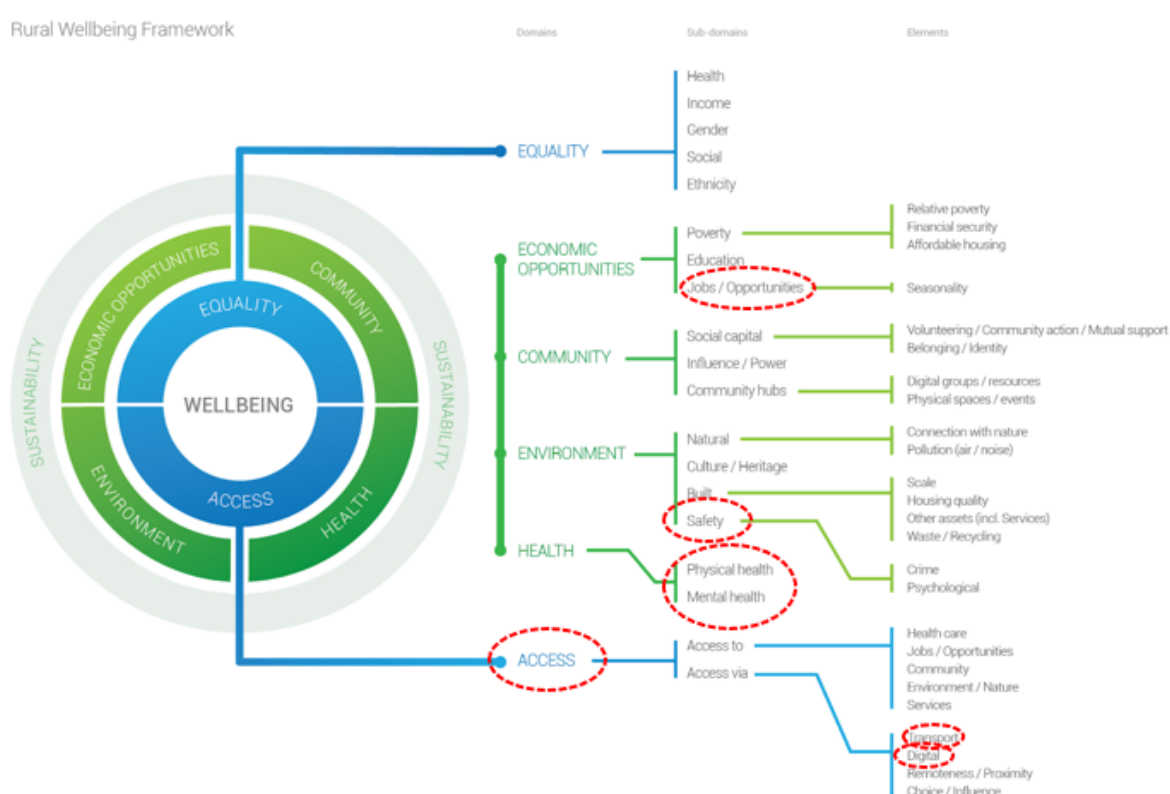

Figure 8: MANY project rural wellbeing impacts

ILLUSTRATING THE ACCESS EXERCISE (see Section 3.2 for details)

Access plays a key role in rural wellbeing and also in the MANY project. This is the outcome of the **Access to/via** Exercise for the MANY project:

Access via the reduction of barriers: The MANY project directly creates digital **access via** 5G, but also indirectly **via** road transport by improving early flood warning on roads and bridges.

Access to the key domains for wellbeing: The MANY project creates and improves **access to** Health, Economic Opportunities and Safety (based on the use cases in Health, Tourism, Emergency Services and Environment).

ILLUSTRATING THE EQUITY IMPACT EXERCISE (see Section 3.2 for details)

Considering the Equity Impacts Exercise for the MANY project means looking at the beneficiaries of each use case. For the MANY project, the strongest positive wellbeing impact is for older people, but young people and the working age population also benefit through improved digital access. Overall it is most likely that the project will have a neutral or small positive wellbeing impact on groups within rural communities. Improving access to the heritage assets of Yorkshire might also have a positive impact at a national level on sense of identity.

Table 3: MANY project equity impact exercise

Group	Key Drivers	MANY	Comments
Children and young people	Access to education and prospects	+	Access VIA 5G to digital opportunities
Employment Age	Access to jobs/secure employment	+	Access VIA 5G to digital opportunities
Parents/carers	Care/childcare options and safety	0	
Older People	Easy/appropriate access to health and social care	++	Better access to essential health and care
Ethnic Minorities	Feeling welcome and belonging	0	
LGBTQ+	Feeling welcome and belonging	0	
'Lower' income households	Access to suitable/ affordable housing	0	
Rural community	Sense of influence and power	0	
National	Pride in heritage/ culture/ identity	+	Making local heritage more accessible via 5G

RELEVANT SECONDARY DATA (see Section 3.4 for details)

Reviewing the Rural Wellbeing Indicator Bank for indicators related to Access and Health initially (two main outcomes that match the RWF domains), we can see that there are five Access indicators including broadband coverage and ten health indicators[6].

Table 4: Indicators for the Access and Health domain

Indicator	Indicator description	Domain	Levels available	Source
RURALITY	Measure of 'sparse/not sparse' on top of 'town & fringe', 'village' and 'hamlets and isolated dwelling' gives six different classifications of 'rurality'.	Access	OA, LSOA	Rural-urban classification
POPULATION DENSITY	Persons per hectare, based on the local population size and geographical area.	Access	LSOA	ONS
ACCESS TO SERVICES (DISTANCE)	Road distance to a post office/primary school/general store/GP surgery	Access	LSOA and LA	Indices of Deprivation
ACCESS TO SERVICES (NO CAR)	Walking/PT travel time to primary school/secondary school average, food store and GP	Access	LSOA and LA	DfT Journey Time Statistics
BROADBAND	Broadband coverage and performance data	Access	LA level with rural/urban split	Ofcom 2020
YEARS OF POTENTIAL LIFE LOST	Premature death, defined as death before the age of 75 from any cause (the commonly used measure of premature death). Age/sex standardised.	Health	LSOA	MHCLG/Indices of Deprivation (IoD) 2019
ILLNESS AND DISABILITY	Comparative illness and disability ratio, based on those receiving benefits due to inability to work through ill health. Age/sex standardised.	Health	LSOA	MHCLG/Indices of Deprivation (IoD) 2019
LIFE-LIMITING ILLNESS	Proportion of population reporting day to day activities limited by a long term illness.	Health	OA/LSOA/MSOA/Ward	Census 2011
CHILD OBESITY	Year 6 children: prevalence of overweight including obesity. (% of children)	Health	Ward/MSOA level	PHE Fingertips
PREVENTABLE MORTALITY	Age-standardised rate of mortality from preventable causes per 100,000 population	Health	Ward/MSOA level	PHE Fingertips
HEALTHY LIFE EXPECTANCY	(upper age band 85+) Female and male. Healthy life expectancy (HLE) is the average number of years that an individual might expect to live in 'good' health in their lifetime.	Health	LA level/MSOA	PHE Public Health Profiles
LIFE EXPECTANCY	Life expectancy at birth (male and female)	Health	Ward level	ONS
MENTAL HEALTH	A composite annual measure of LSOA population health. Data from multiple sources combined into a single index.	Health	LSOA	Place-based Longitudinal Data Resource (PLDR)
MENTAL HEALTH:	Proportion of people with mental health issues, based on the claimants of	Health	OA/LSOA/MSOA/Ward	DWP

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[6] The table has been shortened to fit into the report, the indicator bank contains more information about each indicator.

INCAPACITY BENEFIT	Incapacity Benefit who are claiming due to mental health related conditions.			
SELF HARM	Hospital stays for self harm, standardised admission ratio. All persons.	Health	Ward/MSOA level	PHE Fingertips

DETAILED PROJECT CONTEXT AND RESEARCH

Working in collaboration with Lancaster University, the MANY project has undertaken detailed research into the context of digital access in rural areas and into what is missing to enable wellbeing impacts for people.

The MANY project has also developed its own wellbeing questionnaire to evaluate the impact of the project as it changes from planning into delivery in 2021.
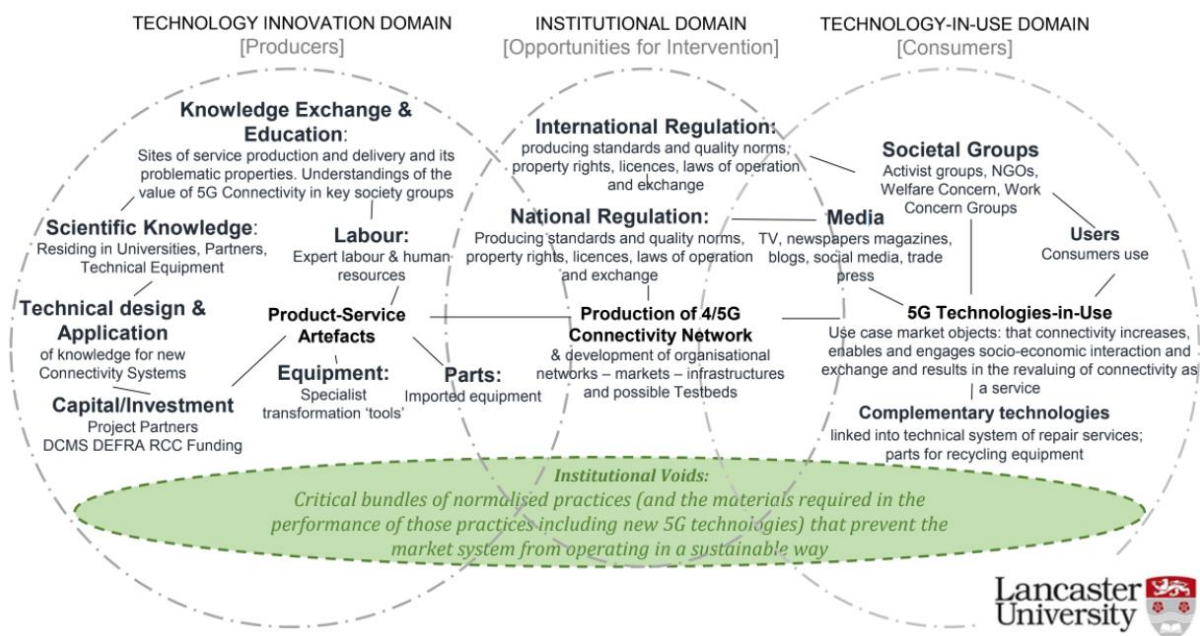

Figure 9: MANY project research map

4.0 DOMAINS AND HEADLINES

This section contains a summary of each of the domains within the RWF, and the evidence and insight that informed them. Domains in the framework were identified through a rapid evidence assessment (REA) of rural wellbeing research in the UK since 2010 and through workshops with communities from a variety of rural settings (see Appendices 1, 2 and 3).

4.1   Domain: Economic Opportunities

The economy is an important driver of wellbeing. All wellbeing frameworks include items relating to economic activity and outcomes. Poverty and its causes impact on our capacity to thrive, so understanding those elements through a rural lens is important for any rural wellbeing analysis. The research conducted for this report found that for rural communities, 'economic opportunities' was a more useful lens than the headline economic outputs – **access** to jobs and education, affordable housing and the services that support basic needs had a greater perceived influence by community participants than other influences on wellbeing in rural areas.

While evidence for the importance of economic factors in wellbeing is strong overall, there were significant gaps in robust published evidence of some of those factors for rural areas specifically. There were some studies that focused on the wellbeing impacts for different types of jobs, and the conditions for and outcomes of local entrepreneurship (these are summarised in Appendix 4). The size of a place and its proximity to services and markets affects potential for entrepreneurship[16] and providing goods, services and opportunities for participation[17][18]. The presence of, and support for, local businesses were particularly important to rural wellbeing[19].

The role of both seasonal and longer-term population inflow and outflow trends was emphasised in the community and expert workshops, with impacts on jobs, housing, services and the visual appeal of the area. There were two relevant studies supporting the view that outflow trends could lead to long term decline in the economic and social sustainability of rural communities[20][21]. The expert workshop identified Economic Opportunity as one of the two most important drivers to wellbeing, similar to urban areas. Relative Poverty was identified as an additional element at this stage, highlighting the invisibility of poverty due to scale and the 'scatteredness' of rural poverty.

In other universal wellbeing frameworks such as the Thriving Places Index, subdomains include Employment, Basic Needs and Local Business – thus considering the individual and the wider community level. However, the REA evidence and workshop feedback spoke more to the household/community level, informing the three subdomains that emerged from this research: Poverty, Education and Jobs and Opportunities.

Subdomain: Poverty

There was some evidence that material poverty in rural areas was less important to rural communities than social and cultural factors[22] like a sense of belonging locally, positive feelings about the local landscape and the availability of informal carers[23]. The evidence of a negative effect on older populations was stronger[24].

More broadly, poverty is often related to access, particularly in terms of the evidence relating to car ownership and rural wellbeing. Seasonality was also identified as a factor relating to affordable housing, job opportunities, cost of living and poverty in the community workshops. Gaps were present in the evidence found in the REA in many aspects of this subdomain, but were included as they were emphasised in the community workshops and verified in consultation with experts. These specific elements of this subdomain were:
- Relative poverty[7]: with pockets of deprivation in otherwise better off areas often being missed
- Financial security: with seasonality affecting jobs, cost of living and access to services
- Affordable housing: impacting growing numbers of second homes and low rural wages particularly for young people

Subdomain: Education

In other universal wellbeing frameworks such as the TPI, Education is recognised as its own domain. However, this was not justifiable in this case due to the lack of evidence relating to the effects of education on rural wellbeing, which was a significant gap. The reasons for inclusion mainly came in the form of wider discussions about opportunities and life stage in the community workshops. This subdomain intersects with access, as exemplified by a qualitative study of schoolchildren that found that transport affects school attendance. However, problems with the bus and attendance are also affected by other social disadvantages such as low income and lack of other forms of transport[25].

Subdomain: Jobs/Opportunities

Having a job and sufficient opportunities for stable employment are widely evidenced to be important to wellbeing[26]. The evidence around the specific role of jobs and opportunities for rural wellbeing is once again less developed, but there is evidence that rural areas are better for job satisfaction and overall wellbeing, while urban areas are better for self employment and entrepreneurship[27]. There is also evidence that health and social care related community businesses deliver a range of health and wellbeing outcomes such as social connectedness, self-esteem, physical health, mental wellbeing and quality of life.[28]

The evidence overall indicated that activities relating to jobs and opportunities were supported by social capital[29] and can contribute to community assets and value[30]. Access is also important in terms of digital connectivity[31] and transport/remoteness[32] [33]. Seasonality in relation to the availability and quality of jobs or the inflow/outflow of local resident/tourist populations was seen as significant by communities and experts but remains a gap in the reviewed evidence.

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[7] Relative poverty, as defined by the OECD is "Individuals are classified as "poor" when their household income is less than half the median level prevailing in each country. [It] capture[s] the notion that avoiding poverty requires access to the goods and services that are regarded as "customary" or necessary to participate fully in any given society".

Summary of the research findings on the Economic Opportunity domain

*NB (*Colours indicate the evidence available: red: no paper/one with only a small sub group; amber: one or two papers and/or mostly small sub groups; green: several papers concluding similar findings and/or larger groups or comparisons across sub groups.*)*

Domain *Subdomain*	Findings from REA on rural wellbeing*	Rural community workshops: qualitative insights	Rural experts and policy testing: qualitative insights
Economic opportunity	Little robust evidence of how economic opportunities drive rural wellbeing.	Rural location provides unique financial challenges. Financial stability gives people choice.	This is one of the most important drivers of wellbeing in rural areas, similar to urban areas.
Poverty	Poverty affects ability to live well, mediated by belonging, social participation. No evidence linking housing affordability to rural poverty.	Rural locations exacerbate hidden poverty; transport, housing, fuel are more expensive. Holiday/second homes affect housing affordability.	Rural poverty may be less visible due to scale and 'scatteredness'. Perception of relative poverty is important and may differ from urban areas. Costs of basic services and (lack of) access, increases cost of living.
Education	No robust evidence of education as a driver of rural wellbeing. One study highlighted the intersection between transport access, social disadvantage and school attendance.	Education is particularly important in offering rural children informed choices about, and routes to, more diverse employment opportunities than those in the family/local area. Education opportunities for other groups or other forms of training were not raised by workshop participants.	N/A
Jobs and Opportunities	Job satisfaction is higher in rural areas but less so for entrepreneurs than urban areas. Trust and social capital support rural community businesses which in turn boost wellbeing. Seasonal weather can hamper conditions for community wellbeing.	Seasonal work can negatively impact wellbeing. Local businesses can become community hubs and support community wellbeing.	N/A

4.2 Domain: Community

The role of community in wellbeing is widely recognised[34]. In terms of rural wellbeing, Community was identified as an important domain at every stage of the research for this report. This comprises participation, social relationships and the places and networks that support them, with community size and different levels of community particularly relevant in rural areas.

In more universal wellbeing frameworks, participation and culture are more prominent in this domain. However, in the rural context the evidence and workshops alluded to culture and heritage as more rooted in place, though overlapping with the Community domain; as such, this can be found in the Environment domain. Participation is considered in both the volunteering and community action element of Social Capital and the elements of Community Hubs, again reflecting the evidence[35 36 37 38] and workshop findings that some aspects of participation in rural areas are constrained by place-based contexts and transport/digital access.

Both rural studies, and those comparing rural with urban, found that social resources[39], neighbourhood trust[40] and community hubs and networks[41 42 43] all supported better wellbeing, with opportunities for social interaction and participation particularly important for older people[44]. Life stage, remoteness and associated lack of access, particularly in relation to car use, could act as barriers[45 46]. These were also particularly common concerns in the community workshops, where the need for influence over decisions affecting the community and local ways of life was also highlighted. The positive effects of community belonging and the negative wellbeing effects of discrimination in rural communities were also described. The expert workshops discussed loneliness, the contribution of personal pride and purpose to sense of belonging and rural identities, and the ways that environmental and political culture interact with this domain.

Subdomain: Social Capital

Social capital, or the local networks and shared understandings that help a community to thrive, is an important driver of wellbeing in rural areas. Some research evidence was available regarding the impact of health[47 48], and a little regarding the impact of belonging[49 50], on social inclusion, connection and collective capacity. Transport and levels of social resources[51] were key determinants of participation and successful local activities.

- Volunteering/Community Action/Mutual Support: both for those who want to participate and those who require that support or enjoy living in a supportive community.
- Belonging/Identity: providing a feeling of safety and support, unless threatened by factors like discrimination.

Subdomain: Influence/Power

In this case Influence and Power relates to decisions affecting other domains such as the community, local environment and local economy as well as personal and household-level autonomy. There was little

research evidence for influence and power as drivers of rural wellbeing. However, this subdomain emerged initially in the community workshops and was further underlined in the expert consultation where influence over and within the community, the rural area and the wider countryside were discussed.

Subdomain: Community Hubs

Community hubs are here defined as both virtual and physical spaces available to the community for social interaction and/or the provision of services (e.g. shops, pubs, community events and online community groups). There is evidence, derived from grey literature and well rooted in evaluation of interventions, that some community hubs (pubs, community businesses) provide a space for people to come together, and promote collectiveness and community cohesion[52][53][54]. This was borne out in the community workshops. Minimal evidence was found about the role of digital resources or about digital groups and community events although these were included because they were highly valued by the community workshop participants.

- Digital groups/resources: useful connections for those who have access.
- Physical spaces/events: vital for the social interactions that sustain trusted networks.

Summary of the research findings on the Community domain

*NB *(Colours indicate the evidence available: red: no paper/one with only a small sub group; amber: one or two papers and/or mostly small sub groups; green: several papers concluding similar findings and/or larger groups or comparisons across sub groups.)*

Domain *Subdomain*	Findings from REA on rural wellbeing*	Rural community workshops: qualitative insights	Rural experts and policy testing: qualitative insights
Commun-ities	Evidence for some subdomains as drivers to rural wellbeing, often indirectly.	Community is an important driver of rural wellbeing, although expectations and desire to participate vary. Personal characteristics (e.g., desire for peace) and demographics (particularly ethnicity) affected this.	Community is an important driver, and different levels of community should be recognised. Political and environmental culture is important to this domain.
Social capital	Social capital is an important driver of rural wellbeing. Some evidence on the impact of health, and a little on the impact of belonging on social inclusion, connection and collective capacity in rural areas. Transport and social resources determine participation and successful local activities. Belonging and identity can link to rural places.	Community belonging and the support that comes with it are important for wellbeing in rural places.	Personal pride and purpose contribute to rural identity and belonging. Loneliness is also an important aspect of this domain.
Influence/ power	No robust evidence on influence/power as a driver of rural wellbeing.	Residents may have little control over rural places changing or diminishing due to tourism and holiday/second homes.	People in rural areas are concerned about power and influence over what happens in those areas; both decisions made within the community

			and beyond, through the hierarchies of power.
Community hubs	Community hubs promote collectiveness and community cohesion. Minimal evidence specifically relating to digital hubs or resources in rural areas.	Physical and digital spaces help to support social capital and belonging. Discrimination is a barrier to belonging.	N/A

4.3 Domain: Environment

As with economic and community conditions, environmental conditions are also well evidenced drivers of wellbeing, contributing to how people feel about their communities and the amenities they enjoy[55].

The importance of access to and engagement with green and natural space for wellbeing is well researched across both rural and urban areas[56] [57]. In rural areas it appears highly valued, as it was for the workshop participants, and one study suggested affiliation with local natural environments governed decisions about where to live[58]. However, there is little published research on the built environment and culture and heritage in relation to rural wellbeing, although the few relevant studies agreed with both the community and expert workshops on aspects of these domains, such as the tensions between concerns about proposed changes to the environment (e.g. housing development) and recognition of problems those changes may solve (e.g. affordable housing)[59]. This may relate to the desire for influence over local decision-making described in the previous section.

In comparison with universal wellbeing frameworks such as the TPI, the natural environment was elevated to a subdomain in the rural context because of the way it was so highly valued as a part of rural life in the community workshops, not just directly for wellbeing but indirectly through relationships with local economies and identities. The evidence and workshops situated rural culture and heritage in place as well as people[60], hence its inclusion in this domain. Finally, in other frameworks transport is usually part of this domain but in the rural context it sits more appropriately under the Access headline, intersecting with many rural wellbeing drivers.

Subdomain: Natural Environment

This was generally understood as accessible or visible areas of land that are not built-up, although it is acknowledged that nature and the natural can be subjective concepts. In the rural context, the natural environment was particularly valued by community workshop participants and evidence showed a positive impact on wellbeing from access to green space[61] [62], with different types of nature (including 'blue space') providing different levels of impact[63] [64]. Accessibility was highlighted as an important mediating factor in the community workshops.

- Connection with Nature
- Pollution (Air/Noise)

Subdomain: Culture/Heritage

While culture and heritage have quite broad meanings, here they encompass the more localised and place-specific as well. Culture and (industrial) heritage were seen as drivers in the expert and policy workshops. Although the REA found scant evidence for this domain, the links between local environments, local food enterprises and wellbeing made in one study[65] aligned with the community workshops. Another study found wellbeing was influenced by intangible aspects of cultural value[66].

Subdomain: Built Environment

Man-made infrastructure seems particularly important in rural areas in terms of community size and amenities, as discussed in the community workshops. There was little research on the effects on the built environment and housing in rural areas, and it is mainly focused on older people[67]. Community scale, assets[68] and issues relating to second home ownership were patchily represented in the REA but discussed in multiple workshops.

- Scale: in particular the perceived and actual negative effects of changes to community scale, which may impact the availability of housing and other amenities.
- Housing quality: directly impacting wellbeing for older people.
- Other assets (incl. services): availability of appropriate services for different life stages.
- Waste/Recycling: availability of services.

Subdomain: Safety

Perceived or psychological safety was an important driver in the REA[69] [70] [71] and the workshops, particularly in remote places where community workshop participants felt safer than elsewhere, although local crime could make them feel more vulnerable because of their remoteness. The built environment research provided insight on perceived safety and capabilities as a result of the environment, for example relating to weather conditions affecting road safety[72].

- Crime: perceived to be less common in rural areas but sometimes related in community workshops to the lack of opportunities for young people.
- Psychological safety: arising from perceived neighbourhood safety as well as actual local crime.

# Summary of the research findings on the Environment domain

*NB *(Colours indicate the evidence available: red: no paper/one with only a small sub group; amber: one or two papers and/or mostly small sub groups; green: several papers concluding similar findings and/or larger groups or comparisons across sub groups.)*

Domain *Subdomain*	Findings from REA on rural wellbeing*	Rural community workshops: qualitative insights	Rural experts and policy testing: qualitative insights
Environment	More evidence of the natural environment as a driver than other subdomains for rural wellbeing. Research provided insight on perceived safety and capabilities as a result of the built environment for older people in rural areas.	Seasonality was a key theme here as well as for Economic Opportunities. Specifically, seasonal impacts on safety and the positive effect of observing the natural environment through the seasons.	N/A
Natural environment	Access to green and natural space is well researched across both rural and urban areas. Access to green space impacts wellbeing positively. Accessibility and type of green space were important mediating factors.	Greater access to, and quality of, natural environments are a particular wellbeing benefit of rural living. Aspects of nature connectedness and access to local and seasonal produce are also valued.	N/A
Culture/ heritage	Little research on this subdomain, except in relation to the cultural value created by local food and drink entrepreneurs and the difficulty of measuring rural cultural activity using mainstream methods.	N/A	Respecting and preserving local heritage, and particularly heritage industries such as fishing, important for community wellbeing, not just those involved directly.
Built environment	Little research on the effects on the built environment and housing in rural areas, and it is mainly focused on older people.	Rural communities need to have the facilities in place to support all life stages. Tension between concern about new building (e.g. housing developments) bringing negative impacts, and concern about lack of affordable housing for local people.	Small changes can have bigger impacts at differing scales.
Safety	Perceived or psychological safety is an important driver in rural areas, based on two studies.	Built environment contributes to danger e.g. poor street lighting but close-knit communities feel safer. Lack of youth opportunities leads to crime.	Specific rural impacts on psychological safety e.g. longer emergency service response times.

4.4   Domain: Health
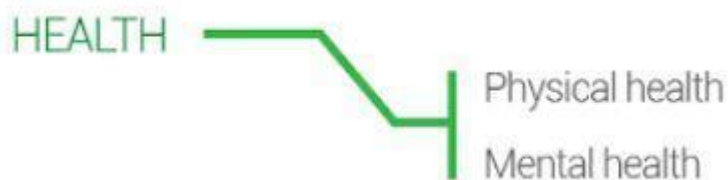
Universally, both mental and physical health are key drivers of wellbeing, and are in turn determined by aspects of other domains such as community and place[73]. Health was one of the most researched domains in the REA, although there was patchy coverage of different life stages and contexts; an overall assessment of health as a driver to specifically rural wellbeing is missing. Health was also the most prominent word in the minds of the community workshop participants when asked what they thought of in relation to wellbeing. In both the REA and workshops, the aspects of health that were specifically relevant to rural wellbeing were the (mainly positive) impact of the proximity to, and types of, natural environment[74] [75], negative impacts of lack of access to health care services[76] [77] and considerations about the ways that healthcare is delivered[78] [79]. Consultation with experts underlined the importance of access and the interaction of health with the Safety subdomain, for example in terms of accessing emergency services.

Universal wellbeing frameworks such as the TPI include more subdomains of health than are shown here; mortality and life expectancy, healthy and risky behaviours might be included for example. While these are likely to be just as important in a rural as an urban setting, no specific evidence emerged that these specific aspects of health impact wellbeing differently in rural areas than urban ones, hence their omission.

Subdomain: Physical Health

Physical health can comprise health behaviours as well as health outcomes. Some of the community workshop participants considered rural living generally healthier in contrast to urban. Most of the research for this project, however, focused on health outcomes. Several studies found the presence of selected natural environments has a positive impact on health[80] [81] [82]. In particular, rural issues discussed in the workshops included lack of connectivity with health services in terms of physical access, particularly without a car, and also in terms of being able to make contact with emergency services (e.g. lack of landlines, low phone signal, no/slow internet access). These were problematic in themselves but also contributed to anxiety.

Subdomain: Mental Health

As with physical health, there are multiple determinants of mental health but the research here mainly considered access to mental health provision. Community workshop participants felt that health was important wherever you live, but mental health services and support may be particularly unavailable for particular groups. One study found that rural schoolchildren had less access to mental health services than urban children[83]. Another found particular benefits for mental health of coastal living, as with physical health[84]. The community workshops highlighted a lack of mental health provision for people struggling with financial instability that threatens traditional rural identities or ways of life such as farming, which may occur in isolated contexts.

Summary of the research findings on the Health domain

*NB *(Colours indicate the evidence available: red: no paper/one with only a small sub group; amber: one or two papers and/or mostly small sub groups; green: several papers concluding similar findings and/or larger groups or comparisons across sub groups.)*

Domain *Subdomain*	Findings from REA on rural wellbeing*	Rural community workshops: qualitative insights	Rural experts and policy testing: qualitative insights
Health	Health is fairly well researched, although there was patchy coverage of different life stages and contexts; an overall assessment of health as a driver to specifically rural wellbeing is missing.	Health is the most prominent word in the minds of the community workshop participants in relation to wellbeing and is important wherever one lives.	Access to health is important in rural areas; there are also particular connections between health and safety.
Physical health	The natural environment has an impact on (physical and mental) health which is most positive for certain types including blue space. The ways that healthcare is delivered can support positive social and community outcomes.	Ease of access to health services and features of rural life such as the natural environment impact positively on wellbeing.	N/A
Mental health	The natural environment has an impact on (physical and mental) health which is most positive for certain types including blue space. One study found lower school mental health provision in rural areas.	As above.	The psychological impact of rural challenges (e.g. safety concerns about isolated work where communication with, and access by, help is difficult) can negatively affect mental health.

4.5   Headline: Access
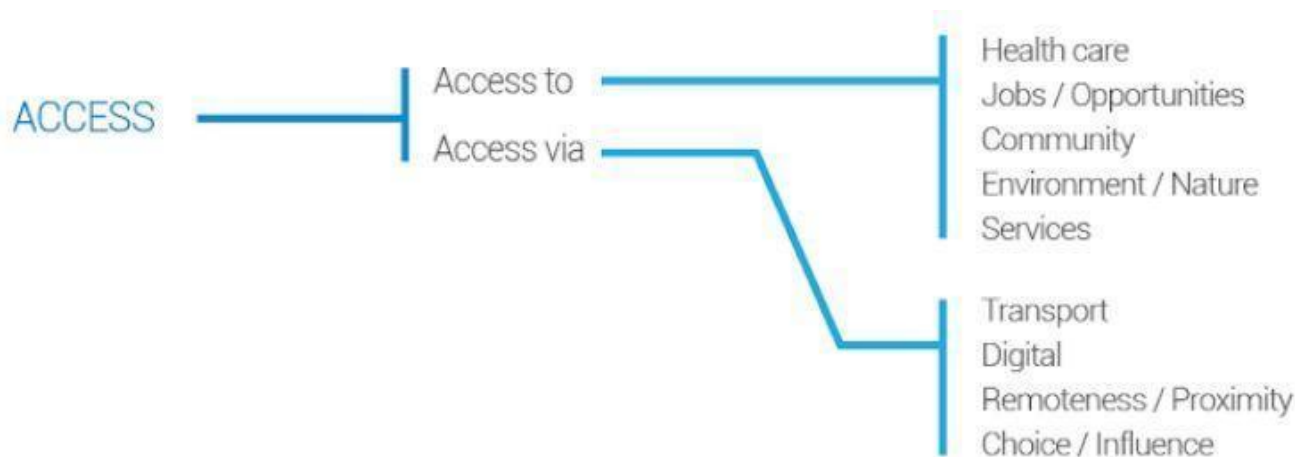
This headline highlights the particular importance to rural wellbeing of access to the services, places and activities that support wellbeing, and the ways in which that access is achieved. In most wellbeing frameworks, access is more likely to be considered within separate domains such as health and environment than in its own right. Indeed, the drivers of rural wellbeing are unlikely to be universally related to access. However, as outlined above, there was evidence across the research stages for links between Access and all other domains. As such, Access may be considered as a lens through which particularly rural impacts within the other domains can often be seen. For example, while evidence suggested people in rural areas have a greater sense of neighbourhood safety[85], workshops indicated barriers to accessing emergency services such as poor mobile signal or long response times can impact wellbeing despite this.

Access to services, people and geographic locations was found in the published evidence and expert workshops to be an important driver of wellbeing[86]. In particular, remoteness was found to influence wellbeing both positively[87] and negatively[88] [89], depending on the level of remoteness, and age and life circumstances of individuals. For example, the limited availability of public transport in rural areas is seen as an important issue for elderly people, women and young people[90]. This aligned with the community workshop findings where access, particularly to health and services, was a priority, although some reduction in spontaneity and choice of leisure activities was accepted as part of rural life. Access was seen as particularly vulnerable to circumstances like weather conditions (such as snow), or cuts to bus services compared to urban areas. For some groups, feelings of remoteness, and the ability to escape from urbanness, were significant drivers of their wellbeing. However, evidence linked remoteness with lower wellbeing for some groups, such as children and their mothers.[91] This was reflected in the expert workshops where life stages and perceptions of access were discussed in relation to equality. The policy testing workshop highlighted more specific aspects such as social access, quality of access and access to services for particular groups such as people with disabilities.

Access to:
- Healthcare: reduced provision of some services in rural areas.
- Jobs/Opportunities: fewer options in more remote areas and they are constrained by connectivity.
- Community: participation is constrained by connectivity.
- Environment/Nature: this is particularly valued.
- Services: with lower proximity, access may be constrained by connectivity/remoteness.

Access via:

- Transport: this is affected by external circumstances such as reduced bus services and weather-related road conditions.
- Digital: digital connectivity was described in the community workshops as a 'basic need' but poor digital infrastructure in rural areas affects this.
- Remoteness/Proximity: remoteness can be valued despite fewer choices in terms of services/opportunities.
- Choice/Influence: over local decisionmaking.

Summary of the research findings on the Access headline

*NB *(Colours indicate the evidence available: red: no paper/one with only a small sub group; amber: one or two papers and/or mostly small sub groups; green: several papers concluding similar findings and/or larger groups or comparisons across sub groups.)*

Domain	Findings from REA on rural wellbeing	Rural community workshops: qualitative insights	Rural experts and policy testing: qualitative insights
Access	Access to services, people and geographic locations is an important driver of wellbeing. Remoteness can positively impact wellbeing, and also negatively via poor transport access for particular groups such as young people.	Access, particularly to health and services, is a priority, and is particularly vulnerable to circumstances like weather conditions, such as snow, or cuts to bus services compared to urban areas. Remoteness can be positive but not for all life stages e.g. older people. Access via digital is also important for wellbeing.	Access is a particular issue in relation to life stage, equality, actual vs perceived access, social access and quality of access.

4.6   Headline: Equality

Equality has been included as a headline for two reasons. First, as with any other evaluation of wellbeing outcomes, it is desirable to include everyone when working to improve local conditions for wellbeing, in terms of fairness and to realise the greatest wellbeing benefits. Second, while there was little direct evidence in the REA regarding the role of equality in specifically rural wellbeing, equality and related issues such as discrimination were highlighted as important factors in rural wellbeing by the community, expert and policy testing workshops.

Equality was not explicitly considered in much of the evidence: wellbeing is often conceptualised only from general populations (i.e. without considering the difference with rural), and very little research has been done with regards to wellbeing inequalities between urban and rural other than an initial piece of research undertaken by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing[92]. One study[93] sought – from a justice perspective – to understand social inequalities in rural uplands and was able to unpick some of the drivers of wellbeing inequality. In addition, age, qualifications, marital status and (former) occupational status were all associated with older people's community participation, and age with their loneliness[94].

The expert workshop participants saw equality as interrelated to access and life stage. 'Equitable' access may be experienced differently because of life stage and access may be available but less acceptable because of discrimination, for example. Social access barriers, issues of gender equality and the unique challenges of living with disabilities in remote areas were considered by participants in the policy testing workshop to have relevance to rural wellbeing.

Summary of the research findings on the Equality headline

*NB *(Colours indicate the evidence available: red: no paper/one with only a small sub group; amber: one or two papers and/or mostly small sub groups; green: several papers concluding similar findings and/or larger groups or comparisons across sub groups.)*

Domain	Findings from REA on rural wellbeing	Rural community workshops: qualitative insights	Rural experts and policy testing: qualitative insights
Equality	Equality was not explicitly considered in much of the rural specific evidence and very little research has been done with regards to wellbeing inequalities between urban and rural.	The availability of accessible services for every life stage, from childcare to elderly care, is a prerequisite for wellbeing. Discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity and sexual orientation impact negatively on wellbeing.	Equality is interrelated with access and life stage. Access may be experienced differently because of life stage and access may be available but less acceptable because of discrimination, for example.

4.7 Headline: Sustainability

Sustainability in this context comprises environmental, economic and social sustainability and is included because of its relevance to evaluation.

As with Equality, this was not directly evidenced in the REA and was more of an implicit than explicit feature of the community workshops. However, measuring whether interventions are delivering against the domain indicators without negatively impacting the environment is important for stakeholders at all levels, particularly in the rural context because of the value attached to local environments by rural-dwellers, as evidenced in the community workshops.

Furthermore, social and economic sustainability were key concerns raised in the REA and community workshops in relation to wellbeing in rural communities. In the REA these particularly related to seasonal and long-term population inflow and outflow trends[95][96], and those in workshops were particularly concerned about what an ageing population meant for thriving rural communities. The economic sustainability for rural-dwellers in poverty was a concern due to higher costs of rural life – predominantly transport and domestic fuel[97].

In terms of the environment, there is evidence of rural concerns around environmental sustainability initiatives such as wind farms impacting local natural environments[98]. Protection of the environment was also identified as relevant in the expert workshops.

Summary of the research findings on the Sustainability headline

*NB *(Colours indicate the evidence available: red: no paper/one with only a small sub group; amber: one or two papers and/or mostly small sub groups; green: several papers concluding similar findings and/or larger groups or comparisons across sub groups.)*

Domain	Findings from REA on rural wellbeing	Rural community workshops: qualitative insights	Rural experts and policy testing: qualitative insights
Sustainability	There was little evidence regarding environmental sustainability but social and economic sustainability were concerns in some studies, regarding seasonal population flows and the higher rural cost of living.	The sustainability of rural living for younger people (due to lack of economic opportunities) and older people (due to lack of access to health/services) is uncertain.	Protecting the environment is relevant to rural wellbeing.

4.8 Life stage and Access, Equality and Sustainability

Life stage here refers to identifiable phases of child- and adult-hood with different characteristics, needs and challenges. Examples include schoolchildren, parents of young children and 'empty nesters'.

While life stage could arguably have been positioned as a subdomain of Equality, it was much more prominent than any of the other aspects of Equality, and always intersecting with other domains. Therefore, life stage doesn't fit into the domain framework, but the evidence and community workshops support the consideration of individual context in terms of capabilities, or at least community life stage demographics, in policy and interventions.

Life stage is referenced multiple times above, in evidence and feedback relating to multiple Domains and Headlines. While not a domain or necessarily a driver in itself, it can amplify the effects of drivers and/or mean that they can be experienced differently. For example:

- Lack of access to services and public transport, while navigable for working age people, created concerns for the wellbeing of older people in rural areas, with some of the opinion that they would need to consider leaving the area when they got older (community workshops).
- Transport was also particularly important for children and young people, with REA evidence unpicking this. Income inequalities intersected with transport on the school journey[99] and cars enabled access to social networks for rural young people[100].
- Lack of affordable housing was seen to specifically drive young people out of their home areas, impacting the sustainability of those areas if more of the housing is used only seasonally for tourism, reducing year-round demand for local services and leading to their closure (community workshops).

Further examples of this from the evidence and workshops are included in the Domain sections above.

4.9   Headline: Subjective wellbeing

Subjective wellbeing of individuals is measured by the ONS using four components; an individual's feelings of satisfaction with life, whether they feel the things they do in their life are worthwhile and their positive and negative emotions[101]. Long term analysis of UK data has found that individuals' overall life satisfaction is influenced by the conditions around them and what they have: that is good health, being economically active, access to education, having secure housing and having strong close personal relationships[102]. In terms of a sense of purpose, research has found that what we do, and our associated health and ability to do it, matters most[103].

Although subjective wellbeing is not classed as a domain in the model, opening questions about wellbeing were a driver to workshop participants thinking more deeply about what mattered to them about living in rural communities and why the different domains were important to them. Subjective wellbeing is therefore built within the model as a headline: something that should be explicitly considered as an end goal within the design and evaluation of any policy or intervention.

Subjective wellbeing, and the four components that comprise the ONS description of how we understand individual wellbeing, were referred to within studies uncovered by the REA, often in terms of how drivers were measured. These studies have been included within the respective domains in terms of understanding how different drivers within communities experience subjective (individual) wellbeing. There were some differences in the aspects of their lives that the different rural groups attending the community workshops attributed their wellbeing to. However, securing basic needs, transport access and a sense of self-worth as linked to community were fairly common themes.

5.0 RURAL WELLBEING INDICATORS

Section 5.1 details secondary data available in relation to the RWF. Section 5.2 outlines gaps in the secondary data and 5.3 provides more detail for useful primary data collection in relation to rural wellbeing.

5.1 An Indicator Bank for rural wellbeing

What is included in the Rural Wellbeing Indicator Bank?

The indicator bank was created to catalogue potential indicators and data sources that could inform rural wellbeing policy and intervention appraisals and evaluations. These indicators relate to the domains/subdomains in the RWF (see Section 2). Suggested indicators and data sources available at postcode, ward, and/or geographical output area (OA) level (e.g. LSOA, MSOA) for those domains/subdomains are included.

We sourced the indicators from existing indexes which have been found useful to policymakers and practitioners. The Local Wellbeing Indicators (LWI)[104] comprise a set of tested indicators for measuring community and personal wellbeing at local authority level. Indicators and data sources for relevant rural wellbeing domains in the LWI have also been included, even if the data sources are only at LA level. Where the indicators are also used in the LWI or the TPI, this is shown in the indicator bank (see accompanying spreadsheet). This provides a comparison of the way those domains are measured in the LWI (and to an extent the TPI) with what could be done using more granular data sources.

How were the proposed indicators identified?

First, the LWI and TPI indicators in the relevant domains were considered:

1. The domains and subdomains emerging from the findings of the REA and workshops which were developed into the initial RWF were listed.
2. Where these domains and subdomains also exist in the LWI, the data sources for indicators from the LWI were listed, with an indication of whether they are available at a sub-local authority level (in column G).
3. Where these domains and subdomains also exist in the TPI, TPI indicators have been listed where data is available below local authority level.
4. Relevant indicators that are found in both the TPI and LWI but for which the data sources are only at local authority level are shown with a TPI/LWI in column A of the proposed indicator list (see accompanying excel spreadsheet).

Then a wider range of data sources were checked to see if they could provide alternatives for the LWI/TPI indicators for which the usual data source is only available at the LA level.

- In some cases a direct match for the indicators in the TPI/LWI were found. For example, a TPI/LWI indicator in the Physical Health subdomain is Physical Activity, and the data used for this in the TPI is from the Physical Activity dataset on PHE Fingertips. The indicator is '% of adults doing 150+ minutes of physical activity per week' but this is not available from PHE Fingertips below LA level. However the same indicator is available from Sport England at MSOA level so this is suggested as an alternative.

- In other cases, suggested alternative indicators have been listed. For example, the TPI/LWI Mental Health indicator in the Mental Health subdomain is 'Estimated prevalence of common mental health disorders, % of population aged 16-74' from the Common Mental Health Disorders PHE Fingertips dataset, which we have not yet found below LA level. Therefore an alternative indicator and data source has been listed as a suggestion for Mental Health: 'Small Area Mental Health Index' from the Place-Based Longitudinal Data Resource (PLDR).

Identifying potential data sources

In order to find potential data sources at a sub-LA level, these actions were taken:
- We checked the data sources for relevant TPI/LWI indicators to see if they were available at sub-LA level.
- Where they were, if they were also potential sources for other indicators we listed them in the 'Record of Review of Evidence Sources' sheet.
- We also listed any data sources the team were aware of that may provide data at a sub-LA level and ideas the team had for sources of such data.
- We then worked through this list of data sources (such as Local Inform Plus and Public Health England Fingertips), and where data was available at a sub-LA level we added the potential indicators to the main 'Record of potential indicator data' sheet. If data was not available at sub-LA level it was not included.
- Some of the data sources are not freely available (e.g. Local Insights, LG Inform Plus) so in these cases we have looked at the sources of the data used by Local Insight/LG Inform Plus and added these to the indicator list, so that all the suggested indicators and their sources are freely available.

This table shows the number of proposed indicators by domain, subdomain and element. Some subdomains have their own indicators, not specific to any of their elements, hence the indicator totals in each column do not match.

The criteria for including indicators in the indicator bank was EITHER:
- An indicator from the TPI/LWI (or close proxy) which related to a subdomain or element of the RWF, OR
- An indicator which measured an aspect of a subdomain or element of the RWF that was present in the REA and/or workshop evidence but not part of the TPI/LWI.

PLUS:
- An appropriate data source was identified, ideally at a sub-LA level. .

However, the indicator list does not claim to be exhaustive; local context may inform the identification of other relevant indicators on a project by project basis.

The following criteria were used for selecting data sources:
- Enables measurement of an identified indicator
- Reputable sources such as ONS, Public Health England, Index of Multiple Deprivation
- Updated recently and regularly
- Ideally available at sub-LA geographies (some LA-level data sources have been included to fill gaps where domains have very few indicators)

This table lists the indicators for each domain:

Table 5: Indicators for each Domain of the Rural Wellbeing Framework

Domain	Subdomain	Element	Indicators
Health	Physical Health		YEARS OF POTENTIAL LIFE LOST ILLNESS AND DISABILITY LIFE-LIMITING ILLNESS CHILD OBESITY PREVENTABLE MORTALITY HEALTHY LIFE EXPECTANCY LIFE EXPECTANCY
	Mental Health		MENTAL HEALTH MENTAL HEALTH: INCAPACITY BENEFIT SELF HARM LIFE-LIMITING ILLNESS
Economic Opportunities	Poverty	Relative Poverty	NONE
		Financial Security	MENTAL HEALTH: INCAPACITY BENEFIT
		Affordable Housing	HOUSING AFFORDABILITY (OWNERSHIP) HOUSING AFFORDABILITY (ALL)
			CHILDREN IN LOW INCOME FAMILIES INCOME DEPRIVATION: OLDER PEOPLE FUEL POVERTY
	Education		ADULTS WITHOUT QUALIFICATIONS LIFELONG LEARNING EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF CHILDREN SCHOOL READINESS
	Jobs/Opportunities	Seasonality	SEASONAL/LOCAL PRODUCE
			UNEMPLOYMENT LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT JOB OPPORTUNITIES YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT
Community	Social Capital	Volunteering / Mutual Support / Community Action	OPPORTUNITY TO VOLUNTEER CLOSE SUPPORT
		Belonging / Identity	COMMUNITY COHESION FARMING COMMUNITY
			BAME REPRESENTATION DEMOGRAPHY
	Influence/Power		LOCAL ELECTION TURNOUT
	Community	Digital	NONE

		Hubs	Groups/Resources	
			Physical Spaces/Events	NONE
				NONE
Environment	Natural		Connection with Nature	NATURE CONNECTION NATURE ACCESS
			Pollution (Air/Noise)	AIR POLLUTION: MULTIPLE POLLUTANTS AIR POLLUTION: NITROGEN DIOXIDE
				GREEN SPACE ACCESS
	Culture/Heritage			HERITAGE VISITS
	Built		Scale	NONE
			Housing Quality	POOR HOUSING
			Other Assets Incl. Services	NONE
			Waste / Recycling	RECYCLING
				NONE
	Safety		Crime	CRIME VIOLENT CRIME
			Psychological	CRIME
				NONE

Table 6: Indicators for the ACCESS Headline Element

Headline	Subdomain	Element	Indicators
Access	Access to:	Healthcare	ACCESS TO SERVICES (DISTANCE) ACCESS TO SERVICES (WITHOUT CAR) YEARS OF POTENTIAL LIFE LOST PREVENTABLE MORTALITY HEALTHY LIFE EXPECTANCY LIFE EXPECTANCY
		Jobs/Opportunities	NONE
		Community	NONE
		Environment/Nature	NATURE ACCESS GREEN SPACE ACCESS
		Services	ACCESS TO SERVICES (DISTANCE) ACCESS TO SERVICES (WITHOUT CAR)
	Access via:	Transport	NONE
		Digital	BROADBAND

		Remoteness/Proximity	RURALITY POPULATION DENSITY
		Choice/Influence	NONE

Table 7: Indicators for the EQUALITY Headline Element available at Local Authority Level

Headline	Indicators
Equality	HEALTH INEQUALITY INCOME INEQUALITY GENDER INEQUALITY SOCIAL INEQUALITY ETHNIC INEQUALITY

Table 8: Indicators for SUSTAINABILITY and WELLBEING

Headline	Indicators
Sustainability	ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR RENEWABLE ENERGY USE RECYCLING
Wellbeing	CHILD WELLBEING SELF REPORTED HAPPINESS SELF REPORTED LIFE SATISFACTION SELF REPORTED WORTHWHILE SELF REPORTED ANXIETY

5.2 Completing the indicator bank

The indicator bank is not an exhaustive list and some key elements that the evidence suggested was important do not currently appear to be measured at lower geographies. As can be seen from the tables above, some domains have fewer indicators than others and some elements have no indicators at all. In addition, there are particular areas that the research outlined in section 4 considered to be important to wellbeing, at least in some rural contexts, which would ideally be added to the indicator bank. These could then be used where they are relevant to the target communities. A wishlist of these missing indicators is shown below, and these may be borne in mind when considering primary data collection as outlined in section 5.3.

*Note: Asterisks below highlight indicator gaps that are captured in the TPI. These indicators are available at local authority level and could be used as proxies for lower geographies where deemed appropriate. A list of these, with detailed descriptions and data sources, is available here.

List of missing indicators

DOMAIN: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Subdomain:
Poverty

Element: **Relative Poverty**
'Percentage with Low Income'*

Element: **Financial Security**
A more general indicator such as household savings or debt

Element: **Affordable Housing**
Proportion of homes that are second homes in the area

Subdomain:
Education

Childcare quality* and availability*

Subdomain:
Jobs / Opportunities

Job quality* and/or local businesses*and/or measure for employment typical for rural areas such as farming and fishing

Element: **Seasonality**
Suggestions for measurement, using secondary meteorological, traffic/highways or police data where available, include:
- Summer population inflow
- Winter population outflow
- Seasonal work – proportion of local jobs that are seasonal only
- Extreme weather – frequency of incidences or impacts such as road closures
- Holiday homes

DOMAIN: COMMUNITY

Subdomain:

Clubs and societies* and organisation membership*

Social Capital

Element: **Volunteering/Mutual Support/Community Action**
Volunteering levels and/or willingness to volunteer
Capability to have love, friendship and support, an attachment attribute on the ICECAP capability wellbeing measure (www.birmingham.ac.uk/icecap)

Element: **Belonging/Identity**
Discrimination indicator
Length of Tenure indicator to measure length of time people live in the area

Subdomain:
Influence / Power

Measures of perceived influence over the community/area and more objective mapping of key power dynamics, see example from the REA[105]

Subdomain: Community Hubs	Element: **Digital Groups/Resources** Count of the number of digital groups and resources available; measure of participation in these groups; access to digital media
	Element: **Physical Spaces/Events** Number of community events taking place; average distance from various community 'hubs' such as shops and pubs

DOMAIN: ENVIRONMENT

Subdomain: Natural	Element: **Connection with Nature** Well covered by the existing indicators
	Element: **Pollution (air/noise)** Noise pollution is not; other forms of pollution, such as waterways or pollution from farming and/or industry
Subdomain: Culture / Heritage	Number of cultural events; participation in the arts; distance to museums etc
Subdomain: Built	Element: **Scale** Perceptions of, and objective measures of, scale change in terms of built up areas
	Element: **Housing Quality** Well covered by the existing indicators.
	Element: **Other Assets (Incl. Services)** Availability, accessibility and use of local assets (post office, village hall, pub etc)
	Element: **Waste/Recycling** Frequency and nature of collections; distance to these services; fly tipping occurrences
Subdomain: Safety	Element: **Crime** Primary youth offenders*
	Element: **Psychological** Perceived safety at dark*

HEADLINE: ACCESS

Access **to**:	Element: **Healthcare** Access to reproductive health and mental health services for different age groups and for people who may be particularly isolated by social, cultural and familial expectations such as farmers
	Element: **Jobs/Opportunities** and Element: **Community**

Remoteness

Element: **Environment/Nature** and Element: **Services**
Covered

Access **via**:   Element: **Transport**
Subjective measure of how far the available transport options meet people's needs;
objective measures of car ownership, public transport availability and the availability of
on demand rural transport

Element: **Digital**
Engagement with digital communication technology; availability and download speeds
of broadband in the area

Element: **Remoteness/Proximity**
Emergency services access and response times

Element: **Choice/Influence**
Perceived influence over local decisions; measures of personal autonomy

5.3   Primary data collection

As the previous section outlines there are not always indicators for every domain or subdomain of the
RWF. Even if there were, the geographical level at which secondary data is often available might not be
suitable for project evaluation or the secondary data indicator might miss the main impact of a specific
project. Below we outline existing wellbeing measures and questions that can be used in project
evaluation as well as summarising our exploration of boosting existing surveys.

Existing wellbeing measures

A key measure for subjective wellbeing in the UK is the wellbeing measure used by the Office for National
Statistics (ONS). The measure consists of four questions, also referred to as the ONS4: life satisfaction,
happiness, sense of worthwhile/purpose and anxiety. The ONS has a [description](#) of how they collect
wellbeing data on a national level. The questions are also frequently used in evaluation questionnaires.
Both the Annual Population Survey and the Opinion and Lifestyle Survey collate data on these four
questions and data tables are regularly published by the ONSE, including at local authority level.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales [WEMWBS](#) are another well researched and used
questionnaire, however, the testing of the survey was done mostly on a paper based questionnaire. The
Individual and Community Wellbeing and Project Impact tool from Centre for Thriving Places [Happiness
Pulse](#) uses both the ONS4 and the shorter SWEMWEBS.

For a comprehensive overview of wellbeing measures, What Works Centre for Wellbeing offers an online
interactive [Wellbeing Measures Bank](#). What Works Centre for Wellbeing also has a [summary](#) of indicators,
frameworks and measures of community wellbeing (and synonyms or proxies for community wellbeing)
used by UK governmental and non-governmental agencies (data collected until 2017).

Boosting existing surveys

Some of the data for the RWF will be readily available. However, with the exception of census data, self-reported information will generally not be available for geographical areas smaller than local authorities. One possible solution to this challenge is to request from surveys with relevant questions booster samples for local areas of interest. Where this is possible, it can provide quality data at a local level with a robust national benchmark for comparison.

To identify which surveys would be of interest, we created a table based on the six domains and subdomains of the draft framework at the end of Stage 3. Seven surveys were considered – the Understanding Society Survey, the People and Nature Survey (formerly MENE), the Community Life Survey, the Labour Force Survey, the English Housing Survey, the National Travel Survey and What about YOUth. These surveys were chosen for their likelihood of offering data relevant to the framework. The questionnaires for each survey were then reviewed to identify whether questions that would be useful to the framework were included. These questions were identified and tabulated. In the case of the Understanding Society Survey, which has a complex set of modules, the module in which the questions are included where relevant.

Please note that practically boosting a survey is up to each project or policy. Boosting a survey might require working with both the organisation commissioning and the one running the survey. Whether boosting is possible at all or for a timeframe desired is not set and needs to be agreed for each boost. However, examples such as the ONS boost of the Opinion and Lifestyle Survey to weekly waves during the Covid pandemic and the hyperlocal Community Life Survey boosting by Power to Change shows how effectively this approach can be used to demonstrate wellbeing related impacts.

Table 9: Additional Indicators that could be available through survey boosting

	Understanding Society Survey	The People and Nature Survey	Community Life	Labour Force Survey	English Housing Survey	Other
HEALTH						
Physical activity	exercise_w9 mod	X				
Healthy eating	nutrition_w9 mod					
Subjective health	scsf1					
Routine health checks	Healthserviceuselong_w10					
Unhealthy behaviour (smoking, drinking)	smoker, ncigs, drnk4w, fivealcdr					
Children's wellbeing						What about YOUth
ECONOMY						
Job satisfaction	jbsat					
Job Quality	currentemployment mod			X		
Economically inactive (because no jobs available)				X		
Adult learning				X		
RELATIONSHIPS						

Volunteering	voluntarywork_w10		FUnPd, FUnOft		
Local civic engagement			Various questions		
Neighbourhood (sense of belonging, trust, help, talk to neighbours, want to stay, etc.)	localneighbourhood_w6, scaneighbourhood_w9		Various questions	Belong, NChat, Trust	
Family relationships (how often see parents, children)	familynetworks_w9 mod		frndrel1		
Personal relationships	sclonely		Lon1, Lon2, Lon3,LonOft		
Binding social capital (friends who are different)			Srace, sfaith, sage, seduc	AmWell, ETension	
ENVIRONMENT					
Time spent outdoors		X			
Access to green space		X			
Nature connection		X			
Aesthetics of landscape		X			
Housing satisfaction				HSatis	
Housing quality				Several	
Neighbourhood satisfaction				HAS44	
ACCESS					
Use of public transport	transportbehaviour_w10				National Travel Survey
Use of active transport	transportbehaviour_w10 (just cycling)				National Travel Survey
Distance to work	commutingbehaviour_w10				National Travel Survey
Perceptions of public transport	commutingbehaviour_w10				
Access to internet	deviceuse (w11) mod				
Things within a 20 minute walk			Assets2	LocalAm	
SAFETY					
Feelings of safety	unsafe, avoid			Several	
OTHER IDEAS					
Subjective wellbeing	sclfsato	X	WellB1		

Prefer / Expect to move somewhere else	lkmove, xpmove (xpmvtown)					
Inward migration	annualeventhistory mod					
Future aspirations of young adults	youngadults_w9 mod					
Local identity	ethid5, pride5					
EQUALITY						
Feeling unsafe because of minority status	resunsafe, resavoid, resinsulted					
SUSTAINABILITY						
Various pro-environmental behaviours	environmentalbehaviour_w10	X				
Recycling	household_w10	X				
Frequency of travel by car	transportbehaviour_w10 (trcarfq)					National Travel Survey
Concern about environment	scaenvironment_w10	X				

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Wellbeing matters. It matters to individuals, to neighbourhoods and to nations. The wellbeing of rural communities urgently needs to be as well understood, measured, valued and supported as that of their urban counterparts.

This report aims to support those working with and for rural communities to put wellbeing outcomes at the heart of their decision-making.

The research behind this report highlighted the many gaps in existing research and data on rural wellbeing, at a time when wellbeing research has grown rapidly elsewhere. The RWF that has emerged from this work brings together the best of the knowledge that is out there on what matters most to individual and community wellbeing in rural areas today.

The indicator bank and guidance provided here are the first steps towards a more comprehensive set of tools to grow understanding of this vital topic and grow the application of a wellbeing approach within today's rural policy makers and practitioners. We also hope it can provide a foundation for more ongoing data to be gathered and knowledge to be shared about what is needed, what works and what matters for rural wellbeing now and in the future. There is a range of recommendations for additional ways this could be supported on pp.5-6 of this report.

The framework is a powerful conceptual tool for reflection and engagement. Not only does it draw out the important elements of the local economy, environment, services and social capital that are required for people to flourish, but also provides the vital additional lens showing how well those local conditions can be delivered in ways that break down access barriers and inequalities, as well as preserving the natural environment on which future wellbeing depends.

We hope this report will help decisionmakers in all sectors to better measure, understand and support a growth in wellbeing of people in rural communities across the UK.

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