



Arsyllfa **Wledig** Cymru
Wales **Rural** Observatory

DEEP RURAL LOCALITIES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary provides an overview of results from a research project in four community areas of 'deep rural' Wales undertaken by the Wales Rural Observatory (WRO) between December 2008 and April 2009.

The Research

By a team at Cardiff University for the Wales Rural Observatory (WRO)

KEY FINDINGS

94% of respondents rated their quality of life as either 'very good' or 'fairly good'.

Respondents tended to cite peace and quiet, feelings of community, a slower pace of life, landscape and scenery as things they liked in their area.

36% of residents rated general service provision in their local area as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

63% rated the provision of hospitals as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

75% of respondents considered a school to be 'essential' in their local area; 21% considered it to be 'desirable'.

82% of respondents considered a Post Office to be 'essential'; 16% stated that it was 'desirable'.

58% of respondents considered broadband to be 'essential' and 33% stated that it was 'desirable'. However, only 51% of total respondents received broadband services.

92% of respondents considered access to a car to be 'essential'. Only 4% of total households did not have access to a private vehicle.

Public transport was generally rated as poor.

80% of properties had central heating. Similarly high proportions had loft insulation and double glazing.

The standard of heating and energy saving was not as high in rented properties: 30% did not have central heating; 30% did not have loft insulation; and 31% did not have double glazing.

59% of households were not connected to mains drainage.

There were widespread concerns about the sustainability of communities in 'deep rural' Wales.

BACKGROUND

Following the publication in 2008 of the policy document 'One Wales', which identified a need to address the particular issues affecting 'deep rural' areas in Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) commissioned the Wales Rural Observatory (WRO) to undertake extensive research into these issues. The aim of the research was to explore how residents experienced life in 'deep rural' parts of Wales, with a focus on the strategies and mechanisms adopted with regard to service provision.

For the purpose of the study, deep rural areas were defined as communities with fewer than 1,000 households, located at least 30 minutes drive-time from a centre with a population of more than 10,000. In order to gain a better understanding of the particular issues affecting these areas, an initial broad sweep analysis of data gathered as part of a survey of households in rural Wales, undertaken by the WRO in 2007¹, was carried out. The results of this analysis were subsequently used to inform the design of the research.

METHODOLOGY

A key aim of the research was to provide different regional perspectives and to ensure sufficient variation. Following discussions with WAG, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and local authority representatives from Gwynedd, Pembrokeshire and Powys, it was agreed that the research would be conducted in four broad areas: the Llŷn Peninsula of Gwynedd, North Powys, South Powys and North Pembrokeshire. It was further agreed that the WRO would identify four candidate deep rural communities, one in each of the named areas, to participate in the study.

As a first step in identifying suitable study communities, the initial definition of what constituted a 'deep rural' area was refined and extended to include the following criteria:

- communities located at least 30 minutes drive-time from a centre with a population of more than 10,000.
- communities comprising between 180 – 500 households.
- communities with fewer than five of twelve 'key' services, defined as:

- Food only shop
- Post Office
- Petrol station
- Bank or Building Society
- General Practitioner
- Dental surgery
- Pharmacy
- Educational establishment
- Permanent library
- Police station
- Bus stop or railway station
- Cash machine

Using these criteria, along with GIS mapping technology, a short list of twenty-four potential research communities was drawn up by the WRO. Drawing on information gathered through scoping visits to each individual community, along with advice from WAG and the local authorities, four research communities were selected, namely: Aberdaron (located on the Llŷn Peninsula in Gwynedd); Clydau in North Pembrokeshire; Llanfihangel-yng-Ngwynfa in North Powys; and Llangammarch Wells in South Powys. Research areas around these communities were delineated using postcodes and GIS technology. As postcodes overlap community council areas, some sections of adjacent communities were also included in the research areas.

The research consisted of four key phases.

Phase 1: During December 2008 and January 2009, an in-depth household survey was conducted in each of the research areas. The surveys were carried out by a team of post-graduate researchers, which included Welsh speakers, under the supervision of WRO core personnel. Each household within the research areas was asked to complete a questionnaire, (either in Welsh or English) over a period of four days. The table below shows the response rate for each research community area.

Community	Responses	Response rate
Aberdaron ²	214	47%
Clydau	245	54%
Llanfihangel	192	52%
Llangammarch	194	52%
Total	845	51%

¹ Wales Rural Observatory (2008) *Report on the Household Survey in Rural Wales: Report 17*. WRO: Cardiff.

² According to the 2001 Census, over 22% of properties in the Aberdaron research area were holiday homes or unoccupied.

Phase 2: Following on from the household survey, a total of 60 (15 in each study area) in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with residents who had indicated a willingness to participate in the second phase of the research. Once again, this phase of the research was designed and developed with the option of conducting the interviews in either English or Welsh. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed.

Phase 3: In each of the four study areas, a focus group was held with local young people between the ages of 14 to 18. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed. The Aberdaron and Clydau focus groups were conducted in the Welsh language.

Phase 4: A range of service providers with operational interests in 'deep rural' Wales was asked to complete a questionnaire. They were given the option of responding by postal, electronic or Internet methods, and in Welsh or English. A total of 243 service providers was contacted and 49 responded, giving a response rate of 20%.

FINDINGS

There was consistency in the research findings; the qualitative data of Phases 2, 3 and 4 tended to support the quantitative data yielded by Phase 1, the household survey.

Locality and Demographics

Across the four areas, almost 45% of respondents had lived in their current local area for over 25 years.

Over half of all respondents were in employment; 39% were retired; 5% were unemployed; and 3% were long term sick and disabled. Aberdaron, which had the highest proportion of retired residents, had a considerably lower proportion of respondents in employment. Clydau had the highest proportion of long term sick and disabled respondents, at 6%. Relatively high proportions of respondents (35%) worked at or from home.

With regard to household income, 23% of respondents had an annual household income of less than £10,000, while 8% had household incomes of more than £52,000 per annum.

Over 90% of respondents were satisfied with their local area as a place to live. Similarly, 94% rated their quality of life as either 'very good' or 'fairly good'. Respondents tended to value most the

peace and quiet, slower pace of life, community belonging, and the landscape associated with their area. The most commonly cited 'dislikes' were a lack of services, and the decline in, and closure of, existing services.

Community and Culture

In terms of ethnicity and language, 49% of respondents considered themselves Welsh, and just over a third (35%) of respondents were fluent Welsh speakers. Aberdaron and Llanfihangel had the highest proportions of Welsh speakers, while Llangamarch recorded the lowest. Almost 40% of respondents had moved to their local area from England.

Overall perceptions of community solidarity were high, with 86% of respondents stating that there was a good 'sense of community' in their local areas. Similarly, a high proportion of respondents (80%) considered themselves to be a member of the local community. Perceptions of community belonging tended to be highest among Welsh speakers - 91% of this groups considered themselves to be active members of the local community. Interview data from non-Welsh residents indicated, however, that they were generally well integrated into local communities. A sizeable minority of 40% of all respondents considered their local area to be isolated.

Services

Across the four community areas, 37% rated general service provision as 'satisfactory'; 27% rated it as either 'good' or 'very good'; and 36% of respondents rated general service provision as 'poor' or 'very poor'. Few respondents thought that the provision of services had changed 'for the better'. Aberdaron respondents tended to perceive their services in the best light, while Llanfihangel respondents were the most critical. Long-term residents were most likely to suggest that services had changed 'for the worse'.

Overall, 18% of respondents relied on help to access services. However, just over a quarter (26%) of all respondents in the over 65 age group relied on help to access services. In the Llanfihangel community area, 23% of all respondents relied on help to access services.

In terms of access to health services, residents were generally satisfied with the provision of general practitioners and dissatisfied with access to dental surgeries. There were also major concerns surrounding hospital provision and the ambulance services. For example, 63% of

respondents rated the provision of hospitals as 'poor' or 'very poor', and 42% of respondents had to travel over 30 miles to a hospital. In Aberdaron this proportion was 87%. In addition, it was argued that the ambulance services were under-resourced. Interview evidence indicated that, while residents tended to have lower expectations of service provision and balanced these against their quality of life, some were considering a move to an urban area because of perceived problems of access to health services.

While policing was generally held to be 'satisfactory', more respondents considered policing to be 'poor' or 'very poor' than 'good' or 'very good'. The overall perception was that the police service was under-resourced.

Certain services, some of which had recently seen withdrawals from these areas, were deemed by large proportions of respondents to be 'essential' for the sustainability of these rural communities. For example, 75% of respondents considered a school to be 'essential' in their local area, and a further 21% considered a school to be 'desirable'. At 82%, even more respondents considered a Post Office to be 'essential', and 16% stated that it was 'desirable'. A local general practitioner was considered to be 'essential' by 66% of respondents, and just over a quarter (26%) considered it to be 'desirable'. Services such as community halls, public houses, churches and chapels were also considered to be important for these rural communities by large proportions of respondents, both in the household survey and in the interviews.

Within the four areas surveyed, there was no local provision for cinemas, nightclubs, theatres, swimming pools, gyms or leisure centres. Gaining access to these types of service entailed a roundtrip of one hour or more. Evidence from the focus groups demonstrated that these access issues greatly affected teenagers, who wished to seek greater independence, but lacked personal transport.

Ease of access to these 'deep rural' areas by the emergency services were considered by most respondents to be either 'good', 'very good' or 'satisfactory'. However, there were significant proportions of respondents who considered access to be 'poor' or 'very poor', particularly in Aberdaron (34%). Concerns raised earlier about the quality of ambulance services should also be noted.

Local shops in these deep rural areas were well used, although there was anecdotal evidence that the prices of goods were expensive relative to urban areas. Almost three-quarters of households made weekly trips to supermarkets in larger towns. In addition, just over half (52%) of all respondents shopped, to varying degrees of frequency, using the internet.

Access to a home computer was relatively high, at 74% of all households. The vast majority of these households (88%) were also connected to the internet, which represented 65% of the total households surveyed.

In terms of the provision of broadband services, there was clearly a gap between demand and supply. 58% of respondents considered broadband to be 'essential' and a further 33% stated that it was 'desirable'. However, only 51% actually received broadband services. All categories of respondents, including survey respondents, interviewees, teenagers and service providers, emphasised the necessity for a high quality broadband service in rural Wales that would better enable businesses, entrepreneurs, education providers and local communities to thrive and survive. Llanfihangel and Llangammarch had the poorest broadband service.

In terms of digital broadcasting services, 55% of respondents received these services; 21% did not; and 22% stated that they were not available in their area.

Respondents tended to assess mobile telephone reception as either 'patchy' or 'poor', with only 20% considering it to be 'good'. Llangammarch had the best mobile telephone reception; Llanfihangel had the worst. Public telephones were never used by the vast majority (81%) of respondents. Those respondents who did use them tended to do so less than once a week.

Transport

Public transport was generally rated as poor within the study areas. Private vehicles were deemed by 92% of respondents to be 'essential' for living in their local area, and only 4% of households did not have access to a car or other private vehicle.

Three out of every five households 41% owned two or more vehicles, and a further 37% owned one. These data excluded agricultural vehicles. Nobody used public transport to get to work.

The cost of fuel and the over-riding need to have a car were cited as the two predominant reasons why living in these rural areas was more expensive than urban areas. Although there were a limited number of retail outlets for fuel in each area, many respondents aligned their re-fuelling with planned trips to nearby towns.

Energy

The survey showed that 80% of households had central heating. In terms of energy saving measures, 82% of respondents had loft insulation; 82% had double glazing; 87% made use of energy saving light bulbs; and 35% had cavity wall insulation. It should be noted that many properties had solid stone walls, thus cavity wall insulation was not an option. Few households made use of solar panels or wind generators. However, just over a third (34%) of respondents in Aberdaron were considering investing in a wind generator.

The provision of central heating and energy saving products varied according to household tenure. For example, 80% of social rented housing had central heating compared with 67% of private rental properties.

Reflecting rising fuel costs, 46% of respondents limited their heating during cold weather to save money. A small minority stated that they restricted their heating for reasons of environmental concern. Lower income groups were the group most likely to limit their use of heating.

With regard to electricity supply, more than one in three respondents agreed that they suffered from a number of power cuts in their local areas. Aberdaron and Llangammarch had the highest proportions of respondents with negative perceptions of the dependability of the local electricity service.

About six out of ten households surveyed were not connected to mains drainage. There were a number of properties in Llangammarch and Llanfihangel that relied on wells or springs for their water.

Sustainable Communities

There was a general concern about the long-term sustainability of these 'deep rural' areas. It was argued that a combination of circumstances was leading to an ageing population and that there were no incentives for younger people to either stay in these areas or to move to them. These circumstances included:

- A lack of rural focus from WAG;
- Unrealistic budgets for local authorities;
- No employment prospects;
- High house prices;
- Little affordable housing;
- No 'value for money' for Council Tax;
- A withdrawal of services- particularly local schools;
- High cost of living.

In addition, there were concerns about the sustainability of the Welsh language.

Ideas to enhance sustainability

Respondents from all categories provided suggestions for promoting and enhancing the sustainability of their local areas. These included:

- Financial incentives for SMEs and other rural businesses;
- High quality broadband and telecommunications;
- Governance arrangements that include local communities, local government, local businesses and organisations such as the FC, RSPB and Severn Trent Water;
- 'Rural relief' with regard to fuel, food, vehicle excise duty and Council Tax;
- New criteria to assess rural local government budgets;
- A more sympathetic and empathetic rural planning system;
- More affordable housing;
- Address the issue of holiday homes;
- Recognise the value of the pharmacy network and utilise it for service delivery in rural areas;
- Group service providers together under one roof in rural offices;
- Internet cafes;
- Student bus/train passes;
- Subsidised group travel for young people to access leisure facilities.