

The Pretty Poverty Report Cornwall Rurality Matters

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Foreword by Perran Moon MP

Cornwall is a place of extraordinary beauty, rich heritage, and proud communities. As the Member of Parliament for Camborne, Redruth and Hayle, I'm often struck—especially when speaking to Ministers—by how easy it is to persuade them to visit during the summer months. Like many across the UK, they leap at the chance, often reminiscing about childhood holidays spent in our Duchy.

But behind the postcard-perfect image lies a more complex reality—one where too many local people face daily struggles with low pay, insecure housing, limited transport, and poor access to essential services. This is the “pretty poverty” at the heart of this report.

The findings and recommendations set out here are grounded in robust evidence, including qualitative insights into lived experience. But for those of us who live in Cornwall, they are also deeply intuitive. We see and feel the effects of “pretty poverty” every day—realities that visitors often miss.

I would like to thank Tanya Ovenden-Hope, Victoria Brown, and Elpida Achtaridou for their work. This report is not only insightful—it is a powerful resource for local representatives. It lays bare the challenges we face and equips us with the evidence needed to advocate effectively with central Government, from a distinctly Cornish perspective.

I have said it before, and it bears repeating: there is no single, sweeping reform—no matter how radical—that can reset the pressures that Cornwall faces. But a crucial first step, as this report outlines, is to ensure that funding distribution reflects the unique characteristics of remote coastal areas like ours.

A central concern is that the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) fail to capture the true extent of remote coastal deprivation. While the IMD has its strengths, relying solely on it risks overlooking the deep structural issues affecting our communities.

There has been some progress. In June 2025, the Government launched a Fair Funding Review, acknowledging that outdated models have long short-changed places like Cornwall. This review includes a ‘remoteness adjustment’ to better support remote coastal areas and recognises the additional costs of serving daytime visitors and tourists.

The Treasury has also reviewed the Green Book, and its first finding was significant: it acknowledged that national investment decisions have placed insufficient emphasis on place-based objectives—on projects that work together to meet the needs of specific communities.

But we must go further. Central Government should be deeply concerned that remote coastal deprivation, as detailed in this report, is not adequately captured by current indicators. This oversight disadvantages people facing educational isolation, barriers to services, and precarious employment.

From my perspective, it all comes back to the housing crisis. The personal stories in this report—of people struggling with unaffordable rents and fierce competition—echo what I hear regularly on the doorstep and in my constituency surgeries.

This report is instrumental in setting out the problem. It is now up to those of us in Government to act. The first step is ensuring that decisions about Cornwall are based on accurate, meaningful assessments of deprivation. That is not happening today—and until it does, the challenges facing our communities will remain unresolved.

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Acknowledgements

The research team appreciate the work of research assistants Dr Marie Bradwell and Melanie West in supporting the Cornwall Rurality Matters Project.

The Diocese of Truro and Plymouth Marjon University jointly funded this report to explore and understand what is meant by ‘rural’ deprivation, how this relates to the IMD 2019 classification and the lived experiences of people in Cornwall’s disadvantaged rural areas.

The Diocese will use the findings and recommendations from this report to support its work with key partners in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. In line with one of the top priorities in the Diocesan Plan for Change & Renewal, the report will support work with, and for those most in need.

Plymouth Marjon University has a commitment to Place and Social Purpose as a core priority of the Marjon 2030 Strategy, and will use the findings of this report to influence place-based equity in social policy.

Executive Summary

The Pretty Poverty Report presents groundbreaking research into rural deprivation in Cornwall, revealing how traditional measurement tools systematically underestimate disadvantage in rural communities. Through the lived experiences of residents across six deprived rural neighbourhoods, this comprehensive study exposes the inadequacies of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) in capturing the complex realities of rural poverty.

Six Critical Themes of Rural Deprivation in Cornwall

The research identified six interconnected themes that fundamentally challenge current deprivation measurement approaches:

- 1. Transport Dependency** emerges as the most significant barrier, with car ownership representing essential infrastructure rather than affluence. Rural residents face systematic exclusion from employment, healthcare, and social opportunities without private transport, creating an additional 'rural tax' invisible to income-based measures.
- 2. Housing Displacement** reveals how second homes and holiday lets create availability crises beyond simple affordability issues. With over 20,000 homes out of residential use in Cornwall, local residents face intense competition and intergenerational dependencies not captured by standard housing indicators.
- 3. Employment Precarity** extends beyond unemployment to include underemployment, seasonal work patterns, and geographic constraints on career development. Cornwall's tourism-dependent economy creates systemic instability affecting even highly qualified professionals.
- 4. Healthcare Withdrawal** demonstrates how service centralisation and digital exclusion compound geographic barriers. Residents face increasing travel distances for basic care while struggling with digitised systems that assume urban connectivity levels.
- 5. Educational Isolation** encompasses transport barriers, limited local provision, and constrained aspirations. Rural students face additional costs and time requirements for educational progression, while schools struggle with higher-than-average special needs concentrations.
- 6. Community Resilience** reveals strong social capital and mutual support networks that both mitigate disadvantage and potentially mask underlying needs from policy recognition.

Critical Findings on IMD Measurement Inadequacies

The research demonstrates three fundamental flaws in current deprivation measurement:

Spatial Aggregation Problems: The IMD's Lower-layer Super Output Area (LSOA) approach creates averaging effects that mask individual household disadvantage in rural areas where poverty is dispersed rather than concentrated.

Inadequate Domain Weighting: Transport barriers receive only 9.3% weighting within the 'Barriers to Housing and Services' domain, despite emerging as the primary determinant of rural life quality and economic participation.

Urban-Centric Indicators: Crime statistics, public transport measures, and service proximity indicators systematically undervalue rural challenges while overemphasizing urban-relevant factors.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The report calls for comprehensive policy framework development addressing rural-specific challenges:

Measurement Reform: Develop rural-specific deprivation indices using smaller geographic units, increased transport barrier weighting, and social capital measures.

Transport Policy: Recognise rural transport as essential infrastructure requiring sustained investment in demand-responsive services rather than discretionary provision.

Housing Strategy: Address both affordability and availability through comprehensive approaches managing second home impacts while supporting local housing needs.

Service Delivery: Develop innovative models combining digital access with place-based provision, recognising compound disadvantage from service withdrawal.

Economic Development: Support rural employment creation addressing skills mismatches and geographic constraints while building on local assets.

Broader Significance


This research contributes to growing evidence that rural communities require alternative approaches to both measurement and intervention. The systematic limitations identified in Cornwall's case suggest current funding mechanisms may perpetuate rural disadvantage by under-recognizing genuine need.


The study's participatory methodology demonstrates how community voices can inform more appropriate rural measurement approaches, moving beyond urban-derived frameworks to capture the complex realities of rural life. As policy makers increasingly recognise rural needs, this research provides crucial evidence for developing place-based approaches that acknowledge unique geographical and social contexts.


The Pretty Poverty Report ultimately reveals that addressing rural deprivation requires fundamental shifts in how we measure, understand, and respond to disadvantage in rural communities—moving from urban-centric assumptions to rural-specific realities grounded in lived experience.


Key Findings of the Pretty Poverty Report


Pretty Poverty:
Rural Deprivation
in Cornwall


Transport Dependency

Housing Displacement

Employment Precarity

Healthcare Withdrawal

Educational Isolation

Community Resilience

Introduction

I think that the pretty poverty that Cornwall has is really, really hidden. Especially from tourists. They come down and they go to Padstow, or they go to Rock, or they go to Mevagissey or St Ives, and it all looks very idyllic. They don't get to see the poverty that's right on the doorstep. Hanna, St Day

To address issues of social inequity it is crucial to understand how deprivation is experienced in all places. Sustained deprivation in a society impacts negatively on economic growth (British Medical Association, 2022), because those living in deprivation are more likely to suffer from a range of serious health conditions such as serious mental illness, obesity, diabetes, and learning disabilities (Baker, 2019). In England deprivation is measured using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). It is the official measure of relative deprivation at small-area level and is designed to identify 32,844 Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) where there are 39 indicators of deprivation categorised across the following seven domains: Income, Employment, Health deprivation and disability, Education, Skills Training, Crime, Barriers to Housing and Services, Living Environment. The IMD findings are used to inform the distribution of government resources or funding with the intention that people most in need benefit from improved services (Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government, 2019).

The intended purpose of the IMD is clear, however as a measure of deprivation for all places, urban and rural, its representativeness has been argued to be limited (Noble S. , Why the Indices of Deprivation are still important in the open data era, 2010). Accepting that the IMD is not an absolute measure of deprivation, meaning that an area with a score of 20 is not half as deprived as an area with a score of 40, and that it can not be used to examine change over time because it is a relative score, the greatest challenge to its efficacy is that it essentially measures concentration, favouring dense populations rather than sparsely populated rural areas where deprivation may be more spread out. This challenge for the IMD to accurately measure rural deprivation is highlighted by only 2% of rural areas being identified as deprived by the IMD, while measuring households in poverty indicates 17% of deprivation occurs in rural settings (Noble S. , Why the Indices of Deprivation are still important in the open data era, 2010).

Cornwall is a county in the far south west of the United Kingdom. In 2021 it was reported as the 4th least productive UK region in terms of Gross Value Added, with earned income at 84% of UK averages, and housing/income costs the 21st most expensive in the UK (Meyrick, 2021). Prior to Brexit, Cornwall was recognised as one of the poorest areas in Western Europe, receiving the highest level of structural funding from 1999 through European Objective 1 and then Convergence funding. Cornwall also has 56% of its population living outside of towns, 42% of whom live in rural settlements (European Network for Rural Development, 2018). For Cornwall, rurality matters.

The combination of low wages and high house prices suggests an unequal distribution of wealth in Cornwall. Cornwall was ranked as 83 of 137 for overall deprivation using IMD 2019 data and there are 76 Cornish LSOAs that are within the most 30% deprivation in the country (Cornwall Council, 2023). However, the rural living experienced by residents of Cornwall in sparse populations suggest that these IMD data may underestimate the levels of deprivation being experienced by those living in rural Cornwall. Therefore any understanding of deprivation requires a measurement that considers indicators which ensure place-based equity.

Recognising the challenges of the IMD for accurately representing rural areas, the Cornwall Rurality Matters project established a research design that aligned the IMD with the concept of ‘educational isolation’ Ovenden-Hope and Passy (2019) to provide more focused areas for exploring rural deprivation. LSOAs in Cornwall were identified using the IMD 2019 highest 20-30% of deprived neighbourhoods, of these the predominantly rural neighbourhoods were identified using the rural-urban classification. Each of these LSOAs were explored to see if they aligned to a primary school that was considered ‘educationally isolated’ using the place-based characteristics established by Ovenden-Hope and Passy (2019). Educationally isolated schools experience three combined place-based elements, geographical remoteness, socioeconomic deprivation and cultural isolation. Those LSOAs that did have an educationally isolated primary school were sorted based on geographical spread across the length of Cornwall.

Six LSOAs were selected on these criteria to represent deprived rural areas across the length of Cornwall - St Buryan and Sennen, St Day, Bodmin St Mary’s Ward South East, St Dennis South, St Blazey West and Looe North East and St Martin (see Figure 1 - Map of selected LSOAs for the Cornwall Rurality Matters project). A cross section of adult residents of these neighbourhoods were interviewed between April 2024 and March 2025 to explore their lived experiences. These interviews were conducted to support

participation of those living in rural areas, with residents choosing how they would prefer to communicate with the researchers - by phone, face to face, online, or by email.

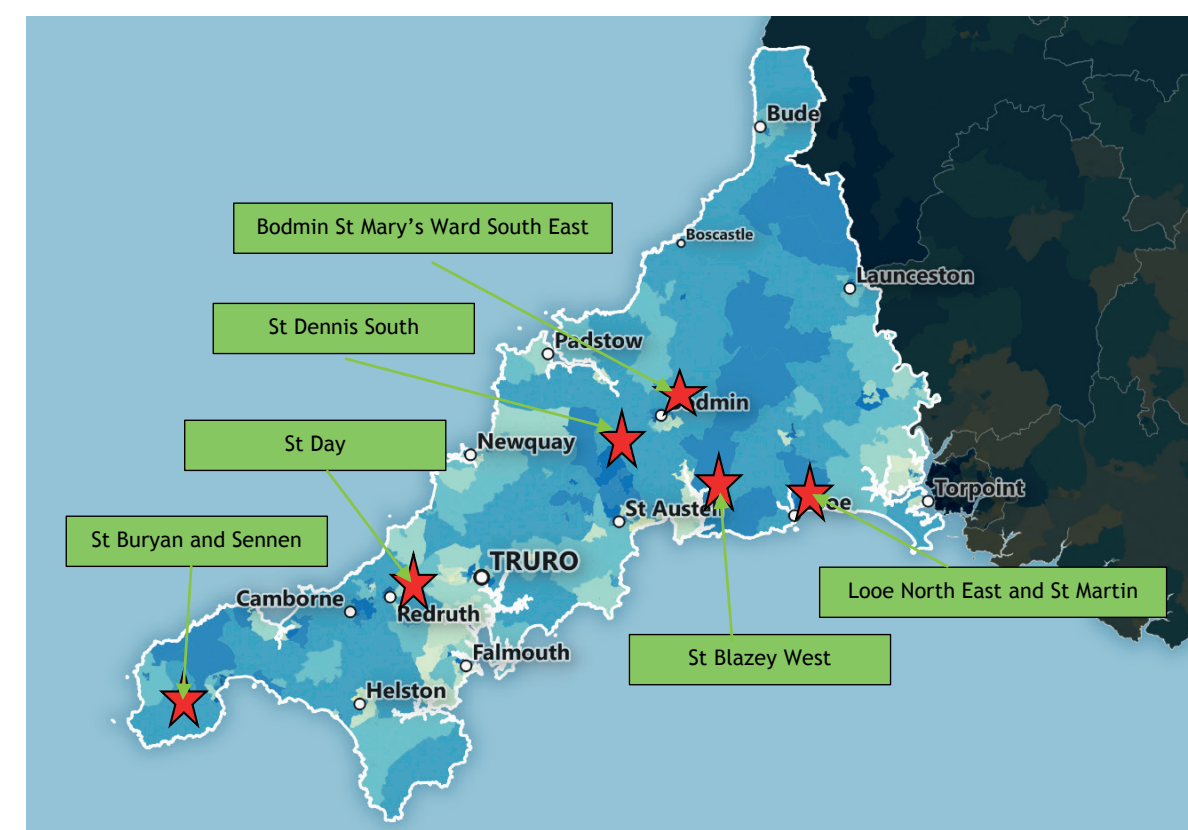


Figure 1: Map of selected LSOAs for the Cornwall Rurality Matters project (NB: The darker the blue, the higher the deprivation).

The Pretty Poverty Report, the findings of the Cornwall Rurality Matters project, addresses the issue of rural deprivation in Cornwall through the authentic lived experience of the people that live in some of Cornwall’s most deprived rural neighbourhoods. The research findings illuminate the efficacy of the IMD for accurately representing deprivation in rural Cornwall, as well as informing understanding of rural deprivation more widely. The report is intended to provoke discussion on the urban bias of the IMD, which in turn should necessitate a review of place-based inequity in policy making.

The ‘Cornwall Rurality Matters’ Context

In this section the context for the Cornwall Rurality Matters research project is explored in more detail, focusing on the Index of Deprivation (IMD) as a measure of deprivation, the distinctiveness of rural deprivation from urban deprivation, the IMD use in Cornwall, and considerations of educational isolation for understanding of rural deprivation in Cornwall.

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

IMD Structure

The IMD is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England, produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government every four years. It ranks 32,844 Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) from 1 (most deprived) to 32,844 (least deprived) by combining seven domains into a weighted composite score (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019):

- Income (22.5%) - measures the proportion of the population experiencing deprivation relating to low income e.g., children in deprived families (IDACI) and older people 60+ experiencing income deprivation (IDAOPI).
- Employment (22.5%) - measures the proportion of the working age population involuntarily excluded from the labour market.
- Health Deprivation and Disability (13.5%) - measures the risk of premature death and impairment of quality of life through poor physical and mental health.
- Education, Skills Training (13.5%) - measures the lack of attainment and skills in the local population.
- Crime (9.3%) - measures the risk of personal and material victimization at local level
- Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%) - measures the physical and financial accessibility of house and local services.
- Living Environment (9.3%) - measures the quality of both the indoor and outdoor local environment.

IMD strengths and limitations

The IMD has some strengths that have sustained its use as the key government measure of deprivation in England, namely:

1. **Multi-Dimensionality**
The IMD captures diverse elements of deprivation—economic, social, educational, and environmental—offering a holistic assessment of local needs.
2. **Small-Area Precision**
By operating at the LSOA level (approximately 1,500 residents), the IMD identifies pockets of concentrated deprivation within larger areas, guiding targeted interventions.
3. **Comparative Utility**
The relative ranks facilitate benchmarking across England, informing resource allocation, policy evaluation, and academic research.

However, these strengths have masked the limitations for measuring deprivation accurately by place, specifically rural places. The challenges inherent in the IMD for measuring rural deprivation include:

1. **Spatial Averaging and Scattered Deprivation**
In rural contexts, deprivation is often dispersed among more affluent households. Aggregating individual deprivation experiences to area-level scores can dilute deprivation signals, yielding “average” LSOA scores that mask scattered deprivation need (Wilson, 2019).
2. **Indicator Urban Bias**
Some indicators, such as recorded crime and public transport access, reflect urban conditions more sensitively than rural realities (Wilson, 2019). Underreporting of rural crime and reliance on car transport can undervalue true rural deprivation.
3. **Weighting Insensitivity**
The low weights assigned to Barriers to Housing & Services (9.3%), which includes geographical access to services, downplay critical rural concerns such as isolation and poor infrastructure (Wilson, 2019).

The IMD design inherently favours urban contexts, effectively identifying concentrated population urban deprivation, but under-representing the dispersed deprivation in rural Cornwall, and similarly rural areas in England. In villages and smaller rural settlements the IMD approach fails because the typical pattern is scattered deprivation, which produces “a

fairly meaningless deprivation score which is the average of affluence and deprivation" (Wilson, 2019, p. para 4).

Limitations of IMD in Rural Settings

Spatial Averaging:

LSOA-level aggregation smooths out localised deprivation clusters, common in scattered rural settlements.

Urban-Centric Indicators:

Some IMD domains (e.g., crime levels, public transport access) reflect urban conditions more sensitively than rural realities.

Underweighted Service Barriers:

The IMD’s Barriers to Housing & Services domain carries only 9.3% weight, downplaying rural isolation in accessing healthcare, education and retail.

The research design of the Cornwall Rurality Matters project supplemented the small-area IMD analysis with further granular level indicators of deprivation, including the identification of an ‘educationally isolated’ school (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019) within the rural LSOA, and qualitative community experiences of living in that rural LSOA. Adopting mixed methods and tailored indices establishes more robust findings, which in turn should support more equitable policy targeting and resource allocation, ensuring rural communities receive appropriate support.

Educational Isolation

‘Educational Isolation’ is a concept that explains place-based challenges experienced by schools (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019). In the United Kingdom, schools in rural and coastal areas are more likely to experience educational isolation. Educationally isolated schools serve communities that experience the three combined elements:

- 1. Socioeconomical disadvantage
- 2. Geographical remoteness
- 3. Cultural isolation

Applying the concept of Educational Isolation enabled the identification of rural deprivation at a local level. Six of the seven IMD domains, all excluding crime, are incorporated into the concept of educational isolation and recognised in the

infrastructural challenges experienced within the three place-based challenges. Socioeconomic disadvantage includes income, employment and housing limitations; geographical remoteness exacerbates access issues to health and education services and reduced cultural opportunities impact on the living environment. Educational isolation limits a school’s access to resources because of the challenges presented by its location. Ensuring each of the selected rural LSOAs in Cornwall also had an educationally isolated school provided further representation of deprivation in the selected rural communities.

Rural Deprivation: Distinctive Characteristics and Challenges

Rural deprivation manifests differently from urban deprivation in several key ways that challenge conventional measurement approaches. In 2016 a review of evidence on rural deprivation in Scotland concluded that “people living in rural areas of Scotland face different challenges than those living in urban areas, and therefore, the experiences of deprivation are not the same” (Thomson, 2016, p. 10). The recommendation from the review was for the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SMID) be used alongside other data sources to adequately identify and describe the main issues of deprivation in rural areas (Thomson, 2016).

The English IMD fails to recognise the key differences of rural to urban poverty:

- 1. Rural poverty tends to be more dispersed and hidden among relatively affluent populations, making it less visible to area-based measures designed for concentrated urban disadvantage (Farmer, Baird, & Iversen, 2001).
- 2. Rural communities face unique challenges including transport poverty, service withdrawal, seasonal employment patterns, and housing displacement (Williams & Doyle, 2016).
- 3. Transport poverty represents a fundamental dimension of rural disadvantage with rural households spending significantly more on transport while facing limited public transport options.

“For rural villages whose inhabitants have to travel longer distances and where public transport is less available, the share of car trips increases to 72%, and average transport costs rise to £9,200.” (Salutin, 2023, p. 21).

Transport costs contribute significantly to poverty in rural areas, pushing over 5 million people into poverty nationally, with impacts worst in rural communities where transport constitutes the single largest household expense (Salutin, 2023). Rural community residents without cars face systematic exclusion from employment, healthcare, and social opportunities (Gates, Gogescu, Grollman, Cooper, & Khambhaita, 2019).

- 4. Housing dynamics in rural areas also differ substantially from urban contexts, with second home ownership and holiday lets creating displacement pressures, alongside inadequate affordable housing, which is not captured by standard housing indicators. Cornwall offers a clear example of this rural poverty challenge:

“Cornwall is facing a growing housing crisis. Many local people are struggling to find affordable homes, leading to an alarming rise in homelessness.” (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2024, p. 2)

It is worth noting that one of the distinct characteristic of rural communities is that they often develop strong social capital and informal support networks that both mitigate the effects of deprivation and potentially mask underlying needs (Yang, Huang, & Huang, 2024). Social capital encompasses social networks, trust, solidarity, and collective action within the community that provide crucial support during crises (Yang, Huang, & Huang, 2024). However, reliance on social capital creates complex dynamics where community goodwill can substitute for formal services. The challenge this presents for measuring deprivation in rural communities is that it can be interpreted as reduced need rather than adaptive resilience. Strong community bonds may therefore mask systematic disadvantage, leading to lower IMD scores despite genuine need (Abdul-Hakim, Abdul-Razak, & Ismail, 2010).

Cornwall: Distinctive characteristics and challenges

Cornwall, a predominantly rural county, has a low population density and scattered settlements with 326 of England’s 32,844 neighbourhoods. The sparse population contributes to challenges in service delivery, transport access, education provision and employment opportunities. The county’s population grew by 7.1% between 2011 and 2021, from approximately 532,300 to 570,300, a growth rate slightly higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%) (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2022). However, Cornwall

remains sparsely populated, with an average of one person living on each football pitch-sized area of land (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2022). Cornwall is ranked 83 out of 317 local authorities in IMD 2019. Living environment featured Cornwall as the 23rd most deprived county (Cornwall Council, 2019), which for a county famed for its outdoor spaces makes interesting reading. It is also interesting to note that scattered rural areas with infrastructure challenges were not highlighted by the IMD 2019 (Cornwall Council, 2019).

The IMD 2019 score for Cornwall of 83 was an improvement from 68 of 326 in 2015 (see Figure 2 for specific neighbourhoods in Cornwall with the highest deprivation levels in 2015 and 2019). The key IMD domain changes for Cornwall from 2015 demonstrated improvement in Crime (+52 places), Barriers to Housing & Services (+51), Living Environment (+8), and Health Deprivation & Disability (+2). IMD domains that worsened since 2015 in Cornwall include Income (-11), Employment (-17), and Education & Skills (-18) (Cornwall Council, 2019). All seven IMD domains in relation to Cornwall are explored further below, as the findings of this report suggest that the lived experiences of residents in Cornwall’s rural communities do not align with IMD outcomes.

Figure 2: 17 Neighbourhoods in Cornwall with highest levels of deprivation in 2019, compared to 2015 2in Cornwall and Nationally. (Source: Cornwall Council, 2019)

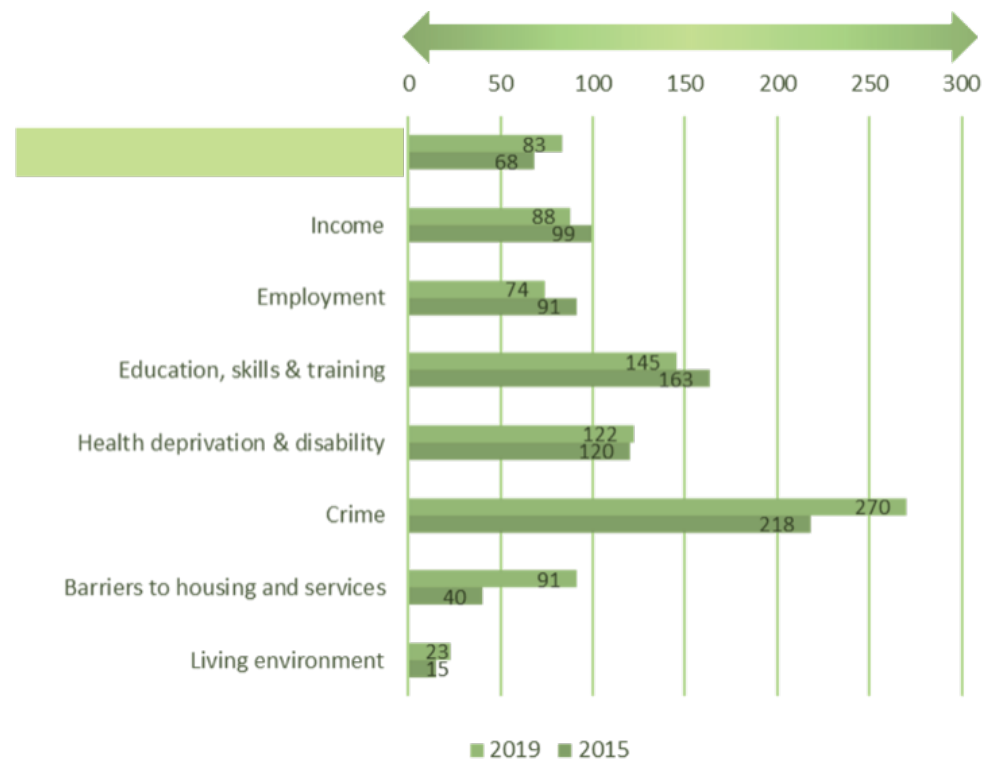
Cornwall Rank		National Rank		LSOA Name
2019	2015	2019	2015	
1	4	577	1133	Camborne Pengegon
2	1	884	414	Penzance Treneere
3	2	1072	606	Redruth North, Close Hill, Strawberry Fields and Treleigh
4	3	1119	964	Camborne College Street and the Glebe
5	6	1661	1512	Camborne Town Centre
6	7	1712	1733	St Austell Penwinnick and Town Centre
7	11	1821	2415	Kinsman Estate and Monument Way
8	5	2134	1350	Illogan East Pool Park
9	8	2447	2147	Penzance St Clare and Town
10	17	2579	2939	Bodmin Town Centre and Berryfields
11	14	2675	2755	St Austell Alexandra Road and East Hill
12	10	2688	2378	Newquay Town Centre
13	12	2985	2497	St Blazey West
14	22	3199	3816	Camborne North Parade and Rosewarne Gardens
15	15	3218	2797	Newquay Narrowcliff
16	16	3228	2938	Newlyn Harbour and Gwavas
17	9	3275	2375	Liskeard St Cleer Road and Bodgara Way

The shifts in IMD domain ranking illustrate that Cornwall’s relative ranking can obscure persistent rural hardships, especially income and employment challenges tied to seasonal work. Service provision, such as dental, GP and education, has gaps in remote areas and

align poorly with LSOA rankings, necessitating a requirement for supplementary local assessments to fully understand the deprivation being experienced by rural communities. Reliance solely on IMD data may misdirect funding toward urban areas, perpetuate rural neglect and make the call for place-based equity considerations in policy all the more important.

The neighbourhoods in Figure 2 are in the top 10% most deprived areas in England. Breaking these data down by the seven domains of the IMD (See Figure 3) provides some insight into the areas considered to impact on the lived experiences of community members. However, the six most deprived neighbourhoods in Cornwall identified by the IMD 2019 are all in urban areas. This suggests that rurality, and the deprivation that exists in these areas, is skewed by urban-centric measures. The crime domain offers an example of urban-centric bias in the IMD. As Figure 3 demonstrates, crime is a low-ranking domain in the IMD for Cornwall, while other deprivation indicators are high. Crime is more prevalent in densely populated urban areas, which questions the efficacy of the weighting for crime as an indicator of deprivation in Cornwall’s neighbourhoods.

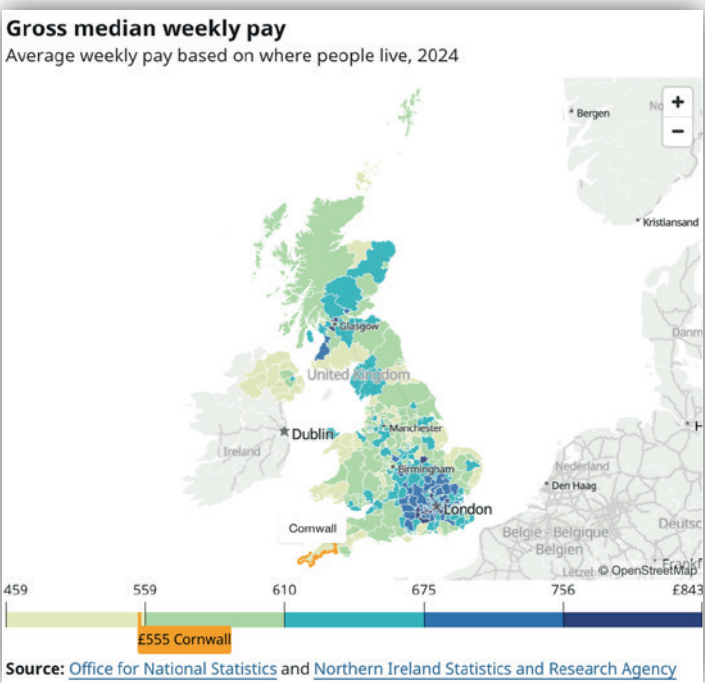
Figure 3: IMD Seven Domains and Cornwall’s ranking 2015 and 2019 respectively. (Source: Cornwall Council, 2019)

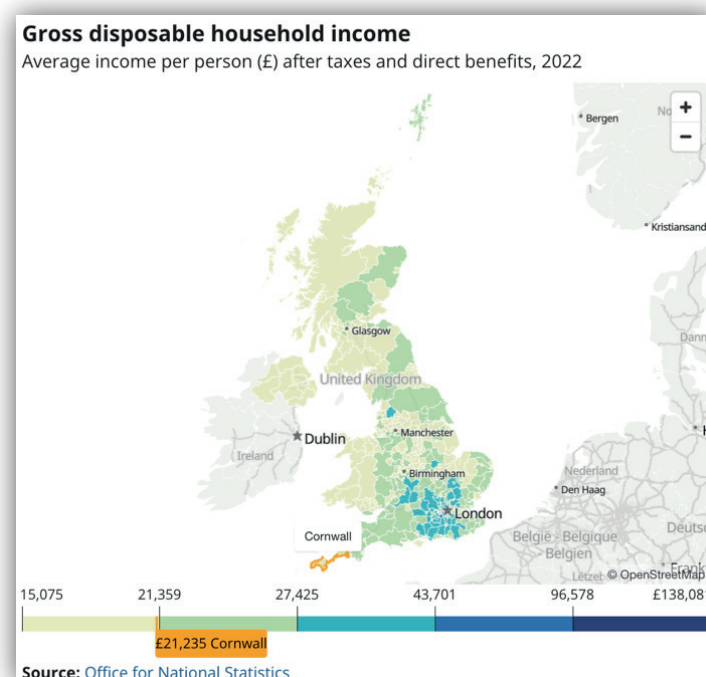


Cornwall: Income

Deprivation is a persistent problem in Cornwall. In 1999 the county was recognised as one of the poorest areas in Western Europe, receiving the highest level of structural funding from European Objective 1 and then Convergence funding. This ended in the UK’s exit from the European Union (European Network for Rural Development, 2018). In 2019, 13.0% of the population in Cornwall was income-deprived, and of the 316 local authorities in England (excluding the Isles of Scilly), Cornwall was ranked 108th most income-deprived (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2021). The maps in Figure 4 below show that income in Cornwall in 2022 and 2024 was in the lowest range for the UK and highlight income challenges (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2024a). Income challenges are reflected in the latest figures on child poverty for Cornwall, with 27,110 (21%<26%) of children under 16 years old in relative poverty (Department for Work & Pensions, 2025). This means that these children live in households with an income below 60% of the national average, before housing costs are taken into account but including contributions from earnings, state support and pensions.

Figure 4: Gross median weekly pay (2024) and gross disposable income (2022) in the UK (based on where people live)





Cornwall has been identified as having a slightly higher-than-average proportion of older people experiencing income deprivation compared to England as a whole (LG Inform Plus, 2025). While it is not surprising that Cornwall is not among the most deprived areas nationally for elderly deprivation given the pull of Cornwall as a place for retirement, it still represents a notable level of financial hardship among older residents. The cost of living crisis has also exacerbated existing income deprivation issues, with more working people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity than in previous years (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2025). According to The Trussell Trust, in the twelve-month period from April 2022 to March 2023, over 36,000 emergency food parcels were distributed by Trussell Trust Foodbanks in Cornwall alone, with over 12,000 of those for children under the age of 16 (Trussell Trust, 2025). In 2024, Government data showed that fuel poverty had increased from 36,274 households to 40,000 households in Cornwall (Inclusion Cornwall, 2024). The extensive use of foodbanks and indicators of child and fuel poverty, suggest the income for many residents in Cornwall is not enough to live on.

Cornwall: Employment

Cornwall's labour market participation and access to employment appear under strain. While unemployment remains below the national average, the combination of falling employment rates, rising benefit claims and notable economic inactivity points to structural challenges and barriers to workforce engagement (Office for National

Statistics (ONS), 2024). In December 2023, 76.1% of Cornwall's working-age population (16 - 64 years) were in employment, a decline from 77.6% the previous year and below the South West average of 78.8% (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2024). The unemployment rate stood at 2.7%, close to the South West's 2.5% and below the national rate of 3.7% (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2024). However, this does not reflect the full picture. The number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits rose from 9,495 in March 2023 to 10,225 in March 2024, while economic inactivity increased to 22.4%, up from 20.7%, and higher than both the South West (19.1%) and national (21.2%) averages (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2024).

Table 1: Cornwall population economic activity in 2024 (Source: (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2022)

Economic activity	Cornwall county	England & Wales (UK)
Employee	39.7%	46.0%
Employed owner, with employees	1.9%	1.5%
Employed self, no employees	10.4%	7.9%
Employed student	1.3%	1.7%
Inactive home, family	4.1%	4.8%
Inactive sick, other	7.0%	7.3%
Retired	28.8%	21.6%
Student, no work	4.6%	6.3%
Unemployed	2.1%	2.8%

Table 1 represents economic activity, or employment status, in Cornwall compared to England and Wales in 2021. Economic inactivity in Cornwall appears to be influenced by a relatively high number of retirees and self-employed individuals compared to national averages. Additionally, the proportion of people who are economically inactive due to long-term sickness is broadly in line with national figures, highlighting a significant presence of health-related barriers to work in the county (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2024).

Cornwall: Health Deprivation and Disability

Although life expectancy in Cornwall remains slightly above the national average at 83.4 years for females and 79.4 years for males, compared to 83.0 and 79.0 years respectively in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2024b), the county faces a

number of health-related challenges. Challenges include relatively low levels of physical activity, substance dependency (including drugs and alcohol), and an older age profile than the national average. In 2021 a third of those living in Cornwall are aged over 60 (32%), for England it was 24% (Cornwall Council, 2025). However, the most pronounced challenges relating to health and disability are:

- **Obesity:** In 2021/22 65.5% of adults in Cornwall were living with overweight or obesity, 26.7% were living with obesity (Cornwall Council, 2024).
- **Health and mental health:** Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have higher levels of self-harm and suicide than the national average and the third-highest rate of suicide in the UK - one suicide every 5.5 days (Cornwall Council, 2021).
- **Long-term illness:** Cornwall has a higher-than-average rate of chronic disease or limiting long term illness with 21% of the population identified as having health problems that limit their day-to-day activities (18% in England) (Cornwall Council, 2025). Further, it was estimated that 3.42% (4,984) 65+ year-olds were living with dementia in 2020/2021, with the number of people in Cornwall who have dementia predicted to increase over the next few decades (around 49% in fifteen years) (Cornwall Council, 2021).

Cornwall: Education and Skills Training

Educational outcomes across phases and stages in Cornwall consistently demonstrate that children and young people from persistently disadvantaged backgrounds experience disparities of opportunity, achieving below the national average in assessment and examination scores, as well as in progression to higher education and training:

- In 2022/23, in five out of the six parliamentary constituencies in the South West, infants living in deprivation (as measured by eligibility for Free School Meals) did not meet the expected standard across all Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) goals (Sim, Mullen, Brooks, Jones, & Major, 2024)
- In 2023/24, Key Stage 2 results show that Cornwall is broadly aligned with the national average in the percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing, and maths combined (60% in Cornwall vs 61% nationally) (Gov.UK, 2025). However, in 2022/23, the percentage of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds meeting the expected standard at KS2 (combined reading, writing, and maths), by parliamentary constituency in Cornwall, shows that only two constituencies performed just above the national average (44.8% vs 44%), while the remaining constituencies fell below it (Sim, Mullen, Brooks, Jones, & Major, 2024)

- In 2022/23, Attainment 8 results in Cornwall were slightly above the national average overall (46.1% vs 45.9%) and in both English (9.9% vs 9.8%) and maths (9.2% vs 9.1%) (Gov.UK, 2025). However, when looking at the percentage of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving grades 4 or above in GCSE English and maths by parliamentary constituency, only one constituency in Cornwall performed above the national average (45.6% vs 43.7%) (Sim, Mullen, Brooks, Jones, & Major, 2024). A similarly less favourable picture for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is also observed for disadvantaged pupils when looking at grades 4 or above achievement in GCSE English and maths by parliamentary constituency (Sim, Mullen, Brooks, Jones, & Major, 2024).
- In 2021/22, the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Cornwall achieving a Level 2 qualification in English and maths by age 19 was just under 55%, below the national average of 57%. While this gap is a concern, the figure marks a +5.1 percentage point improvement since 2020/21 (Sim, Mullen, Brooks, Jones, & Major, 2024).
- In 2019/20, progression to higher education showed clear improvement since 2015/16, with overall figures increasing by 6 percentage points and by 9 percentage points for disadvantaged young people. However, this progress has not been sufficient to bring the South West in line with the national average on either measure. The region continues to trail behind all other English regions (Sims et al., 2024, p.21)
- In 2023, Cornwall had the second highest NEET rates for 16-17 year olds in the South West, close to 8%, and notably higher than the national average, which stands at just over 5% (Sim, Mullen, Brooks, Jones, & Major, 2024).

Schools and colleges in Cornwall are more likely to experience educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019) as a consequence of their rural and coastal locations, which create place-based challenges for accessing resources. Educationally isolated schools and colleges have more limited access to teachers, high quality professional development and externally funded interventions because of infrastructural issues of their location (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019).

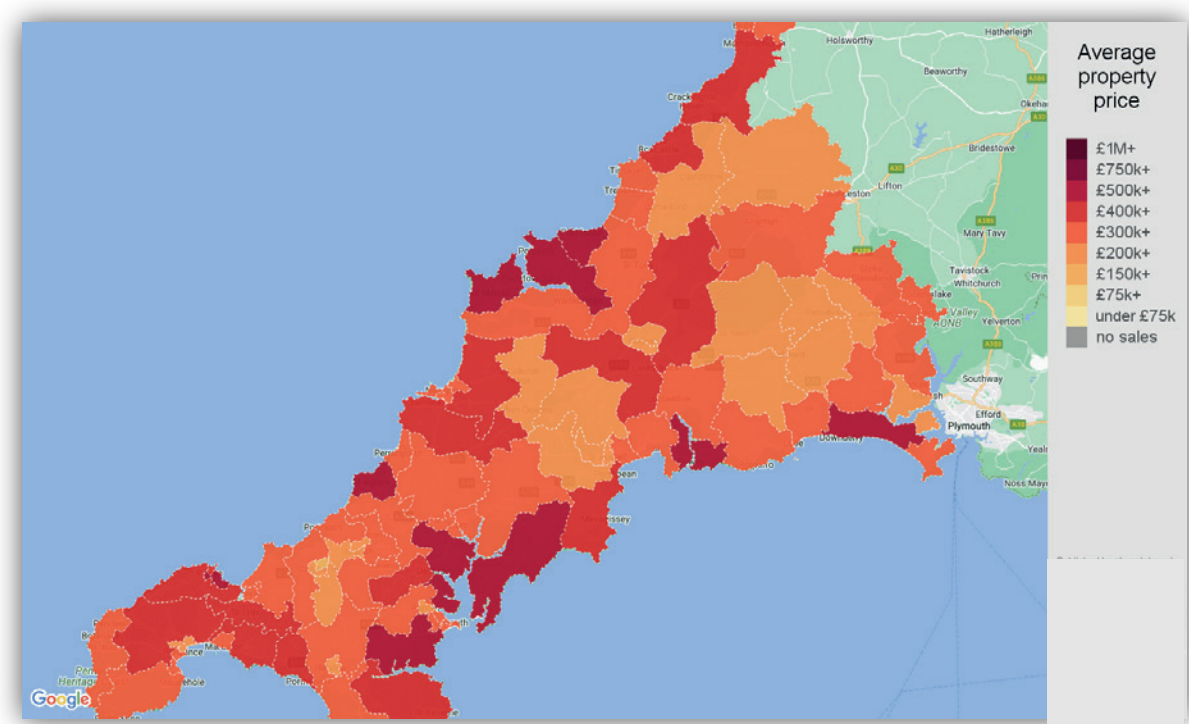
In Cornwall, all of the infrastructural issues identified in this report, from transport dependency to employment precarity, affect equitable access to resources for schools and colleges. It is harder to find and recruit teachers and leaders because a house move is typically required to secure a job, but there is housing precarity and few large employers

to employ a spouse within that move. Also a car is required to get to work. The barriers to teacher recruitment in Cornwall establish create place-based inequities that require targeted resources (Ovenden-Hope, Passy, & Iglehart, 2022). When T levels were introduced the requirement for employers restricted the use of micro-business for placements, creating an inequity for colleges in Cornwall where small and medium enterprises and micro businesses constitute a large proportion of employers.

Cornwall: Barriers to Housing and Services

Cornwall faces a growing housing crisis, with local residents struggling to find affordable homes (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2024). A key factor contributing to this crisis is the prevalence of second homes and short-term holiday rentals to have significantly reduced housing availability for local residents (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2024). The map in Figure 5 below shows the average property price in a given postcode sector in Cornwall. The most affordable place is 'TR14 8' with the average price of £198k. The most expensive place is 'TR2 5' with an average hours price of £757k. These prices are averages of their areas, and represents the mix of affluence and deprivation in Cornwall in relation to housing poverty. The median property price to median earnings ratio in Cornwall is 8.4, meaning that a resident in Cornwall would need 8.4 time their annual salary to afford a house (compared to 7.4 for England and Wales) (Plumplot, 2025).

Figure 5: Average property price by postcode in Cornwall. Source: (Plumplot, 2025)



Access to services is also a challenge for Cornish residents, with geographic remoteness, limited crisis services, and limited public transport acting as key barriers creating inequities for rural and coastal residents’ access to a full range of services:

- **Access to basic services:** rural communities often lack immediate access to essential services like GP surgeries, post offices, or advisory schemes (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2025).
- **Access to regular public transport:** There is limited regular public transport in Cornwall, forcing residents without access to public transport into car ownership. The result is a higher level of car ownership in Cornwall at 84.9% with one car or more, compared to England and Wales at 76.7% (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2022).
- **Internet access:** Internet speeds are 28.51% worse than the UK average, contributing to digital isolation (Cornwall Council, 2025).

Access to mental health related services also appear to be particular challenge, with the latest Healthwatch Cornwall report highlighting systemic issues affecting timely and effective mental health support in the county (Healthwatch Cornwall, 2025). The report also points to severe workforce shortages of Mental Health Practitioners (MHPs) in GP surgeries; excessive waiting times for individuals seeking neurodivergent assessments; many individuals have been denied care due to restrictive eligibility criteria; a shortage of local specialist inpatient facilities forces many patients (especially those with complex conditions) to seek care outside Cornwall, disrupting continuity of care and increasing pressure on families and perceptions of limited treatment options beyond Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and medication (Healthwatch Cornwall, 2025).

Cornwall: Crime

Cornwall shows relatively low levels of crime compared to the rest of England, with Devon & Cornwall Police ranked having the sixth lowest crime rate out of 42 police forces in England and Wales by the ONS in 2024 against 14 crime categories (Devon and Cornwall Police, 2024). However, Cornwall recorded increases in criminal activity in 2024, as reported by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner Devon and Cornwall in 2025:

- **Overall crime:** increased by 14%
- **Violence against a person:** increased 12.9% (Overall crime includes, homicide, violence with injury, violence without injury, stalking and harassment, death or serious injury caused by unlawful driving.)

- **Drug offences:** increased 15.9% (Drug offences include possession of drug offences and trafficking of drug offences, and drug trafficking includes selling, transporting, or importing illegal drugs.)
- **Theft offences:** increased 19.6% (Theft offences include burglary (residential and non-residential), vehicle offences, theft from the person, bicycle theft, shoplifting and all other theft offences)
- **Anti-social behaviour:** increased by 3.3% from 2023.

The increase in crime in Cornwall is interesting to note given the response of residents in this research indicating a removal of police presence from rural areas in Cornwall.

Cornwall: Living Environment

Cornwall is the largest world heritage site in the UK, 30% of the county is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, its maritime environment is diverse and has a number of nature and landscape conservation area designations (Cornwall Council, 2023). The living environment in Cornwall should therefore be positive. However, natural capital of Cornwall is increasingly under threat with positive steps and progress made in the past years. In more detail:

- **Water quality** is a concern, with figures in 2023 showing Cornwall having more water pollution incidents than elsewhere in England (Westcountry Rivers Trust, 2023).
- **Household recycling** levels in 2024-25 was at 44%, improved from 33% in 2022, but still below the national target of 50% by 2020 (Cornwall Council, 2025).
- **Air quality** is generally good. Progress has been made in five previously declared 'hotspots' where standards failed to meet national air quality objectives and which are now declared areas of concern. Four areas remain as Air Quality Management Areas (Cornwall Council, 2020)

Project Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

The full methodology for the Cornwall Rurality Matters research project can be found in Appendix 1. This section provides a summary of the project aims, objectives and research questions.

The Cornwall Rurality Matters research project aim was to understand how place-based deprivation is experienced by residents in Cornwall's rural neighbourhoods. The objective was to develop a robust understanding of rural deprivation in Cornwall and the efficacy of the IMD to measure this. The objective was met by exploring the lived experiences of adults from all walks of life in six rural Cornish neighbourhoods identified as being under resourced by the IMD 2019 (20/30 % most deprived) and having an educationally isolated school. The objective was further supported by a critical review of literature on the IMD, the IMD as a measure of deprivation in rural neighbourhoods, and of Cornwall's relation to the seven categories of the IMD.


The Cornwall Rurality Matters research project attempted to answer the following research questions to achieved its aims and objectives:

- What are the key determinants of deprivation identified by adult residents in deprived rural neighbourhoods in Cornwall, how are these experienced and do they vary based on the individual profiles of their residents (e.g., does employment status, age, sex affect experience)?
- In what ways do key determinants of deprivation identified by residents align or misalign with the IMD seven domains of deprivation?
- In what ways is the IMD a useful/unhelpful measure for understanding lived experience of deprivation in deprived rural Cornish neighbourhoods?
- What recommendations can be made to policy makers and stakeholders for understanding *Cornwall Rurality Matters*?


34 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants ranging in age from 24 to 84; employed, unemployed and retired; male, female, non-binary; married and single; able-bodied and with disabilities. The interviews were conducted in way preferred by the participant and included face to face, on Teams, by phone and by email. The six LSOAs selected to represent deprived rural neighbourhoods were Bodmin St Mary's Ward East, Looe North East, St Blazey West, St Buryan and Sennen, St Day, and St Dennis. The next section provides findings from the analysis across all data.

Key Findings


Pretty Poverty:
Rural Deprivation
in Cornwall




Transport Dependency




Housing Displacement




Employment Precarity



Healthcare Withdrawal



Educational Isolation



Community Resilience

Understanding deprivation for Cornwall’s rural communities

In this section we present the key findings from the analysis of interviews conducted with residents of Bodmin St Mary’s Ward East, Looe North East, St Blazey West, St Buryan and Sennen, St Day, and St Dennis, drawing out cross-cutting themes across the six areas. For detailed findings by individual area, please see Appendix 2.

The Cornwall Rurality Matters research project findings challenge the IMD as an adequate measure of rural disadvantage, revealing systematic limitations in its urban-centric design. Through the analysis of interview data from Bodmin St Mary’s Ward East, Looe North East, St Blazey West, St Buryan and Sennen, St Day, and St Dennis, six overarching themes emerged that demonstrate how rural deprivation manifests in ways the IMD fails to capture - transport dependency, housing displacement, employment precarity, healthcare withdrawal, educational isolation, and community resilience.

The findings reveal that while the IMD provides useful baseline measures, it inadequately weights geographic barriers, fails to account for the complex realities of rural deprivation, and overlooks the compensatory role of social capital in rural communities. This research contributes to growing evidence that rural communities require alternative deprivation measures that acknowledge their unique geographical and social contexts.

Theme 1: Transport Dependency

The most prominent theme across all six study areas revealed car ownership as essential infrastructure rather than lifestyle choice, fundamentally challenging the IMD’s limited attention to transport barriers. This finding exposes a critical limitation in the IMD’s weighting system, where transport considerations receive minimal attention within the ‘Barriers to Housing and Services’ domain at just 9.3%.

Participants consistently emphasised the impossibility of rural life without private transport. In St Day, Hanna stated: “I couldn’t do my life without having a car”. Similarly, in St Buryan, Taff declared: “I wouldn’t be able to go to the gym, because the gym is in Penzance. So, I would have to buy in some gym equipment to train at home, which I wouldn’t particularly enjoy... I could live here without a car, but I wouldn’t want to”. These statements reveal car dependency not as consumer choice but as survival necessity in rural contexts.

The financial burden of mandatory car ownership represents an additional ‘rural tax’ not captured by IMD income measures. In Bodmin St Mary’s East, Kimberly exemplified this challenge: “I work two days a week in St Austell and then three days at home... Early in the mornings. Like six o’clock in the morning I have to get the bus into work to get there for eight o’clock”. Her experience demonstrates how transport poverty constrains employment opportunities, with those lacking private transport facing systematic disadvantage.

Public transport inadequacy emerged as a universal concern across study areas. In St Dennis, Elizabeth emphasised: “I would never be without my car. It’s limited public transport for us. Really limited”. The unreliability of public transport compounds access difficulties, with participants describing services that fail to meet basic connectivity needs. This aligns with national evidence showing that two-thirds of rural residents live in ‘transport deserts’, contributing significantly to poverty in rural areas (Salutin, 2023).

The seasonal nature of public transport particularly affects rural communities. In St Buryan, Taff noted: “The bus service around here is very good in the summer because we’re on the major tourist route... They’re not frequent. There’s one every hour or so... They do run [in winter], but it’s very much a reduced service”. This pattern reflects broader challenges where transport provision fluctuates with tourism demand rather than resident needs, creating additional barriers during winter months when employment and service access become more critical.

The analysis reveals transport as the primary determinant of rural life quality and economic participation, yet the IMD's failure to adequately weight transportation costs represents a fundamental rural measurement flaw. While the "Barriers to Housing and Services" domain includes some transport considerations, it receives only 9.3% weighting compared to Income at 22.5% and Employment at 22.5%. However, participant experiences reveal transportation as determining rural access to employment, healthcare, education, and social participation.

The financial burden of mandatory car ownership creates what participants described as an additional 'rural tax' not captured by income-based deprivation measures. Research demonstrates that transport costs contribute significantly to poverty in rural areas, pushing over 5 million people into poverty nationally, with rural households facing transport as their single largest expense excluding mortgages (Salutin, 2023). This creates systematic disadvantage where rural residents face higher transportation costs while potentially appearing less deprived on income-based measures.

Geographic constraints fundamentally alter how other IMD domains manifest in rural areas. Healthcare access requires significant travel, as demonstrated by participants' experiences in Looe of travelling to "Derriford twice a week" with additional costs including "£28 for the service to get there plus the toll [to cross the Tamar Bridge]". Educational opportunities become geographically constrained, with young people facing "an hour and a half to go to Truro College" for specialist courses. These geographic multiplier effects remain invisible to the IMD's domain-specific approach.

Theme 2: Housing Displacement

Housing challenges across the study areas extend beyond affordability to fundamental availability, representing a dynamic displacement process not captured by static IMD housing measures. The IMD housing domain focuses on homelessness and overcrowding rather than the acute shortage and displacement dynamics characterising rural areas.

The housing crisis in Cornwall's rural areas manifests through intense competition for limited properties. In St Blazey, Hanna described: "There were 150 people going for each property... It wasn't really a choice we were in [to buy a house]". This competition reflects Cornwall's broader housing emergency, where average homes cost 11 times average earnings and only 11% of housing stock is social housing compared to 18% nationally (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2025).

Second home ownership emerged as a critical displacement factor across multiple study areas. In St Buryan, Taff observed: "If you go down the cove, Sennen cove in the winter, you will be lucky to see half a dozen houses with lights on down there", inferring second home and holiday rental ownership of the majority of properties. This pattern reflects broader trends where Cornwall has over 20,000 homes out of residential use, with two-thirds classified as second homes often used as holiday rentals (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2024). This represents more than one in every 14 properties being unavailable for local residents while over 21,000 households remain on waiting lists (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2024). Cornwall exemplifies rural housing market dynamics that challenge conventional housing deprivation measures focused on homelessness and overcrowding rather than availability and displacement.

The impact on house prices creates systematic displacement of local residents. In St Buryan, Taff noted: "I bought this house for £50,000 in 1990 and the place next door to me was sold two years ago, and the place next door to mine isn't even in as good condition. It's smaller, doesn't have so much garden, that went for £300,000". This six-fold increase over thirty years far exceeds wage growth, pricing out local residents and fundamentally altering community composition.

Intergenerational housing dependencies reveal hidden forms of precarity not captured by ownership statistics. In St Blazey, Ryan acknowledged: "I'm just fortunate that my wife's grandma could afford to buy a house... So it was as simple as that really, but I know that's very lucky" when commenting on inheriting the property he was living in. Similarly, in Bodmin St Mary's East, Colum's stark statement exemplified the crisis: "I essentially needed a close family member to pass away so that I could actually afford to live by myself". These experiences demonstrate how housing security often depends on family assets rather than individual economic capacity, creating vulnerabilities not reflected in standard housing indicators.

Recent policy interventions demonstrate both the scale of the challenge and potential solutions. Cornwall Council's implementation of double council tax on second homes represents recognition of the housing displacement problem, though industry experts warn that former holiday homes may not be suitable for local buyers (Noble S. , 2025). The complex relationship between second homes, holiday lets, and local housing markets requires measurement approaches that capture displacement dynamics rather than simple ownership patterns.

The gentrification processes described by participants, particularly following media attention such as the "Beyond Paradise" BBC television programme, illustrate how rural communities face rapid demographic change not captured by static housing indicators. These displacement pressures create intergenerational impacts where young people face systematic exclusion from their home communities, requiring measurement approaches that capture community sustainability rather than simple housing statistics.

The thematic analysis reveals fundamental limitations in how the IMD captures rural deprivation through its **spatial aggregation** approach. The index's reliance on Lower-Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) aggregation misrepresents rural deprivation patterns where poverty is dispersed rather than concentrated. Rural areas typically contain mixtures of affluent and deprived households within the same LSOA, creating averaging effects that mask individual household disadvantage (Wilson, 2019).

This spatial mismatch is exemplified across the study areas where participants described living in areas with mixed housing types and economic circumstances. The housing observations in St Blazey, where Laura noted: "The other side of the road is council [housing]... But how many of those are privately owned? I wouldn't like to say", demonstrate how housing tenure and economic status vary within small geographical areas. This heterogeneity within LSOAs creates statistical averaging that obscures localised deprivation patterns characteristic of rural areas.

Research demonstrates that small areas of deprivation are less likely to be identifiable amid relatively affluent rural areas, making the IMD's area-based approach fundamentally unsuitable for dispersed rural poverty. The Scottish Government's analysis acknowledges that "dispersed poverty in rural areas means that the number of deprived data zones in a local authority will be a biased measure" (Thomson, 2016, p. 9). This limitation is particularly relevant to Cornwall as a largely rural county, yet rural deprivation remains systematically underrepresented.

Theme 3: Employment Precarity

Employment experiences across the study areas revealed limitations in the IMD's binary employed/unemployed categorisation, exposing a landscape of part-time, insecure, and low-paid work reflecting Cornwall's broader economic profile. The analysis demonstrated that employment deprivation extends beyond unemployment to include

underemployment, forced geographic mobility, and absent career progression opportunities.

Cornwall's economic structure creates systemic employment precarity not adequately captured by standard employment metrics. Tourism accounts for 20% of employment, characterised by seasonal, low-wage, and insecure jobs, with over 70% of hospitality sector jobs paying below the Living Wage (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2025). This reflects broader patterns where 26.5% of Cornwall's population earned under the real living wage in 2021, while part-time work accounts for over 40% of jobs (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2025).

Geographic constraints emerged as a fundamental limitation on employment opportunities. In St Dennis, Anne observed: "Most people are employed outside the village" with "getting to work... an issue I guess if you haven't got a car". In St Blazey, Ryan noted: "there wasn't any work in St Blazey. You'd have to go to North Hill or Fowey or Lostwithiel to work". These experiences demonstrate how rural location constrains employment access, requiring additional transport costs and time investments not captured by employment statistics.

The employment paradox affects even highly qualified individuals who face underemployment due to geographic constraints. In St Day, Hanna, despite holding a master's degree and working in specialised youth services, must travel extensively: "My charity role is a South West remit, so I travel to Exeter and Plymouth quite a lot... There's not that much of my life that actually occurs in St Day". This reflects broader patterns where talent in rural Cornwall has limiting opportunities due to poor transport links and limited internet access.

Professional career constraints particularly affect skilled workers. In Looe North East, Laura's musical career demonstrates rural limitations: "There is work. But you wouldn't survive on it... The bulk of my 'bread and butter' work is as a member of the International Film Orchestra and that takes me everywhere. Everywhere, other than in Cornwall". Her experience reveals how skilled professionals face career limitations that income measures alone cannot capture.

Rural employment constraints create complex disadvantage patterns that challenge conventional employment deprivation measures focused on unemployment rather than employment quality and security. Participants described situations where formal employment statistics might indicate economic activity while masking underlying precarity, limited progression opportunities, and forced career compromises.

Theme 4: Healthcare Withdrawal

Healthcare access emerged as a complex challenge involving both geographical barriers and service limitations that compound health disadvantage across the study areas. The IMD health domain focuses on mortality and morbidity rates rather than service accessibility, missing crucial dimensions of rural health deprivation.

Systematic healthcare service withdrawal creates compound disadvantage not captured by health outcome measures. In St Day, Sandra described: "I think they [doctor] may come on Tuesday still, but mostly it's a nurse... No district nurses. Nobody's had a district nurse for years". This withdrawal forces residents to travel increasingly long distances for basic healthcare, compounding transport poverty effects.

Dental service access represents a particular crisis across rural areas. In St Dennis, Elizabeth stated: "I'm still on the National Health waiting list for a dentist". Sarah in Bodmin St Marys Ward East recognised that those unable to afford private care face significant challenges: "The state of their teeth is awful, but they can't afford [private dentist]. There is no National Health Service dentist for them [people in the community]". This pattern reflects broader rural healthcare challenges where geographic remoteness compounds service scarcity. It also exemplifies this gap between availability and accessibility, as services may exist regionally but remain effectively unavailable.

Geographic barriers to specialist healthcare create additional access challenges. In St Blazey, Anne's cancer treatment experience illustrates compounding effects: "The biggest difficulty I think for us at the time was daily radiotherapy. So I needed to get there, and I wasn't well enough to travel on public transport, so we had to pay for taxis". Her experience highlights how rural location creates additional healthcare costs and access barriers during critical illness periods.

Digital exclusion compounds healthcare access barriers, particularly affecting older rural residents. In St Day, Lesley struggled with the GP online booking system: "I've got a friend to book my surgery appointment, it's the online booking system that I don't like". Cornwall's internet speeds are 29% worse than the UK average, yet healthcare services increasingly assume digital literacy and access, creating age-based healthcare inequalities.

The IMD measures service proximity rather than service accessibility, creating rural measurement distortions not captured by distance-based indicators. Participants described services being technically "available" but practically inaccessible due to transportation, timing, or capacity constraints. This distinction between nominal and effective service

access represents a crucial rural measurement challenge. The systematic reduction in local healthcare provision, as described by participants noting the absence of district nurses and reduced GP services, forces residents to travel increasingly long distances for basic care. This service centralisation creates accessibility barriers that distance measurements cannot capture, particularly when combined with transport poverty and digital exclusion.

Theme 5: Educational Isolation

Educational opportunities and skills development face significant rural constraints that challenge formal education deprivation measures across the study areas. The analysis revealed how geographic remoteness, limited local provision, and intergenerational patterns of low aspiration create educational disadvantage not captured by attainment-focused indicators.

Educational choice limitations affect multiple generations. In St Blazey, Laura's grandchildren's schooling decisions illustrate rural constraints: "We did look at the two schools here [in St Blazey]... neither we liked. And we chose... to send them to another school, which is 5 miles away". Her family's choice required significant transportation commitments and highlighted perceived local provision inadequacies.

Geographic expansion of educational access requirements creates barriers for rural young people. In St Blazey, Ryan observed: "I went to St Austell College for my A-levels and last I heard, they stopped doing A-levels... So now you'd have to go to Bodmin or Truro to do A-levels". This pattern demonstrates how educational progression increasingly requires longer travel distances, creating additional barriers for rural students.

Special educational needs concentrations reveal hidden educational challenges. In St Dennis, it was noted by Cathy, the headteacher, that in the school: "29% of pupils have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP), whereas the national level is 3%". This exceptional concentration creates significant challenges for schools and communities while indicating deeper patterns of disadvantage not captured by standard educational measures. The majority of the primary schools serving the areas researched identified as having higher than national levels of pupils with additional needs, noting that parents chose rural schools in the hope of a more personalised experience for their children. The challenge of finding the additional resource required to support high numbers of children with EHCPs,

and those with needs without EHCPs, is particularly difficult for small rural primary schools due to national funding formula (Ovenden-Hope T. , 2024).

Limited aspirations emerged as intergenerational concerns across study areas. In St Dennis, it was noted: "We haven't got any professional families in the local school" with observations that "there may be opportunities, but some parents would not necessarily want to go to work". These patterns suggest cultural and structural factors that perpetuate educational disadvantage across generations.

Educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019) was identified in rural Cornwall, highlighted by the following issues:

1. Transport Barriers and Geographic Remoteness

Across all six LSOAs, unreliable or absent public transport emerged as a fundamental constraint on attendance, participation, and choice of schools or post-16 institutions. Interviews highlighted journeys requiring multiple bus changes or dependence on private cars, imposing financial and time costs that disproportionately affect low-income families.

2. Limited Local Provision and Institutional Choice

Participants from each LSOA reported closure or scarcity of local post-16 and adult education facilities, forcing students to travel considerable distances for A-levels or vocational courses. The withdrawal of A-level options at local colleges was cited as a critical loss of academic pathways.

3. Digital Exclusion

Poor broadband coverage and mobile connectivity hindered access to online learning, remote work, and interactive resources. Cornwall's average internet speeds remain below the national average, compounding isolation for learners without reliable home connections.

4. Socioeconomic Constraints and Hidden Deprivation

High transport costs, seasonal employment, and a "rural premium" on living expenses restrict families' ability to invest in education. Hidden pockets of poverty often go undetected by urban-centric indices, meaning funding allocations rarely reflect local need.

5. Cultural Isolation and Aspirational Limits

Limited exposure to diverse cultural experiences, role models, and career pathways led to constrained aspirations. Students seldom accessed museums, theatres, or industry sites, reducing cultural capital and expectation for higher study.

6. Workforce and Professional Development Deficits

Teacher recruitment and professional development opportunities were constrained by remoteness. Rural school headteachers reported difficulty attracting and retaining high-quality staff and accessing CPD networks, undermining school improvement efforts.

The impact of educational isolation in Cornwall's rural areas are:

- **Poorer attendance and retention:** Transport unreliability aligns with increased absenteeism and dropout at post-16 level, as does more limited local options at post-16.
- **Achievement Gaps:** Rural pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds attain lower GCSE and A-level results than urban peers with similar deprivation scores.
- **Community Talent Drain:** Graduates often relocate for opportunities, exacerbating local skill shortages and weakening community capacity.

Theme 6: Community Resilience

Despite multiple deprivation challenges, all study areas demonstrated significant community resilience and social capital, this meaning that each LSOA had networks of relationships among the people who live and work there that enabled it to function more effectively. Formal measures, including the IMD, struggle to quantify the effect of this community resilience and social capital. The findings reveal how rural communities develop adaptive strategies and mutual support systems that both mitigate disadvantage and potentially mask underlying needs.

Community mutual support emerged across all study areas. In St Dennis, Anne described: "Generally you know your neighbours... if someone hasn't seen you for a week or so, you'll generally find you get a knock on the door". She provided specific examples: "The shopkeeper shut up the shop and gave me a lift to the train station". These informal support networks provide crucial safety nets not captured by formal service measures.

Strong community mobilisation during crises demonstrates rural adaptive capacity. In St Day, Lesley described neighbourhood support during power outages: "I had people knocking on the door saying do you need anything? Somebody else knocked on the door

and they have hot water bottles". This pattern reflects broader research showing social capital can explain variance in community resilience (Yang, Huang, & Huang, 2024).

Community leadership through voluntary efforts creates local infrastructure. In St Blazey, Ryan's community involvement illustrates this: "I run the PL24 Community Association, which I'm the chairperson... yesterday, we ran our Lantern Parade for the St Blazey Saints AFC". His activities demonstrate how rural residents create community infrastructure through unpaid voluntary efforts. However, community resilience faces modern pressures and fragmentation, as Ryan observed: "It's quite cliquey [in St Blazey West]. ... yesterday, 70 people came to the Craft Fair... but it's not a very high percentage of the people who live here". This fragmentation suggests that while community spirit exists, participation remains limited and faces generational changes.

The compensatory role of social capital creates measurement challenges where community assets may mask underlying structural disadvantages. Research demonstrates that rural communities often develop informal support systems that substitute for formal services while potentially being interpreted as reduced need rather than adaptive resilience. This dynamic risks lower IMD scores despite genuine structural disadvantage.

Rural deprivation - a new measure is needed

Cornwall's specific challenges reflect broader patterns affecting coastal-rural areas while presenting unique characteristics that challenge conventional urban-derived deprivation measurement. Cornwall's ranking as 83rd out of 317 local authority areas for overall deprivation using IMD 2019 masks the complex rural disadvantage patterns revealed through this analysis.

The seasonal tourism economy creates complexities not captured by standard employment and housing measures. Communities must manage population swells in the peak summer weeks, while supporting residents through winters when services reduce and employment becomes scarce. This seasonal variation affects housing markets, employment stability, and service provision in ways that the IMD snapshots cannot capture.

Cornwall's position as historically one of four UK areas qualifying for EU poverty-related grants due to its 70.9% GVA compared to the national average demonstrates the inadequacy of current measurement approaches. The loss of EU funding compounds rural disadvantage while current IMD measurements may underestimate continuing rural needs, suggesting systematic under-recognition of Cornwall's distinctive rural challenges.

The challenges identified in measuring deprivation in rural Cornwall reflect broader patterns affecting rural areas across the UK and similar developed economies. Research from Scotland, Wales, and other rural regions demonstrates comparable patterns of transport poverty, service withdrawal, housing displacement, and employment precarity that challenge urban-derived measurement frameworks (Burke & Jones, 2019; Roy, et al., 2024; Williams & Doyle, 2016; Thomson, 2016).

The Rural Services Network report in 2022 identified that rural was missing from the levelling up agenda in the UK, recognising that 'many of the underlying causes of need and disadvantage' were missed by that policy and called for rural to be identified a 'region' (Leckie, Munro, & Pragnell, 2022, p. 7). The report stated that: "If England's rural communities were treated as a distinct region, their need for levelling up would be greater than any other - based on the government's own headline metrics.", demonstrating the specific need for a measurement of deprivation that removes the urban-centric constructs that fails to recognise rural disadvantage.

The development of alternative rural deprivation measures in other contexts provides further evidence for more appropriate approaches. The Rural Deprivation Index developed for Norfolk demonstrates how rural-specific indicators can be weighted appropriately to capture distinctive rural challenges (Burke & Jones, 2019). Scottish research on rural deprivation acknowledges that "the type of deprivation experienced within rural areas may differ from that experienced by urban residents" (Thomson, 2016, p. 9).

International evidence supports the need for rural-specific approaches to deprivation measurement and intervention. Research from rural areas in developed economies consistently identifies transport accessibility, service withdrawal, seasonal employment, and community sustainability as key challenges requiring alternative measurement approaches (Gates, Gogescu, Grollman, Cooper, & Khambhaita, 2019; European Commission, 2024). These comparative contexts suggest that Cornwall's challenges represent broader rural patterns of deprivation requiring systematic policy response rather than localised interventions.

Conclusion

The Cornwall Rurality Matters research project demonstrates that the IMD's urban-centric design systematically underestimates rural deprivation across the six Cornish study areas. The six themes identified - transport dependency, housing displacement, employment precarity, healthcare withdrawal, educational isolation, and community resilience - reveal forms of disadvantage invisible to current measurement frameworks.

The findings support arguments for developing rural-specific deprivation indices that recognise geographic constraints, service accessibility, and community assets alongside traditional deprivation indicators. For Cornwall and similar rural areas, this research suggests that policy responses must move beyond urban models to address the unique challenges of rural disadvantage revealed through resident experiences.

The study contributes to growing evidence that “Far too often the needs and concerns of rural communities escapes the lens of policy makers” (Quallington, 2023, p. 1), who often fail to consider rural contexts, blinded by the ‘rural idyll’ which dominates our view of rural lives. Addressing rural deprivation requires measurement tools that capture the complex realities of rural life rather than applying urban frameworks to fundamentally different contexts.

Cornwall's experience demonstrates the need for place-based approaches that understand how geographic, economic, and social factors interact to create distinctive forms of rural disadvantage. The community resilience demonstrated across the study areas offers important insights for rural development strategies, though this must complement rather than substitute for adequate public investment in rural infrastructure and services.

Future policy development must recognise that rural communities require alternative approaches to both measurement and intervention that acknowledge their unique geographical and social contexts. The comprehensive engagement of the Cornwall Rurality Matters Research Project with residents experiencing rural deprivation in six Cornish LSOAs reveals fundamental limitations in how existing deprivation indices capture rural disadvantage, while pointing toward specific enhancements that could dramatically improve measurement accuracy and policy effectiveness. The researchers acknowledge the reflexive nature of the analysis method, yet the consistency of experiences across diverse participants suggests robust findings that challenge current policy frameworks and measurement approaches.

Measuring Rural Deprivation

Spatial Aggregation

The IMD's reliance on LSOA-level aggregation creates fundamental misrepresentation of rural deprivation patterns where poverty is dispersed rather than concentrated. Rural areas typically contain mixtures of affluent and deprived households within the same LSOA, creating averaging effects that mask individual household disadvantage. The averaging of disadvantage makes the IMD's area-based approach fundamentally unsuitable for dispersed rural poverty. The Norfolk Rural Deprivation Index study illustrates this challenge, showing that rural LSOAs are physically much larger than urban LSOAs due to lower population densities, with populations that may be less homogeneous (Burke & Jones, 2019). This spatial mismatch means that concentrated pockets of rural deprivation become statistically invisible when averaged across larger geographical areas containing mixed socioeconomic populations.

The Socioeconomic Index for Small Areas (SEISA) is UK-wide area-based measure of deprivation, produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in 2025 (Iglehart, Forthcoming). Using two Census 2021 indicators, educational qualifications and occupation of residents, it measures deprivation at Output Area (OA), the smallest geographical level at which aggregated Census statistics are publicly available (Nathwani, Donnelly, & Bye, 2024). The first indicator captures the proportion of residents in an OA aged 16 or over with below level 4 qualifications (below degree level), while the second captures the proportion of residents in an OA aged 16 to 74 in NS-SEC (National Statistics Socio-economic Classification) groups 3 to 8, (non-managerial, non-professional or non-administrative occupations)¹; these were combined by taking an average of the two values for each OA to produce a score (Nathwani, Donnelly, & Bye, 2024). Like the IMD 2019, the score, reflecting the deprivation experienced by residents in each of the 171,372 OAs for England,² was ranked, but then allocated to one of five quintiles instead of deciles (like the IMD), with this information available on HESA's (2025) website (Iglehart, Forthcoming).

By aggregating data at OA level, with 100 to 650 residents (on average 310) and 40 to 250 households, rather than at LSOA level, with 1,000 and 3,000 residents (on average 1,500) and 400 and 1,200 households, SEISA provides a more granular approach that both lowers the likelihood of overlooking pockets of deprivation and makes capturing deprivation in

¹ Those that couldn't be classified were excluded from the calculation.

² As a UK-wide measure, SEISA includes OAs for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well (a total of 232,296), and all OAs are ranked according to quintiles, although these quintiles are adjusted by country when data for each country are explored separately.

rural areas more accurate (Nathwani, Donnelly, & Bye, 2024). While the SEISA measure of deprivation is new, and its efficacy has yet to be fully explored (Roy, et al., 2024), it appears to have the potential to be a more effective measure for identifying rural deprivation (Iglehart, Forthcoming). A recent analysis of SEISA indicated that its use identified 7% of areas in the lowest quintile as rural, whereas the IMD only identified 3% in the same quintile as rural (Nathwani, Donnelly, & Bye, 2024).

Inadequate Domain Weighting for Rural Contexts

Transportation

The IMD's current weighting system fails to reflect the relative importance of different deprivation dimensions in rural contexts. Transport barriers, which emerged as the most significant constraint across all Cornwall study areas, receive minimal attention within the 'Barriers to Housing and Services' domain at just 9.3% weighting. This contrasts sharply with Income (22.5%) and Employment (22.5%) domains, despite transport representing the fundamental determinant of rural access to employment, healthcare, education, and social participation.

Research indicates that transport costs contribute significantly to poverty in rural areas, pushing over 5 million people into poverty nationally, with rural households facing transport as their single largest expense excluding mortgages (Salutin, 2023). Cornwall's rural communities reveal car ownership as essential infrastructure rather than lifestyle choice. Participants consistently described situations where formal employment statistics might indicate economic activity while masking underlying transport poverty that constrains life opportunities. The seasonal reduction of public transport services particularly affects rural residents, with services designed around tourism demand rather than resident needs. The current IMD weighting structure systematically undervalues these multiplier effects of geographic isolation that cascade across all life domains in rural contexts.

Housing

Cornwall's housing crisis involves complex displacement processes not captured by static IMD housing measures focused on homelessness and overcrowding. The county has over 20,000 homes out of residential use, with two-thirds classified as second homes often used as holiday rentals (Sheaf, 2024), while over 21,000 households remain on waiting lists (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2024; Sheaf, 2024). This creates systematic displacement where local residents face competition from external purchasers with substantially higher purchasing power, forcing intergenerational dependencies not

reflected in standard housing indicators. The current IMD housing measures cannot capture the availability crisis that characterises rural markets, where properties may technically exist but remain inaccessible to local residents.

Services - digital literacy and access

Cornwall's internet speeds are 29% worse than the UK average (UK Parliament, 2024), yet healthcare and education increasingly assume digital literacy and access (We Are Group, 2024). This digital divide particularly affects older rural residents, creating age-based inequalities not captured by conventional service access measures. The combination of poor digital infrastructure and service digitalisation, including access to education and skills, creates compound disadvantage where rural residents face multiple barriers to accessing essential services (We Are Group, 2024). IMD 2019 measurements focus on physical proximity to services rather than effective accessibility, missing crucial dimensions of rural service access that combine geographic, digital, and financial barriers.

Evidence-Based Recommendations for Rural-Specific Deprivation Measures

The Norfolk Rural Deprivation Index offers a methodology for creating rural-specific measures that better capture distinctive rural challenges (Burke & Jones, 2019). This approach involves 'bundling' highly correlated indicators applicable to both urban and rural deprivation into one domain, while creating separate domains for indicators relevant specifically to rural settings (Burke & Jones, 2019). Identifying specific rural domains results in more rural areas falling into the most deprived quintiles, particularly those classified as Rural town and fringe in sparse settings, preventing 'pockets of deprivation in rural areas being overlooked or hidden' (Anscombe, 2025, p. 1).

Transport accessibility should receive substantially increased weighting in rural-specific indices, reflecting its role as the fundamental determinant of rural life quality (Salutin, 2023). Alternative measures could incorporate transport costs as a percentage of household income, public transport frequency and reliability, and distance effects on service access (European Commission, 2024). These indicators would capture the cascading effects of geographic remoteness that current IMD weightings underrepresent.

Incorporating Social Capital and Community Resilience Measures

As evidenced in the findings of this report, rural communities demonstrate significant adaptive capacity through informal support networks and voluntary leadership that formal measures overlook (Teilman, 2012). Research indicates that social capital can explain variance in community resilience, with components including social networks, trust, solidarity, and collective action providing crucial support during crises (Teilman, 2012).

The World Bank's Integrated Questionnaire for the Measurement of Social Capital provides established methodologies for quantifying these dimensions through membership in associations, trust indicators, and collective action measures (Grootaert, Narayan, Jones, & Woolcock, 2003).

The measurement of social capital, however, must avoid the trap of using community assets to justify reduced public investment (Community First Yorkshire, 2020). Rural deprivation indices should incorporate social capital as both a community asset and potential masking mechanism, ensuring that strong informal networks complement rather than substitute for adequate formal service provision.

Addressing Seasonal and Employment Quality Variations

Cornwall's seasonal economy creates employment patterns not captured by binary employed/unemployed categorisations (Leckie, Munro, & Pragnell, 2022). Rural-specific measures should incorporate employment quality indicators including job security, seasonal variation, skills mismatch, and career progression opportunities (Allieu, 2019).

Alternative indicators for employment measures in rural areas could include the percentage of workers in seasonal employment, multiple job holdings, under-employment rates, and time taken for commuting distances required for suitable employment (Leckie, Munro, & Pragnell, 2022). These measures would capture the employment precarity that affects rural residents disproportionately while remaining invisible to standard employment measures.

Methodological Innovations for Scattered Deprivation

Area-based indices may have less relevance in rural contexts where deprivation is spatially dispersed (Thomson, 2016). Alternative approaches could incorporate measures of variability within small areas to capture the heterogeneity characteristic of rural LSOAs (Burke & Jones, 2019). The Norfolk study demonstrates methods for measuring deprivation variability within geographical units, and reveals high levels of divergency in rural areas when using such measures (Burke & Jones, 2019).

Smaller area analysis provide more meaningful geographical units for rural areas, more reflective of actual communities than LSOAs, as the new SEISA measure demonstrates (Nathwani, Donnelly, & Bye, 2024). Local Insight research argues that rural parishes tend to contain households of more similar socioeconomic demographics than rural LSOAs, suggesting parish-level indicators more sensitive to rural deprivation patterns (Anscombe, 2025).

The findings of the Cornwall Rurality Matters research project presented in The Pretty Poverty Report support calls for rural-specific deprivation measures that better capture the distinctive challenges of rural communities. IMD-based resource allocation systematically disadvantages rural areas by failing to capture hidden rural deprivation. Policy responses must address funding allocation formulas that rely heavily on IMD rankings, developing rural service delivery models that address accessibility rather than just availability. The systematic limitations identified in Cornwall's case suggest that current funding mechanisms may perpetuate rural disadvantage by under-recognising genuine need.

Future research should develop hybrid quantitative-qualitative measurement approaches that capture place-based inequities, material deprivation, cultural isolation and community resilience factors. Considerations of local context adaptations in measures should also be reviewed. The multi-modal participatory methodology demonstrated through the Cornwall Rurality Matters research project illustrates how alternative measures of deprivation and qualitative research can inform understanding for more appropriate rural measurement and policy approaches.

Recommendations

This section presents recommendations for identifying the transport dependency, housing displacement, employment precarity, healthcare withdrawal, educational isolation, and community resilience that have been identified in this report as part of rural deprivation experiences. The report's findings demonstrate that the IMD reliance on LSOA-level aggregation fundamentally misrepresents rural deprivation patterns where poverty is dispersed rather than concentrated.

Policy Framework Development

The systematic limitations of the IMD in rural contexts require comprehensive policy framework development that addresses rural-specific challenges while building on community assets. Transport policy must recognise rural transport as essential infrastructure rather than discretionary service, requiring sustained investment in demand-responsive transport and innovative delivery models.

Economic development strategies should support rural employment creation that addresses skills mismatches and geographic constraints while building on local assets and community leadership capacity. Housing policy requires comprehensive approaches that address both affordability and availability while managing second home impacts on community sustainability.

Healthcare and education policies must address rural service delivery challenges through innovative models that combine access to digital technology with place-based provision, recognising the compound disadvantage created by service withdrawal. These interventions require measurement frameworks that capture service accessibility and community outcomes rather than simple provision statistics.

The following recommendations are based on the Cornwall experience, the methodology for collecting the Cornwall Rurality Matters research project data and the critical analysis of the IMD 2019. The Pretty Poverty Report analysis argues that different patterns of deprivation affect rural areas in Cornwall, across the UK and in similarly developed economies. Collaboration between the ONS and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is set to take place in England with update of the Indices of Deprivation in late 2025 (Noble S. , 2024), indicating policy recognition of the limitations in the current IMD measure for rural LSOAs.

Table 2 below maps key insights from the Cornwall Rurality Matters research project findings to specific recommendations to enhance deprivation indices as a measure in rural contexts.

Table 2: The Pretty Poverty Report recommendations for measuring deprivation in rural contexts

Pretty Poverty Report Insight	Recommendation
Spatial aggregation misrepresents dispersed rural poverty	<p>Use smaller geographic units (e.g., parishes, OAs) and incorporate variability measures within units (e.g., educationally isolated schools).</p> <p>Fine-scale spatial units reduce the averaging effects of LSOAs, uncovering pockets of deprivation masked within mixed-affluence rural areas.</p> <p>In St Dennis and Bodmin St Mary’s East, residents described ‘hidden’ deprivation amid otherwise stable communities, which smaller unit level mapping would reveal.</p>
Inadequate weighting of transport barriers	<p>Increase the weight of transport accessibility by including metrics such as transport cost as a percentage of household income, public-service frequency, waiting time for buses, and reliability, time taken to travel to capture transport poverty’s multiplier effects.</p> <p>All six rural LSOAs in the research uniformly reported car ownership as non-discretionary, illustrating the necessity of indicators on transport affordability and reliability .</p>
Housing displacement driven by second homes and holiday lets	<p>Include indicators on the share of second homes, prevalence of short-term lets, and local house-price-to-income ratios to address the rural availability crises driven by holiday lets and external demand.</p> <p>In St Buryan and Sennen and St Day, fierce competition for homes and rapid price inflation demonstrate displacement dynamics invisible to homelessness-focused metrics.</p>

Digital exclusion compounds service-access barriers	<p>Add digital inclusion metrics, such as average broadband speeds relative to national targets, proportion of households without fixed broadband and community digital literacy scores to reveal compound barriers where service digitalisation meets poor connectivity.</p> <p>St Day participants struggled with online GP systems, and Cornwall’s below-average internet speeds exacerbated healthcare inaccessibility.</p>
Omission of social capital and community resilience	<p>Incorporate social capital measures (e.g., civic participation, informal support networks, mutual aid events) to identify community assets that both mitigate and mask deprivation.</p> <p>Residents in St Blazey and St Dennis described the ‘knock-on-door’ mutual aid given by neighbours during crises, revealing invisible support systems .</p>
Employment precarity and seasonality unaccounted	<p>Introduce employment-quality indicators such as under-employment rates, seasonal contract prevalence, and average commuting distances and time taken to primary workplaces to capture rural labour insecurity beyond unemployment counts.</p> <p>In Looe North East and St Day, zero-hours contracts and forced travel for specialist roles exposed underemployment and talent underutilisation .</p>
Heterogeneity within rural areas masked	<p>Implement variability measures (e.g., standard deviation of income and service access within geographic units) to reveal hidden pockets of deprivation in areas of affluence.</p>
Over-reliance on quantitative data without lived experience	<p>Adopt mixed methods approaches by integrating qualitative participatory findings alongside quantitative indicators</p>
Funding allocation based solely on IMD undervalues rural needs	<p>Reform resource-allocation formulas to reflect higher per-capita costs of rural service provision and multi-dimensional deprivation profiles.</p>

The Pretty Poverty Report provides compelling evidence using Cornwall’s unique challenges for fundamental reforms to deprivation measurement in rural contexts. The systematic limitations identified in the IMD measurement for rural LSOAs reveal a systematic underestimation of rural deprivation. Enhanced indices must address spatial aggregation problems, incorporate rural-specific indicators with appropriate weightings, recognise the role of social capital and community resilience, and account for the unique contextual and geographical dimensions of rural disadvantage. Only through such comprehensive methodological reforms can deprivation measurement achieve the accuracy and effectiveness that rural communities deserve, ensuring policy responses reflect the genuine challenges facing rural populations.

Future rural deprivation measurement requires approaches that capture the complex realities revealed in Cornwall’s experience: transport as essential infrastructure, housing displacement dynamics, digital exclusion effects, employment quality variations, and the dual role of community resilience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Methodology

Research Design

Aims and Objectives

The Cornwall Rurality Matters research project aim was to understand how place-based deprivation is experienced by residents in Cornwall's rural neighbourhoods. The project was conducted February 2024 - June 2025. The objective was to develop a robust understanding of rural deprivation in Cornwall and the efficacy of the IMD to measure this. The objective was met by exploring the lived experiences of adults from all walks of life in six rural Cornish neighbourhoods identified as being under resourced by the IMD 2019 (20-30% most deprived) and having an educationally isolated school. The objective was further supported by a critical review of literature on the IMD, the IMD as a measure of deprivation in rural neighbourhoods, and of Cornwall's relation to the seven categories of the IMD.

Research Questions

The Cornwall Rurality Matters research project attempted to answer the following research questions to achieved its aims and objectives:

- What are the key determinants of deprivation identified by adult residents in deprived rural neighbourhoods in Cornwall, how are these experienced and do they vary based on the individual profiles of their residents (e.g., does employment status, age, sex affect experience)?
- In what ways do key determinants of deprivation identified by residents align or misalign with the IMD seven domains of deprivation?
- In what ways is the IMD a useful/unhelpful measure for understanding lived experience of deprivation in deprived rural Cornish neighbourhoods?
- What recommendations can be made to policy makers and stakeholders for understanding *Cornwall Rurality Matters*?

Sampling

To select the neighbourhoods for investigation, the following selection criteria were applied:

1. LSOAs in Cornwall ranked in the lowest 20-30% on IMD 2019 (Cornwall Council, 2019)

2. Areas classified as rural based on the national Rural-Urban Classification criteria (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2025).
3. The sample identified using the two criteria above were further stratified on the basis of having a primary school in Cornwall Council's designated primary school area that was identified as meeting the criteria for being 'Educationally Isolated' (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019).
4. The final selection criteria applied was on LSOA location in Cornwall, with representation across the county to ensure diverse rural LSOA contexts in the county were included.

The selected sample of rural LSOAs, or neighbourhoods, in the lowest 20/30% of the IMD ranking for Cornwall with an educationally isolated primary school and representative of Cornwall's deprived rural communities were:

1. St Blazey West
2. Bodmin St Mary West South East
3. St Day
4. St Buryan and Sennen
5. St Dennis South
6. Looe North East and St Martin

The map below in Figure 6 identifies the LSOA by IMD deprivation percentage, rank and primary school.

Figure 6: Map of selected sample of LSOAs by IMD deprivation percentage, rank and primary school



Methods

A desk review and semi-structured interviews were conducted to answer the research questions. The IMD 2019 served as a guiding framework for both data collection and analysis across these methods. As such, particular focus was placed on the IMD’s seven core domains: income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and services, and the living environment.

Desk review

The desk-based research was comprehensive in scope, encompassing both academic and grey literature. This included publicly available documents specific to each neighbourhood, focusing on indicators of deprivation and affluence, national-level documents related to the IMD to provide a contextual understanding of socio-economic disparities across the areas. The desk review helped establish the broader context for the research and highlighted specific challenges faced by each area. These emerging issues informed the next phase of the study, enabling a more focused and informed approach to the interviews for each area and the residents from the six neighbourhoods.

A critical analysis of literature on rural deprivation and of the IMD as a measure was also conducted and used to inform conclusions drawn from the primary data analysis themes.

Semi-structured Interviews

34 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants ranging in age from 24 to 84; employed, unemployed and retired; male, female, non-binary; married and single; able-bodied and with disabilities. The interviews were conducted in way preferred by the participant and included face to face, on Teams, by phone and by email. The interviews took place between September 2024 and March 2025.

It was initially intended that purposive sampling would be used for selecting the LSOA populations for interview, stratified to reflect the adult demographic profile of each neighbourhood. The aim was to recruit approximately 10 participants per neighbourhood, resulting in a total sample of 60 participants.

The recruitment phase aligned with the desk review and data collection tools construction and was in place from February 2024 until the end of August 2024. All community organisations and churches in each of the LSOAs was identified and contacted by email and phone and asked to share information on the project with its members/congregations. A leaflet was created and shared for this purpose. Each of the LSOAs Facebook community accounts were also joined by the research team and information on the research shared

via social media. A BBC Radio Cornwall interview was also conducted with the principal investigator and a request for participants was aired on this channel.

Despite five months of active recruitment, the response rate was lower than hoped and required a sampling approach shifted to opportunity sampling. This means that participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to take part. This change in sampling was necessary, but could have resulted in a sample not representative of the broader population of each neighbourhood. However, the 34 participants represented a broad population profile (see table 3 below), offering valuable insights into local perspectives.

There was variation in both the number of interviews conducted per area and the duration of each interview, which ranged from 35 to 80 minutes, with an average length of 54 minutes. To encourage participation, the mode of the interview was based on participant preference: some interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, others in person at locations convenient to the participant, some over the phone and some by email. To support the validity of the findings, researchers observed one another during the initial interviews. This collaborative process allowed for the refinement of both the interview schedule and the interviewing approach, helping greater consistency and rigour across interviews. Additionally, researchers visited each of the six neighbourhoods prior to conducting interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding of their physical setting and context. This preparatory step contributed to more informed and sensitive engagement with participants. All interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed.

Table 3: Summary of interviews

Area	No of interviews	Sample composition	Mode
St Blazey West	5	2 male. 3 female. Age range 40 - 81. 3 homeowners. 2 renting. 4 married. 2 retired. 1 in full-time employment. 1 part-time employment. 1 long-term sickness. All car owners. 2 with school age children (in local school).	Phone and Teams

Bodmin St Mary's Ward South East	11	4 Male. 7 female. Age range 32 - 62. 3 homeowners. 6 renting (5 social housing). 2 living with parents. 3 full-time employment. 2 part-time employment. 6 long term sickness. 5 car owners. 2 with school age children (in local school).	Phone, face to face, Teams
St Day	4	4 female. Age range 84 - 40. 3 homeowners. 1 renting. 2 retired (1 disabled). 2 full-time employment. 3 car owners. 1 with school age children (not at local school)	Phone and Teams
St Buryan and Sennen	7	4 male. 3 female. Age range 30 - 65. 5 homeowners. 1 renting. 1 living with family. 1 full-time employment. 2 part-time employment. 1 long-term sickness. 3 retired. 7 car owners. 2 with school age children (not at local school).	Face to face, Teams, Phone and Email
St Dennis South	2	2 female. Age range 42 - 62. 2 homeowners. 1 full-time employment. 1 part-time employment. 2 car owners. 0 school age children.	Phone and Teams
Looe North East and St Martin	5	1 male. 4 female. Age range 35 - 68. 4 homeowners. 1 full-time employment. 1 part-time self employed. 2 part-time employed. 1 retired. 5 car owners. 1 school age children.	Teams and Phone.
Total	34		

Analysis

For the analysis, the IMD continued to serve as a guiding framework. Although the approach was primarily deductive whilst using the IMD, the research was also inductive, allowing new themes to emerge from the data. This combination was particularly important for enhancing the robustness of the analysis in this context. While the IMD domains aim to provide a comprehensive view of deprivation, their suitability for rural settings has been questioned. In rural areas, deprivation is often more dispersed and less visible than in urban contexts, requiring sensitivity to context-specific experiences that may not be fully captured by the standard domains.

To analyse the primary data, Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (Braune, 2021) was employed. Unlike traditional thematic analysis that seeks to identify themes within data, reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges the researcher's active role in constructing themes as interpretative stories about the data. The analysis utilised the seven IMD domains as an initial coding framework: Income, Employment, Health Deprivation and Disability, Education, Skills and Training, Crime, Barriers to Housing and Services, and Living Environment. However, reflexive engagement with participant narratives revealed additional dimensions of rural deprivation not captured by these standardised measures.

Reflexive thematic analysis involves six distinct steps: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes. These steps were followed for each of the three phases of analysis:

- **Phase one:** established the themes by LSOA using the 34 semi-structured interviews collected from residents of the six areas. Initial coding involved identifying segments of text related to each IMD domain, as well as additional codes that captured experiences specific to rural contexts. These codes were then grouped into potential themes, which were reviewed and refined through an iterative process. The final themes were defined and named to reflect the key patterns identified in the data.
- **Phase two:** used the themes by LSOA from phase one to conduct a further thematic analysis to understand similarities of experiences across deprived rural areas in Cornwall.
- **Phase three:** explored each LSOA findings in relation to educational isolation, and drew conclusions at LSOA and county level on the relationship between educational isolation and rural deprivation.

Full ethical permission from the university was sought and given prior to the project commencing to ensure integrity and robustness in the research design.

Study Limitations

A sample of six LSOAs in Cornwall, and reliance on interview data from a limited number of participants, reduces the reliability of the findings for generalisations. However, the thematic consistency across study areas suggests broad patterns in similarly rural deprived areas may exist.

Future Research Directions

Future research could:

- Develop and test alternative rural deprivation measures that incorporate the themes identified through this analysis. Quantitative measures could be developed that weight transport accessibility, service withdrawal, housing displacement, and community resilience appropriately for rural contexts.
- Employ comparative research across different rural regions to examine how geographic, economic, and cultural factors influence rural deprivation patterns and community responses. International comparisons could identify effective policy interventions and measurement approaches that address rural-specific challenges while building on community assets
- Conduct longitudinal research to track how rural communities respond to policy interventions designed to address the challenges identified through this analysis. Evaluation of transport initiatives, housing policies, and service delivery innovations could inform evidence-based rural policy development.

Appendix 2 - Findings on the experiences of rural deprivation by area

St Blazey West

Summary

This section presents a reflexive thematic analysis of interview transcripts exploring rural deprivation in St Blazey West, Cornwall. The analysis reveals how lived experiences in rural communities illuminate forms of deprivation that remain invisible to standardised indices, highlighting the need for more nuanced approaches to measuring rural disadvantage.

St Blazey, situated in the Par Bay area of Cornwall, exemplifies the complex nature of rural deprivation where geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and economic decline intersect. There is approximately one bus per hour which goes to St Austell and Newquay, both of which have community hospitals and train stations.

Tywardreath School

Tywardreath School serves the St Blazey West LSOA and operates as part of the Truro and Penwith Academy Trust. The school is currently rated 'Good' by Ofsted and runs near capacity with 305 pupils out of 315 places. With 22.3% of pupils eligible for free school meals, the school performs above local and national averages with 68% of pupils meeting expected standards in reading, writing, and mathematics. The school benefits from extensive grounds including a garden and forest-school area, plus a high-specification swimming pool built in partnership with the community. This facility allows pupils to swim weekly throughout the year, supporting the school's tradition of sporting excellence. Extracurricular activities include swimming, cross-country, football, netball, athletics, rounders, and Taiko drumming. The curriculum is designed to inspire high aspirations in all children, focusing on cultural diversity, environmental awareness, heritage, and school values. Ofsted describes the school's leadership as skilled and determined, with a commitment to ensuring the best for every pupil.

St Blazey West (Tywardreath School) Key Characteristics Data (source IMD 2019, ONS Census 2021).

Indicator	Value
IMD Rank (England)	3,332 (top 20% most deprived)
Population (2021)	1,606
Free School Meals	24.4% (vs 23.8% national)
Unemployment	3.8% (Cornwall avg. 3.7%)
Travel to Work (>5 km)	35%

Households with Disability	26%
Ethnicity - White	97.7%

Findings

Themes

Theme 1: Transportation as a Fundamental Determinant of Rural Access

Transport emerged as the most pervasive barrier affecting all aspects of rural life, transcending traditional IMD categorisations. This theme encompasses both physical mobility constraints and the cascading effects on employment, healthcare, education, and social participation.

Sub-theme 1.1: Essential Car Dependency

All participants identified car ownership as fundamental to rural survival, contradicting assumptions that car ownership indicates affluence. Ryan noted: "I think you do [need a car], but like I said, I'm quite fortunate. I have a car. When I was younger, I had to get the bus to work until I could afford to get a car". This dependency creates additional financial burdens that IMD metrics fail to capture adequately.

David emphasised the financial implications: "It's essential to have a car for a start... You know, you need it get around, but it costs a lot to run a car". Rural residents can face higher transportation costs because they do not have access to public transport and have no choice but to own a car in order to travel to work. This suggests that while potentially appearing less deprived on income-based measures, car dependency can exacerbate deprivation.

Sub-theme 1.2: Public Transport Inadequacy

Public transport limitations severely constrain rural residents' life choices, particularly affecting those unable to drive or afford private vehicles. Anne described the precarious nature of her work commute: "Buses are not overly reliable, so I would say at least five or six times a month I have to pay for a taxi". This unreliability creates additional costs and employment vulnerability that standard deprivation measures cannot capture.

Laura's professional career illustrates how transport barriers limit rural economic participation: "The train, the cost of public transport is prohibitive... I can't book far enough in advance to take advantage of cheap fares". Her experience demonstrates how rural location compounds occupational mobility challenges, particularly for skilled professionals.

Theme 2: Hidden Housing Precarity and Spatial Inequality

Housing experiences in St Blazey West reveal complex patterns of advantage and disadvantage that challenge conventional deprivation metrics. While some participants own homes outright, housing security masks underlying vulnerabilities and intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.

Sub-theme 2.1: Intergenerational Housing Advantages and Constraints

Several participants achieved homeownership through family inheritance rather than economic capability. Ryan acknowledged: "Well, yeah. I mean, I'm just fortunate that my wife's grandma could afford to buy a house... So it was as simple as that really, but I know that's very lucky". This highlights how IMD housing measures may misclassify rural households as advantaged when their security depends on family assets rather than individual economic capacity.

David's experience supporting his children's housing purchases illustrates intergenerational wealth transfer necessities: "My son... we helped him a little bit when they bought their house in 2016... just before COVID we did financially help her [daughter] and her partner a lot". This pattern suggests rural housing markets require family financial support systems that formal measures cannot detect.

Sub-theme 2.2: Executive Housing Displacement

Anne described how new housing developments fail to meet local needs: "The planning is agreed on the basis that half will be affordable housing, but it's then changed once the development has started and it's these sort of four bedroomed executive homes". This trend forces local residents to seek housing "further into the clay areas" while new developments serve incoming populations, creating spatial displacement that IMD measures cannot capture.

Theme 3: Employment Fragility and Economic Marginality

Rural employment patterns in St Blazey West reveal precarious economic circumstances masked by formal employment statistics. Participants described limited local opportunities, seasonal work dependence, and career constraints that challenge standard employment deprivation measures.

Sub-theme 3.1: Limited Local Employment Opportunities

Ryan's observation that "there wasn't any work in St Blazey. You'd have to go to North Hill or Fowey or Lostwithiel to work", illustrates how rural residents must seek employment outside their communities, creating additional transportation and time costs. Anne elaborated: "Largely they're owned and run... by one or two proprietors, they're not businesses that are big enough to support bringing in additional staff".

The closure of traditional industries compounds employment challenges. David's experience in China clay industry's decline exemplifies broader rural de-industrialisation: "When I started with them, there were 16,000 people working for them. Now, there's not maybe 1000 at the most". This industrial decline creates long-term economic vulnerability that persists across generations.

Sub-theme 3.2: Professional Career Constraints

Laura's musical career demonstrates how rural location constrains professional development: "There is work. But you wouldn't survive on it... The bulk of my 'bread and butter' work is as a member of the International Film Orchestra and that takes me everywhere. Everywhere, other than in Cornwall". Her experience reveals how skilled professionals face career limitations that income measures alone cannot capture.

Anne's teaching role vulnerability through service closures illustrates rural employment insecurity: "At the moment I'm at risk of redundancy...Or I could change centres, but that will then mean a bus journey from my house to the train station, then a bus from Bodmin

Parkway out to the school". The closure of rural services creates employment instability that affects entire communities.

Theme 4: Health and Social Care Access Barriers

Healthcare access emerged as a complex challenge involving both geographical barriers and service limitations that compound health disadvantage. Participants described significant travel requirements, service closures, and care access inequalities.

Sub-theme 4.1: Geographical Healthcare Barriers

Distance to specialist services creates significant access challenges. Anne's cancer treatment experience illustrates the compounding effects: "The biggest difficulty I think for us at the time was daily radiotherapy. So I needed to get there, and I wasn't well enough to travel on public transport, so we had to pay for taxis". Her experience highlights how rural location creates additional healthcare costs and access barriers during critical illness periods.

David's healthcare access, while locally adequate, depends on private transportation: "I do appreciate that I have to be very careful. I go for check ups regularly by car". His situation demonstrates how rural residents with chronic conditions face ongoing access challenges.

Sub-theme 4.2: Service Closure Impacts

Dental service closure exemplifies rural service withdrawal. David noted: "We lost our dentist 18 months ago, she decided to leave. So she left us all with no dentist now". Anne confirmed the broader impact: "Most people I speak to are not with a dentist. Their children are not with the dentist. It's just not something that is on people's radar anymore because it's unacceptable".

These service closures create healthcare access inequalities that formal health deprivation measures may not adequately capture, as they focus on health outcomes rather than access barriers.

Theme 5: Educational Isolation and Skills Development Constraints

Educational opportunities and skills development face significant rural constraints that challenge formal education deprivation measures. Participants described limited local provision, transport barriers to accessing education, and intergenerational educational disadvantage.

Sub-theme 5.1: Limited Local Educational Infrastructure

Educational choice limitations affect multiple generations. Laura's grandchildren's schooling decisions illustrate rural educational constraints: "We did look at the two schools here... neither we liked. And we chose to send them to school 5 miles away". Her family's choice required significant transportation commitments and highlighted local provision inadequacies.

Anne's adult education centre closure demonstrates broader educational service withdrawal: "The adult education centre I work in is closing. Those in rural communities can be left behind by the statistics that define deprivation". Her observation directly links rural educational service loss to measurement inadequacies.

Sub-theme 5.2: Skills Development Barriers

Ryan's observation about post-16 education access illustrates rural educational progression challenges: "I went to St Austell College for my A-levels and last I heard, they stopped doing A-levels... So now you'd have to go to Bodmin or Truro to do A-levels, which are a long way away". This geographic expansion of educational access requirements creates additional barriers for rural young people.

The closure of adult education centres particularly affects rural residents seeking skills development. Anne explained: "They need small classes. And they need an adult environment, and they need something that doesn't feel like school. And community adult education does that very well". Her insight highlights how rural educational needs differ from urban provision models.

Theme 6: Community Resilience and Social Capital

Despite multiple deprivation challenges, St Blazey West demonstrates significant community resilience and social capital that formal measures struggle to quantify. This theme reveals how rural communities develop adaptive strategies and mutual support systems.

Sub-theme 6.1: Community Mutual Support

Anne described community support mechanisms: "Generally you know your neighbours... if someone hasn't seen you for a week or so, you'll generally find you get a knock on the door". She provided a specific example when "The shopkeeper shut up the shop and gave her a lift to the train station". These informal support networks provide crucial safety nets not captured by formal service measures.

Ryan's community leadership role illustrates rural social capital: "I run the PL24 Community Association, which I'm the chairperson for... yesterday, we ran our Lantern Parade for the St Blazey Saints AFC". His involvement demonstrates how rural residents create community infrastructure through voluntary efforts.

Sub-theme 6.2: Community Fragmentation Challenges

Community cohesion faces modern pressures. Ryan observed: "It's quite cliquey [in St Blazey West]. ... yesterday, 70 people came to the Craft Fair... but it's not a very high percentage of the people who live here". This fragmentation suggests that while community spirit exists, participation remains limited.

Anne noted generational differences in community engagement: "I do think it's mainly amongst the older generation". This pattern indicates changing community participation that may affect long-term rural resilience.

Analysis

Spatial Aggregation Problems

The IMD's reliance on LSOA aggregation fundamentally misrepresents rural deprivation patterns. Rural poverty's dispersed nature means that affluent and deprived households often share the same LSOA, creating averaging effects that mask individual household disadvantage. In St Blazey, participants described living in areas with mixed housing types, where social housing adjoins private developments, creating artificial statistical averaging.

Laura's observation illustrates this spatial complexity: "The other side of the road [to mine] is council housing, but how many of those are privately owned? I wouldn't like to say". This housing mix within small geographical areas demonstrates how LSOA-based measurements fail to capture localised deprivation patterns that characterise rural areas.

Transport Cost Invisibility

The IMD's failure to adequately weight transportation costs represents a fundamental rural measurement flaw. While the "Barriers to Housing and Services" domain includes some transport considerations, it receives only 9.3% weighting compared to Income at 22.5% and Employment 22.5%. However, participant narratives reveal transportation as a primary determinant of rural life quality and economic participation.

Anne's experience exemplifies this measurement gap: "I would say at least five or six times a month I have to pay for a taxi... if I was not in a decently paid teaching position, I would not be able to go to work". Her situation demonstrates how transportation costs can determine employment viability, yet these costs remain invisible to income-based deprivation measures.

Service Access Versus Service Availability

The IMD measures service proximity rather than service accessibility, creating rural measurement distortions. Participants described services being technically "available" but practically inaccessible due to transportation, timing, or capacity constraints. This distinction between nominal and effective service access represents a crucial rural measurement challenge.

David's dentist access illustrates this gap: "We lost our dentist 18 months ago... So we have to go to Lostwithiel. There's a few in St. Austell, but they're only taking children". While dental services exist regionally, practical access barriers render them effectively unavailable for many rural residents.

Economic Participation Constraints

Rural employment constraints create complex disadvantage patterns that challenge conventional employment deprivation measures. Participants described situations where formal employment statistics might indicate economic activity while masking underlying precarity, limited progression opportunities, and forced career compromises.

Laura's professional situation exemplifies this complexity: "With the cost of living as it is, I have to question what I spend... my daughter and I were talking about this the other day. I said, 'you know, I long to go into the supermarket and just put stuff in my trolley without thinking how much it costs'". Despite professional employment, her rural location constrains economic security in ways that employment statistics cannot capture.

Community Resilience Recognition

Rural communities demonstrate significant adaptive capacity and social capital that formal measures overlook. St Blazey participants described extensive mutual support networks, voluntary community leadership, and collective problem-solving that constitute valuable community assets. Recognition of these resources should inform both measurement approaches and intervention strategies.

However, community resilience faces pressures from economic decline, population change, and service withdrawal that threaten long-term sustainability. Anne's observation

about generational differences in community participation suggests that traditional rural social capital may be eroding, requiring proactive support rather than continued reliance on unpaid community effort.

Conclusion

St Blazey residents' lived experiences demonstrate how transportation barriers, service access constraints, economic precarity, and geographical isolation create multidimensional disadvantage that conventional indices cannot capture. The analysis supports developing rural-specific deprivation measures that incorporate transportation costs, service accessibility, and geographical barriers as primary rather than subsidiary factors. Such measures should recognise rural poverty's dispersed nature and avoid spatial aggregation effects that mask household-level disadvantage. Additionally, measurement approaches should incorporate community assets and resilience factors alongside deficit indicators.

Summary

This section presents a reflexive thematic analysis of interview transcripts exploring rural deprivation in Bodmin St Marys Ward East, Cornwall. The analysis reveals that while the IMD provides useful baseline measures, it inadequately weights geographic barriers and fails to capture the complex realities of rural deprivation, particularly the cascading effects of transport poverty and the compensatory role of social capital.

St Bodmin St Marys East, situated in the middle of North Cornwall, exemplifies the complex nature of rural deprivation in a relatively inland area for the county. There is approximately one bus per half hour to Wadebridge, where there is a train station and on to Padstow. Bodmin town has a community hospital.

Nanstallon Community Primary School

Nanstallon Community Primary School serves the Bodmin St Marys Ward East LSOA as a foundation school with 125 pupils, slightly exceeding its 119 capacity⁷. Led by headteacher Ben Stephenson, the school educates children aged 4-11 and has a free school meal eligibility rate of 14.4%, below the national average⁷. The school was rated 'Good' in its 2021 Ofsted inspection, showing significant improvement from its previous 'Requires Improvement' rating. The curriculum is built around joy, curiosity, and purpose, organized into four interconnected strands: STEM, Creative Communication, Humanities, and Personal & Physical Development. This approach balances foundational knowledge with conceptual thinking and creativity. The school offers various extracurricular activities including art, chess, football, basketball, netball, rugby, athletics, biking, fencing, archery, and Lego league. Before and after-school care is available from 8:00 am, with after-school clubs run by Plymouth Argyle Coaching until 5:00 pm, providing working parents with comprehensive childcare options.

Bodmin St Mary (Nanstallon Community Primary) Key Characteristics Data (Sources: IMD 2019, ONS Census 2021)

Indicator	Value
IMD Rank (England)	3,373 (top 20%)
Population (2013)	1,681
Free School Meals	10.3% (vs 23.8% national)
Unemployment	4% (Cornwall avg. 3.7%)
Over-65 Households	27%
Households working from Home	32%
Household with disability	20%
Travel to Work (>5 km)	25%
Households without a car/van	2%

Findings

Themes

Theme 1: Transport Poverty and Geographic Isolation

The most prominent theme across interviews was transport poverty, revealing a dimension of rural deprivation inadequately captured by the IMD. Participants consistently highlighted car dependency as fundamental to accessing employment, services, and maintaining quality of life. Kimberly, a 37-year-old single mother, exemplified this challenge: "I work two days a week in St Austell and then three days at home... Early in the mornings. Like six o'clock in the morning I have to get the bus into work to get there for eight o'clock".

This aligns with national data showing that two-thirds of rural residents live in 'transport deserts', with transport costs contributing significantly to poverty in rural areas, pushing over 5 million people into poverty nationally. The multiplier effect of transport poverty became evident in employment constraints, as Kimberly noted: "I don't drive as well. That restricted seriously the sort of work that I could do".

Even residents praising public transport in Bodmin acknowledged significant challenges. Sarah stated: "That's three buses to the Truro, because they stopped the accessible bus... We can't do morning appointments at the hospital; we have to do afternoon appointments to get there in time". The IMD's 'Barriers to housing and services' domain captures some transport issues but fails to adequately weight the cascading effects on employment, social isolation, and service access.

Theme 2: Employment Precarity and the Low-Wage Economy

Employment experiences revealed limitations in the IMD's binary employed/unemployed categorisation. Participants described a landscape of part-time, insecure, and low-paid work reflecting Cornwall's economic profile, where 26.5% of the population earns below the real living wage. Viv articulated this clearly: "I'm probably still not earning as much as I did back in 2002. When I was upcountry... If I had the same job where I lived before, I'd probably be on £16k - £17k more a year".

Colum's experience highlighted housing-employment intersections, stating: "I essentially needed a close family member to pass away so that I could actually afford to live by myself" while earning £28,000 annually and living "mostly pay check to pay check". The analysis revealed that employment deprivation extends beyond unemployment to include underemployment, forced geographic mobility, and absent career progression opportunities.

Cornwall's economic structure, with tourism accounting for 20% of employment characterised by seasonal, low-wage, and insecure jobs, creates systemic employment precarity not adequately captured by standard employment metrics. Over 70% of hospitality sector jobs pay below the Living Wage, while 49% of self-employed people earn less than minimum wage.

Theme 3: Housing Affordability Crisis

Housing emerged as a critical deprivation dimension, with participants describing an affordability crisis displacing local residents. Paul and Elaine noted that "people coming into the town from outside the region and people coming from within the region but in villages to settle in Bodmin" due to village properties being "way too expensive". This reflects broader trends where Cornwall has seen a surge in second homes and Airbnb conversions, with some communities having over one-third of properties used as holiday lets.

Colum's stark statement exemplified this crisis: "I essentially needed a close family member to pass away so that I could actually afford to live by myself". The housing crisis forces intergenerational dependency and delays life transitions, creating hidden forms of deprivation not captured by standard housing indicators. Cornwall's social housing waiting list reached 25,625 households in 2024, representing an eight-year high.

Viv described rent increases of £220 per month over ten years in social housing, while equivalent private rental would cost £500 more monthly. With average house prices in Cornwall at £302,121 and homes costing 11 times average earnings, housing affordability represents a fundamental barrier to rural living (Peninsula Transport, 2022).

Theme 4: Health Inequalities and Service Access

Health deprivation manifested through barriers to accessing healthcare rather than solely health outcomes. Viv's experience with her husband's cancer diagnosis revealed systematic delays: "going from the diagnosis to actually getting treatment took five months". She contrasted this with experiences in other regions where treatment was "dealt with very quickly," highlighting geographic inequalities in healthcare access.

The innovative Community Health and Wellbeing Worker programme, operating in areas with highest IMD scores, acknowledges these access barriers. With nearly 60 workers supporting approximately 600 people from 530 households across Cornwall, the programme addresses gaps traditional healthcare metrics miss. Participants highlighted absent NHS dental care, with several unable to access dental services, reflecting broader rural healthcare challenges where geographic remoteness compounds service scarcity.

Kimberly's statement, "I don't have a dentist, no... I am terrified of dentists anyway," exemplifies how personal and structural barriers intersect in rural healthcare access. The programme's community-recruited workers provide personalised support to individuals facing barriers in accessing traditional services, addressing health inequalities the IMD framework inadequately captures.

Theme 5: Social Capital and Community Resilience

Despite deprivation indicators, many participants demonstrated remarkable social capital and community resilience. One resident described community initiatives like the restored Methodist Chapel, now hosting diverse activities from pottery classes to pop-up pubs. This community mobilisation represents assets invisible to the IMD framework yet crucial for understanding rural resilience.

Kimberly emphasised this theme: "It's very community-oriented, there's people who do help each other out". However, this social capital often masks underlying deprivation, potentially leading to lower IMD scores despite genuine need. Research demonstrates that social capital can explain variance in community resilience, with components including

social networks, trust, solidarity, and collective action providing crucial support during crises.

Judy described how "if somebody is poorly someone will offer transport," illustrating informal support systems that substitute for formal services. While valuable, this social capital should not diminish recognition of structural disadvantages, as the IMD framework risks doing when averaging affluence and deprivation across geographic areas.

Theme 6: Crime and Antisocial Behaviour

Crime experiences were nuanced, challenging the IMD's straightforward crime metrics. While rural crime rates are consistently lower than urban areas (59 vs 99 crimes per 1,000 population), participants described specific concerns impacting quality of life. Kimberly's partner was attacked in what appeared to be a targeted crime involving a staged collapse and group assault.

Shirley described persistent antisocial behaviour significantly impacting daily life: "Antisocial behaviour... Very noisy... Most of the time yes" affecting sleep and daily functioning. Sarah identified "The drugs" as their main concern about the area. These localised safety concerns and their impact on residents' wellbeing remain inadequately captured by aggregate crime statistics used in IMD calculations.

Viv described visible drug problems: "Say it normal for Bodmin, but they are the junkies that you can see on the streets". Lower crime statistics in rural areas may contribute to lower overall IMD scores while masking real community safety concerns and their impact on residents' wellbeing.

Analysis

Inadequate Weighting of Geographic Barriers

The analysis reveals that the IMD's geographic barriers sub-domain accounts for insufficient weighting given transport poverty's central role in rural deprivation. Transport emerged as the most significant constraint on participants' life opportunities, yet the 'Barriers to Housing and Services' domain represents only 9.3% of the overall IMD weighting. Research suggests exponential transformations in IMD calculations may amplify rural-specific indicators, but this remains insufficient to capture the multiplier effects of geographic isolation demonstrated in participant experiences (Burke & Jones, 2019).

Failure to Capture Hidden Rural Poverty

Rural deprivation often exists within apparently affluent areas, creating heterogeneous communities that average out in area-based measures. The Bodmin St Mary's East ward exemplifies this, combining areas of significant deprivation with more affluent neighbourhoods like Nanstallon, potentially masking concentrated disadvantage. As noted by rural critics, the IMD focuses on identifying concentrated deprived populations typical of urban settlements but fails in villages where scattered deprivation intersperses with affluence (Burke & Jones, 2019).

Overlooking Compensatory Social Capital

The IMD fails to account for how rural communities develop informal support systems that substitute for formal services while potentially masking underlying needs. This social capital, while valuable for community resilience, should not diminish recognition of

structural disadvantages. The analysis demonstrates how community goodwill and mutual support can compensate for service gaps, but this compensation mechanism risks being interpreted as reduced need rather than adaptive resilience (Yang, Huang, & Huang, 2024).

Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that while the IMD provides a useful framework for understanding deprivation, it inadequately captures the complex realities of rural disadvantage in Bodmin St Mary's East. The voices from participants reveal how geographic isolation creates cascading effects across all life domains, yet these receive insufficient weighting in current measures. Transport poverty emerged as the fundamental constraint, affecting employment access, service utilisation, and social participation in ways the IMD framework undervalues.

Cornwall's experience, with its innovative Community Health and Wellbeing Worker programme addressing gaps traditional metrics miss, illustrates both the need for and potential solutions to rural deprivation measurement challenges. The analysis reveals that rural communities develop compensatory social capital that, while valuable for resilience, risks masking underlying structural disadvantages when interpreted through urban-centric measurement frameworks.

Future policy development must move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches to recognise the distinctive nature of rural deprivation and develop appropriate measurement and intervention strategies. The need for rural-specific deprivation measures that capture transport poverty's multiplier effects, recognise scattered rather than concentrated disadvantage patterns, and account for the dual role of social capital as both community asset and potential policy blind spot remains urgent.

St Day

Summary

This section provides the findings of the analysis of lived experiences of rural deprivation in St Day, Cornwall. The findings reveal how the IMD's urban-centric design fails to capture the complex realities of rural deprivation, including transport poverty, community resilience mechanisms, housing displacement dynamics, healthcare withdrawal, and employment paradoxes.

St Day, situated just under two miles from Redruth in Kerrier, exemplifies the complex nature of rural deprivation in area located relatively close to a town and the seaside. There is approximately one bus per hour to Redruth that takes approximately 20 minutes, where there is a train station connecting to Penzance and through to Plymouth and London. There is a community hospital with urgent care 3 miles from St Day.

St Day and Caharrack Community School

St Day and Caharrack Community School serves the St Day LSOA as a foundation school with 132 pupils, operating below its 210-pupil capacity. The school has a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at 40.9%, significantly above the national average. Rated 'Good' by Ofsted, the school demonstrates strong performance with 66% of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing, and mathematics at key stage. The curriculum is designed around the principle that "We are the Change-Makers of our World" with core values of "Enjoy, Engage, Excel". The school emphasizes positive relationships and Rights Respecting School principles of dignity, equality, and respect. Their bespoke curriculum aims to immerse children in rich learning experiences across all subjects, connecting past, present, and future events of local, national, and global relevance. The school's approach focuses on progressive accumulation of knowledge, skills, and vocabulary, enabling students to know more, remember more, and achieve excellence.

St Day (St Day & Carharrack Community School) Key Characteristics Data (source IMD 2019, ONS Census 2021).

Indicator	Value
IMD Rank (England)	9,553 (top 30%)
Population (2013)	1,761
Free School Meals	36.5%
Unemployment	5%
Households without Car/Van	23%
Household with disability	27%
Travel to Work (>5 km)	32%
Households working from home	34%
Gypsy/Traveller Households	1.2%
Ethnicity - White	96.8%

Findings

Themes

Theme 1: The Car as Lifeline - Mobility Dependence and Social Inequality

The most prominent theme reveals car ownership as essential infrastructure rather than lifestyle choice in rural St Day. This finding challenges the IMD's limited attention to transport barriers, which carry minimal weight within the 'Barriers to Housing and Services' domain at just 9.3%.

Hanna, a 48-year-old professional, stated: "I couldn't do my life without having a car". This dependency creates what can be termed 'transport poverty,' where those without vehicles face systematic exclusion from employment, healthcare, and social opportunities. Sandra, an 82-year-old retiree, highlighted the inadequacy of public transport: "We've got a bus once an hour. You can go to Redruth, or you can go to Truro... you can't always rely on them". The unreliability of public transport compounds access difficulties, with Hanna's daughter's experience illustrating broader systemic issues: "when we first moved in, she tried to get a bus in, and it didn't turn up".

The financial burden of car dependency represents an additional 'rural tax' not captured by IMD income measures. Hanna described the ongoing expense: "I'm just having to have a car and having to drive and having to use petrol on the expense of all that". This aligns with national evidence that car ownership is higher than the UK average, with rural households spending more on transport and energy (Salutin, 2023).

Theme 2: Scattered Community Assets vs Concentrated Urban Services

This theme reveals a fundamental tension between rural community resilience and formal service provision that the IMD fails to recognise. While the IMD identifies service deficits, it cannot account for the social capital and informal networks that characterise rural communities.

Participants demonstrated strong community cohesion during crises. Lesley described neighbourhood support during power outages: "I had people knocking on the door saying do you need anything? Somebody else knocked on the door and they have hot water bottles". Sandra emphasised the post office's community role: "we have a wonderful, wonderful post office in the village... They put notices in the window if someone's died and when the funeral is".

Susannah noted community transformation through the school hosting events that were generally well attended: "This was a broken community... We've become a real community". This demonstrates how rural areas can build resilience through social networks, yet these assets remain invisible to the IMD's focus on formal service provision. Research indicates that rural deprivation often involves scattered disadvantage among relatively affluent populations, making it less detectable through area-based measures designed for concentrated urban deprivation (Thomson, 2016).

Theme 3: The Housing Displacement Crisis - When Affordability Meets Availability

Housing challenges in St Day extend beyond affordability to fundamental availability, representing a dynamic displacement process not captured by static IMD housing

measures. The IMD housing domain focuses on homelessness and overcrowding rather than the acute shortage characterizing rural areas.

Hanna's experience illustrates the crisis severity: "There were 150 people going for each property... It wasn't really a choice we were in [to buy a house]". This competition reflects Cornwall's broader housing emergency, where the average home costs 11 times average earnings and only 11% of housing stock is social housing compared to 18% nationally (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2025).

Susannah observed systematic displacement: "I've dealt with more families who've had to move away from the area... landlords who are able to, you know, double their rents". This forced migration fragments communities is not measured by the IMD.

Theme 4: Healthcare Withdrawal and Digital Exclusion

This theme reveals systematic healthcare service withdrawal combined with digital exclusion barriers, creating compound disadvantage not captured by IMD health measures. The IMD health domain focuses on mortality and morbidity rates rather than service accessibility.

Sandra described the erosion of local healthcare: "I think they may come on Tuesday still, but mostly it's a nurse... No district nurses. Nobody's had a district nurse for years". This withdrawal forces residents to travel increasingly long distances for basic healthcare, compounding transport poverty. Research demonstrates that rural populations face particular challenges accessing healthcare due to geographic barriers and service concentration in urban areas (British Medical Association, 2022).

Digital exclusion creates additional barriers, with Lesley struggling with online booking systems: "I've got a friend to book my surgery appointment, so it's the online booking system that you don't like". Cornwall's internet speeds are worse than the UK average, yet healthcare services increasingly assume digital literacy and access (We Are Group, 2024). This digital divide particularly affects older rural residents, creating age-based healthcare inequalities.

Theme 5: The Employment Paradox - Skills, Qualifications, and Geographic Constraints

The final theme reveals how highly qualified individuals face underemployment due to geographic constraints, challenging IMD employment measures that focus on unemployment rather than underemployment or skills mismatch.

Local employment options remain severely limited. Sandra observed: "There is no work in the village as such. You can work in the pub or the shop". Hanna, despite holding a master's degree and working in specialised youth services, must travel extensively: "My charity role is a South West remit, so I travel to Exeter and Plymouth quite a lot... There's not that much of my life that actually occurs in St Day".

This employment paradox reflects broader patterns where talent in rural Cornwall is limited due to poor transport links and limited internet access. Research shows that 26.5% of Cornwall's population earned under the real living wage in 2021, with part-time work accounting for over 40% of jobs (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2025). Susannah noted persistent "intergenerational poverty in the community", suggesting that employment deprivation in rural areas involves complex cycles of limited opportunity rather than simple unemployment.

Analysis

The findings have significant implications for resource allocation and policy development in Cornwall and similar rural regions. Those in rural communities can be left behind by the collected statistics that define deprivation. Cornwall was historically one of four UK areas qualifying for EU poverty-related grants due to its 70.9% GVA compared to the national average (Meyrick, 2021), yet current IMD measurements appear to underestimate continuing rural disadvantage.

The study's themes align with broader rural research identifying transport, housing, healthcare access, and employment as key rural challenges (Thomson, 2016). The development of Rural Deprivation Indices in other contexts demonstrates the need for alternative measures that recognize rural-specific indicators (Burke & Jones, 2019). These include agricultural asset ownership, exposure to environmental risks, and access to digital infrastructure.

For Cornwall specifically, the research suggests that official deprivation measures should incorporate transport costs, housing availability dynamics, digital exclusion, and service withdrawal processes. Hanna also recognised the lived environment was not quite what it seemed, stating that: “I think that the pretty poverty that Cornwall has is really, really hidden. Especially from tourists. They come down and they go to Padstow, or they go to Rock, or they go to Mevagissey or St Ives, and it all looks very idyllic. They don't get to see the poverty that's right on the doorstep”. The county's rural landscape demands measurement approaches that recognise geographic constraints as fundamental to accessing opportunities and services.

St Buryan and Sennen

Summary

Traditional deprivation measures fail to adequately account for the complex, interconnected challenges faced by St Buryan and Sennen’s rural community, including transport dependency, service accessibility, housing affordability, and community dynamics. This section provides an analysis of the interviews conducted with residents of St Buryan and Sennen in Cornwall, exploring their lived experiences of rural life.

St Buryan and Sennen, situated six miles South West of Penzance towards Lands End and close to the coast, exemplifies the complex nature of rural deprivation in a coastal area for the county. There is a regular bus service to Penzance every two hours Mon-Sat until 7pm and reduce service on a Sunday and Bank Holidays. There is a train station in Penzance

St Buryan Academy Primary

St Buryan Academy Primary serves the St Buryan and Sennen LSOA as an academy converter within the Leading Edge Academies Partnership. The school has 59 pupils, utilizing only 36% of its 140-pupil capacity, with 26.4% of students eligible for free school meals. Rated 'Good' in its July 2023 Ofsted inspection, the school demonstrates strong academic performance with 86% of pupils meeting expected standards in reading, writing, and mathematics. The curriculum vision aims to provide all children with access to learning that will inspire them to achieve their aspirations. Each term has a focused learning context driven by an essential question, supported by 'essential reads' that progress learning and inquiry. The school offers a range of extracurricular activities and has a strong sporting ethos, with many pupils playing sport competitively to a high standard. The school's facilities include a car park with 50 spaces and good disabled access to most areas. Parents describe the school as having a "strong, caring and community feel".

St Buryan & Sennen (St Buryan Academy Primary) Key Characteristics Data (Sources: IMD 2019, ONS Census 2021)

Indicator	Outcome
IMD Rank (England)	9,201 (top 30%)
Population (2013)	1,681
Free School Meals	20.6%
Unemployment	4.2% (Cornwall avg. 3.7%)
Household with disability	26%
Over-65 households	35%
Households working from home	27%
Travel to Work (>5 km)	42%
Households without Car/Van	9%
Ethnicity - White	95.9%

Findings

The analysis identified four major themes that capture the experience of rural deprivation in St Buryan and Sennen: (1) Transport Dependency and Isolation, (2) Access to Services and Opportunities, (3) Housing Affordability and Community Composition, and (4) Community Resilience and Social Capital.

Theme 1: Transport Dependency and Isolation

A dominant theme across all interviews was the essential role of private transport in enabling residents to access basic services, employment, and social opportunities. The inadequacy of public transport emerged as a significant barrier to quality of life for those without access to a car. Taff stated that: "I wouldn't be able to go to the gym because the gym is in Penzance. So, I would have to buy in some gym equipment to train at home, which I wouldn't particularly enjoy... I could live here without a car, but I wouldn't want to". Charlotte expanded on the necessity of having a car: "No, I think it would be very difficult just to rely on public transport. I would definitely always want to have at least one car in the family, I think".

This dependency on private transport creates significant barriers to participation in everyday for residents in rural areas. The seasonal nature of public transport was highlighted, with services reduced during winter months when tourism decreases, as Taff recounted "The bus service around here is very good in the summer because we're on the major tourist route... They're not frequent. There's one every hour or so... They do run [in winter], but it's very much a reduced service". (

This theme directly relates to the "Barriers to Housing and Services" domain of the IMD, particularly the "Geographical Barriers to Services" sub-domain. However, participants' experiences suggest that the impact of transport limitations extends beyond simple distance measures, affecting employment opportunities, social connections, and overall quality of life in ways not fully captured by the IMD.

Theme 2: Access to Services and Opportunities

Closely related to transport dependency was the theme of limited access to services and opportunities, including healthcare, education, employment, and retail options. Participants described the significant time, planning, and resources required to access services that would be readily available in urban areas. Ian said that: "Everything is in Penzance. Whatever you want, the answer is Penzance or maybe St Just", which is six miles away on a sometimes one track road that can take forty minutes in the tourist season.

The services in the area were appreciated by residents, as was the environment itself. Taff reported: "We've got a little village shop come Post Office; a little garage that's useful for keeping the vehicles on the road. Yes, it's just a lovely place to be". However, healthcare access emerged as a particular concern, with residents describing long journeys to reach medical facilities, especially for specialised care: "We've got Penzance Hospital, which has what they call an 'urgent treatment centre'... But then my daughter came over to stay with us four years back now... she picked up norovirus and was quite ill. So, we had to take her all the way to Truro to A&E", which is 33 miles away.

Educational opportunities were also limited, with families making difficult choices about schooling. Dom said that they moved to St Buryan because it was the only place that they

could afford to buy a house, but the children were already settled in school: "So they go to school in Ludgvan, which is the other side of Penzance... We didn't want to take him out to move into the school which is in St Buryan".

Josh noted challenges in providing educational opportunities: "One of our issues at St Buryan School is providing opportunities for our children to look outside of the village and 'past the parish', equipping them with not only the skills, but also the mindset, to see what opportunities there are for them outside of what is known."

While the IMD includes measures of geographical barriers to services, participants' experiences suggest that the impact of these barriers is more profound and multifaceted than current metrics capture. The interconnected nature of service access issues—where limited transport affects healthcare access, which affects employment opportunities, which affects income—creates a complex web of disadvantage not fully represented in the IMD's separate domains.

Theme 3: Housing Affordability and Community Composition

Housing affordability emerged as a significant concern, with participants describing how rising house prices, driven partly by second-home ownership, were changing the demographic composition of their communities. This was creating challenges for younger residents and families trying to remain in the area. Taff, a retired member of the community said: "I bought this for £50,000 in 1990 and the place next door to me was sold two years ago, and the place next door to mine isn't even in as good condition. It's smaller, doesn't have so much garden, that went for £300,000". Josh added: "House prices are not affordable for young families, and the village struggles to attract new people from outside of the locality unless they are retired".

The impact of second homes and holiday lets was particularly noted in Sennen, with Taff saying: "If you go down the cove, Sennen cove in the winter, you will be lucky to see half a dozen houses with lights on down there". This changing community composition was affecting local services, including schools, as Josh noted: "Farmers used to keep the village and school going, however, with rising costs and generational shifts, these farmers are no longer there - hence population decreases, which is then felt by the school".

While the IMD includes a "Barriers to Housing and Services" domain, participants' experiences suggest that the specific dynamics of rural housing markets—particularly the impact of second homes and holiday lets—are not adequately captured. The resulting demographic changes have far-reaching implications for community sustainability that extend beyond simple measures of housing affordability.

Theme 4: Community Resilience and Social Capital

Despite the challenges, a strong theme of community resilience and social capital emerged from the interviews. Participants described how community connections helped mitigate some of the difficulties of rural living, while also noting that these connections required active participation. Tiffany shared how the community support each other: "We do have a very good community here... that put it out on the local WhatsApp group or Facebook group and just say, oh, has anyone got some golden syrup? I'm in the middle of a recipe". Ian reiterated this, but also warned of the challenges for those community members who did not engage: "I think you have to be involved. So you've got to make yourself involved in the village, join some of the little groups, the WI or whatever and then once you become involved in the village, then I think you'll feel the village is then

your home, but if you don't become involved, then you're living in a vacuum." (Ian, St Buryan 6)

However, participants also noted that not everyone had equal opportunity to participate in community life, particularly working families with limited time, as Dom said: "It does feel like it has a community... We don't tend to get involved in them because we just don't have the time and we've got the children, all that kind of stuff".

This theme highlights a significant gap in the IMD framework, which does not include measures of social capital or community resilience. These factors can both mitigate and exacerbate other forms of deprivation in rural areas, suggesting that understanding rural deprivation requires consideration of community dynamics alongside more traditional deprivation measures.

Analysis

The experiences described by participants in St Buryan and Sennen reflect broader patterns of rural deprivation in Cornwall and similar coastal rural areas. Research has identified several key challenges facing rural coastal communities like St Buryan and Sennen, including limited employment opportunities beyond seasonal tourism, poor transport connectivity, and housing affordability issues exacerbated by second-home ownership (Local Government Association, 2024). These challenges create rural isolation, which intensifies the issues faced by people living in poverty (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2025).

The experiences described by participants also align with research highlighting the "hollowing out" of rural local government through service closures and reduced spending power (University, 2020). This has left voluntary groups, charities, and communities to fill the gaps, as described by participants who noted the importance of community initiatives in addressing local needs.

This thematic analysis highlights the significant limitations in how the IMD captures rural deprivation in communities like St Buryan and Sennen. While the IMD provides a framework for understanding relative deprivation across England, its application to rural contexts requires careful consideration of the specific challenges faced by rural communities.

St Dennis South

Summary

This report presents a reflexive thematic analysis of interview transcripts exploring rural deprivation in St Dennis, Cornwall. Six key themes emerged from the analysis: hidden rural deprivation, transport poverty and geographic isolation, service scarcity and health inequities, educational deprivation and limited aspirations, community resilience and social capital, and employment precarity and skills mismatch. The findings suggests that while the IMD provides a framework for understanding deprivation, its area-based approach and urban-centric metrics fail to fully capture the nuanced experience of deprivation in rural communities.

St Dennis is ten miles South East of Newquay and seven and a half miles North West of St Austell, in a relatively central location for Cornwall. The bus from St Dennis to St Austell runs on an hourly basis from 0600 - 2200 and takes approximately 25 mins. There is also an hourly bus to Newquay from 0600 to 2300 which takes approximately 45 mins. St Austell has a mainline train stations for onward travel to Plymouth and London. The nearest community hospital is in St Austell, 9 miles from St. Dennis.

St Dennis Primary Academy

St Dennis Primary Academy serves the St Dennis South LSOA as part of the Truro & Penwith Academy Trust. The school has 203 pupils against a capacity of 210, with a high proportion (40.5%) of children eligible for free school meals. In February 2023, Ofsted rated the school as 'Good' across all areas, noting that "St Dennis is built on strong relationships" and "pupils have a great sense of pride in the school". The curriculum is designed to broaden horizons and provide opportunities that engage and motivate children. Key values of aspiration, courage, achievement, friendship, teamwork, and responsibility are woven throughout the curriculum. The school prioritizes trips and experiences beyond the classroom, including a residential trip to London that increases pupils' knowledge of life beyond Cornwall. Pupils gain leadership skills through roles on the school council and eco council, and attend various clubs including yoga, newspaper writing, and football. Ofsted reports leaders ensure disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs participate in these enrichment activities.

St Dennis South (St Dennis South Primary Academy) Key Characteristics Data (Sources: IMD 2019, ONS Census 2021)

Indicator	Value
IMD Rank (England)	7,952 (top 30%)
Population (2013)	1,484
Free School Meals	35.7%
Households with disability	35%
Unemployment	6.1% (Cornwall avg. 3.7%)
Overcrowding (bedrooms)	3%

Travel to Work (>5 km)	58%
Households working from home	13%
Household without car/van	10%
Gypsy/Traveller Households	1.5%
Ethnicity - White	97.8%

Findings

Themes

The analysis identified six key themes that capture the experience of rural deprivation in St Dennis. Each theme is illustrated with quotations from the interviewees and discussed in relation to the IMD domains.

Theme 1: Hidden Rural Deprivation

This theme captures how deprivation in St Dennis exists but is often masked by rural geography and community cohesion. Despite being relatively affordable compared to other parts of Cornwall, St Dennis exhibits significant levels of deprivation that may not be fully captured by area-based statistics. Elizabeth noted: "There is a huge well of deprivation in the village, but it's possibly hidden by the community aspects". This observation is supported by educational statistics, with the Cathy reporting that the primary school had: "47% people premium... free school meals over 50%", which is significantly higher than the national average of 25%.

The dispersed nature of rural poverty means it may not register in IMD statistics, which are calculated at the LSOA level. Small areas of deprivation are less likely to be identifiable amid a relatively affluent area, a limitation particularly relevant to rural communities like St Dennis.

Theme 2: Transport Poverty and Geographic Isolation

Limited transport infrastructure creates significant barriers to accessing services and opportunities in St Dennis, a challenge that relates to the IMD domains of Barriers to Housing and Services and Living Environment Deprivation. Elizabeth emphasised: "I would never be without my car. Limited public transport for us. Really limited". This car dependency creates inequalities, as Elizabeth acknowledged when she said, "there's no way of getting back [to St Dennis] other than by taxi because there's no public transport", making it difficult for those without private transport to access essential services.

Cathy highlighted how geographic isolation affects children's development: "Children's experiences, they're not really leaving the village to experience anything". This geographic isolation limits opportunities for cultural and educational enrichment, a factor not adequately captured in the IMD. The IMD includes distance to services, but it fails to account for the quality and accessibility of transport options, a significant limitation in rural areas where public transport is often infrequent, unreliable or non-existent.

Theme 3: Service Scarcity and Health Inequities

Access to essential services, particularly healthcare, emerged as a significant challenge in St Dennis, relating to the IMD domains of Health Deprivation and Disability and Barriers to Housing and Services. Dental health was highlighted as a particular concern. Elizabeth stated: "I'm still on the National Health waiting list for a dentist", confirming that those in the village who cannot afford private care face significant challenges: "The state of their teeth is awful, but they can't afford dental care. There is no National Health Service dentist for them". Cathy reiterated the problem with the absence of an NHS dentist for local residents, stating that in the primary school: "Children eat a lot of sweets and their teeth are really poor", leading the school to implement preventive measures: "They brush their teeth twice a day in school".

While the IMD includes health indicators, it does not capture waiting lists for services or the financial barriers to accessing private healthcare when public services are unavailable. This limitation is particularly relevant in rural areas like Cornwall, where access to healthcare services is often more limited than in urban areas.

Theme 4: Educational Deprivation and Limited Aspirations

St Dennis exhibits high levels of educational deprivation, with limited professional role models affecting aspirations, a challenge related to the IMD domain of Education, Skills and Training Deprivation. Cathy, the primary school headteacher, reported exceptionally high rates of special educational needs: "29% of pupils have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP), whereas the national level is 3%". This concentration of need creates significant challenges for the school and community.

Limited aspirations were also identified as a concern, with Cathy noting that in the school: "We haven't got any professional families in the local school" with observations that "there may be opportunities, but some parents would not necessarily want to go to work". This suggests intergenerational patterns of low aspiration that may perpetuate deprivation.

While the IMD includes educational attainment, it does not capture intergenerational patterns of low aspiration or the concentration of special educational needs in rural schools. These factors are particularly relevant in Cornwall, where educational attainment has historically been below the national average.

Theme 5: Community Resilience and Social Capital

Despite significant challenges, St Dennis exhibits strong community bonds and mutual support systems that help mitigate some effects of deprivation. This theme does not directly relate to any IMD domain, highlighting a significant limitation of the index in capturing positive community factors.

Elizabeth emphasised the strong community spirit: "It's a village that's got lots going on. A real sense of community". When asked what she liked most about living in St Dennis, she simply stated: "People. The people here. The community that's here".

This community cohesion provides informal support networks, as illustrated by Elizabeth's story of a vulnerable resident: "Everybody looks out for him. And when he wasn't around, somebody immediately went round". Cathy, the school headteacher similarly noted the positive community atmosphere: "Our children are absolutely delightful... they love school".

Social capital and community resilience can significantly mitigate the effects of material deprivation, yet these factors are entirely absent from the IMD. This omission is

particularly significant for rural communities like St Dennis, where strong social networks often provide essential support in the absence of formal services.

Theme 6: Employment Precarity and Skills Mismatch

Limited employment opportunities and a mismatch between available work and resident skills emerged as significant challenges in St Dennis, relating to the IMD domains of Employment Deprivation and Income Deprivation.

Cathy noted the predominance of manual work: "Families that do work might work at supermarkets... it's very manual". Elizabeth observed that "most people are employed outside the village" , and that this created additional challenges: "Getting to work is an issue I guess if you haven't got a car". Lack of ambition was identified as a factor in unemployment: "Locals have low aspirations. They don't want to work". This suggests complex social and cultural factors influencing employment patterns.

While the IMD includes employment status, it does not capture the skills mismatch between available jobs and resident qualifications. These limitations are particularly relevant in Cornwall, where large employers are few and at distance from village locations.

Analysis

The findings from St Dennis reflect broader patterns of rural deprivation in Cornwall and similar rural areas. Cornwall has historically been one of the most deprived areas in Britain, receiving EU Objective One status from 1999 due to its economic challenges (Meyrick, 2021). Recent data shows that Cornwall continues to face significant deprivation, with 17 neighbourhoods in the top 10% most deprived areas in England (Cornwall Council, 2019).

Child poverty is a particular concern, with regions including North Cornwall and St Ives recording rates of 37% and 34% respectively, significantly higher than the UK average of 28.3%. St Dennis specifically has high rates of child poverty, with the area of "Treverbyn & St Dennis" recording 36.12% of children living in poverty (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2022)

The challenges identified in St Dennis, including transport poverty, service scarcity, educational isolation, and employment precarity, are common across rural Cornwall and similar rural areas. The response to this in strong community resilience observed in St Dennis is also characteristic of many rural communities, providing an important buffer against material deprivation (Farmer, Baird, & Iversen, 2001).

Alternative approaches to measuring rural deprivation are needed to capture these nuanced experiences. The findings suggest that the IMDs area-based approach and urban-centric metrics fail to fully capture the nuanced experience of deprivation in rural communities like St Dennis.

Looe North East and St Martin

Summary

This analysis of residents experiences of living in Looe North East and St Martin reveals significant limitations in how the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) captures the complexity of rural disadvantage. Four major themes emerged: transport dependency and isolation, hidden poverty and housing pressures, seasonal employment vulnerability, and community resilience versus systemic neglect. The findings demonstrate that rural deprivation manifests differently from urban deprivation, requiring alternative measurement approaches that account for geographical isolation, service accessibility, and the unique socioeconomic dynamics of rural-coastal communities.

Looe North East and St Martin is a coastal town situated twenty miles West of Plymouth and eleven miles South of Liskeard. The bus from Looe to Plymouth runs on an hourly basis from approximately 7am until 6pm. The bus to Liskeard also runs on an hourly basis from 8am until 6pm. There is a train station in Looe that connects to the mainline through to Plymouth or Penzance. The nearest community hospital is nearly 9 miles away.

Looe Primary Academy

Looe Primary Academy serves the Looe North East and St Martin LSOA as part of the Bridge Multi-Academy Trust. The school operates below capacity with 243 pupils out of 329 places, with 27.8% of students eligible for free school meals, above the national average. Rated 'Good' in its January 2019 Ofsted inspection, the school showed significant improvement from its previous 'Requires Improvement' rating. The school offers a wide range of clubs including sports and classroom-based activities, running from 3:15pm until 4:15pm. Some clubs are run by external providers for an additional charge, reflecting specialised coaching and equipment. The school's Field Gun team, managed by Bobby Hopkinson (Pro 20), trains during the last half hour each Friday, requiring commitment to every training session for competitive team consideration. The curriculum is well-planned and provides pupils with rich and varied learning experiences that capture their interest and contribute to their personal and social development. The leadership team are reported by Ofsted to maintain a strong and passionate drive for improvement, creating a strong inclusive community ethos.

Looe North East and St Martin (Looe Primary Academy) Key Characteristics Data (Sources: IMD 2019, ONS Census 2021)

Indicator	Value
IMD Rank (England)	7,369 (top 30%)
Population (2013)	1,408
Free School Meals	27.8%
Unemployment	4.5% (Cornwall avg. 3.7%)
Households without Car/Van	19%

Travel to Work (>5 km)	33%
Households working from home	39%
Households with Disability	40%
Ethnicity - White	96.5%

Findings

Themes

The interviews with residents explored experiences across IMD domains including income, employment, education, health, crime, housing, and living environment.

Findings

Theme 1: Transport Dependency and Geographical Isolation

Transport emerged as the most significant barrier affecting all aspects of rural life, confirming research identifying transport as the primary challenge for rural communities. Peter described how "lack of transport, access to education, access to more technical and higher skilled jobs" created systemic disadvantage.

Lindsey reinforced this challenges of transport, explaining that "the public transport is terrible" and noting the additional costs attached to living in Looe in relation to transport: "For what I do, I have to be able to drive... even to get to Liskeard, it's 15 minutes each way". Janine, the primary school headteacher, implemented practical solutions, stating "I started running a minibus out every day to pick up children for school... to prevent some of those parents from having to pay £5 per journey".

The seasonal reduction in transport services particularly affected residents, as Peter noted: "we ridiculously went over to a winter timetable on 1st of September, so people that were you know reliant on jobs... maybe living in Liskeard 8 miles away from here were relying on the summer bus". This pattern demonstrates that rural areas face transport costs higher than urban areas.

Theme 2: Hidden Poverty and Housing Pressures

A complex picture of hidden poverty emerged, challenging IMD assumptions about deprivation visibility. Lindsey observed that "you go up the hill and there's all the hidden poverty... they can't get any transport down the hill". This contrasted sharply with tourist perceptions: "if you just come from a day trip... you can get a lovely cup of coffee and some lovely cakes you can walk to the beach, and you'll go home thinking that was a lovely day". Peter added that the towns hidden poverty extended to services: "we don't have any NHS dentists anymore... to get an appointment, you know, with an NHS dentist, it's like hens teeth".

Housing pressures intensified through gentrification, particularly following the "Beyond Paradise" television programme. Lindsey described how "gentrification's already happening... there's at least eight shops that are either going to close because they can't afford to stay open... and then the other shops are like they've stripped out all their basic tables and chairs and made them much plusher and trendier".

Young people faced particular housing challenges, with Lindsey observing "a lot of them are sofa surfing... just in the summer they get a caravan to live in. But in the winter they just a sofa surfing because they they're not allowed to stay in the caravans". This reflects broader challenge of rural house prices being among the highest based on earnings multiples in Cornwall (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2024; Sheaf, 2024).

Theme 3: Seasonal Employment Vulnerability and Economic Precarity

Employment patterns revealed the vulnerability of seasonal tourism-dependent economies. Peter explained how "Looe's population swells from about 5500 to nearly 40,000 in the peak summer weeks", and that many residents worked in tourism on "zero hours contracts for £11.40 an hour" making housing ladder access near impossible.

Janine described families where "they're third generation benefit families. They have never worked, so they don't intend to", alongside others working in tourism who "can be on zero hours contracts" with all the precarity that this entails. Peter added that in Looe "40% of the shops, cafes and restaurants are closed for the winter" creating limited opportunities for employment outside of the tourist season.

Educational aspirations were constrained by employment realities. As Peter reflected: "a lot of people will say, well, what's the point? I get a degree. What am I going to do with a degree in Looe, you know?". This connects to research showing rural areas face lower investment and productivity, with residents traveling longer distances for employment opportunities (Peninsula Transport, 2022).

Theme 4: Community Resilience Versus Systemic Neglect

Despite challenges, strong community networks emerged as a protective factor, though this masked underlying systemic issues. Peter described how "there's a very good charitable sector from the Lions Club and Rotary that supports people...people know how to get that help". However, this community support compensated for reduced public services. Peter noted the decline from "having a, you know, a proper manned police station with the cell" to only "20 hours of policing for one month in September". Janine observed that "the town shops have no security, so they've put a proposal forward next year... to keep these uniform security guards that walk around town, like a safer streets campaign. It's going to cost the shopkeepers £27,000".

Service reduction affected multiple domains simultaneously. As Lindsey observed: "they're basically just cutting off that whole side of the town and the buses aren't even allowed through in the day... But I can't imagine that anywhere else they would ever do that to a community. It's like Looe. Oh, it's end of the line. It doesn't matter".

Findings

The findings reveal fundamental limitations in how the IMD captures rural deprivation. The crime domain, weighted at 9.3%, particularly fails to reflect rural realities where low police presence means, as Peter observed: "crime goes undetected and then that screws the figures". Rural communities generally have lower recorded crime rates (Devon and Cornwall Police, 2024) but reduced police visibility, creating measurement distortions.

The scattered nature of rural deprivation challenges the IMD's area-based approach. The interviews revealed how affluent coastal properties coexist with hidden poverty, creating

as Lindsey observed "a real shift in the town of change" that aggregate measures cannot capture.

Transport barriers fundamentally alter how other IMD domains manifest in rural areas. Healthcare access requires travel to "Derriford twice a week" with additional costs including "£28 for the service to get there plus the toll [to cross the Tamar Bridge]", as Peter notes. Educational opportunities become geographically constrained, with young people facing as Lindsey states "an hour and a half to go to Truro College" for specialist courses.

Cornwall's specific challenges reflect broader patterns affecting coastal rural areas (House of Lords [HoL], 2019). The county's position as "one of the most remote and isolated parts of Britain" with "fewer than 30% of the population live in the nine larger settlements of over 10,000 people" creates particular vulnerabilities (UK Parliament, 2010, p. 1).

The seasonal tourism economy creates additional complexities not captured by standard employment measures. As interviews revealed, communities must manage population swells while supporting residents through winters when services reduce. This pattern affects housing markets, employment stability, and service provision in ways that annual IMD snapshots cannot capture.

Cultural and aspirational factors also distinguish rural deprivation. Janine, the headteacher observed that "for many of them, it will be their home for life because they're not aspirational. Their families are not aspirational", which reflects research suggesting that rural education faces particular challenges in linking local identity with broader opportunities (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019).

The findings support calls for alternative rural deprivation measures. The interviews reveal how transport, seasonal employment, and service accessibility create interconnected disadvantages requiring targeted policy responses. Community resilience emerged as both a strength and a concern, with voluntary organisations filling the gaps in services and support. However, this resilience may mask the need for structural interventions, as community networks compensate for reduced public investment in policing, transport, and economic development.

The research aligns with broader calls for place-based approaches to rural policy. The South West Rural Mobility Strategy recognises that "poor access to publicly available and shared transport and long journey distances mean that rural areas are far more reliant on private cars than their urban counterparts" (Peninsula Transport, 2022, p. ii). Effective rural policy requires understanding these geographical realities rather than applying urban-derived measures.

This analysis reveals that rural deprivation in Looe North East and St Martin manifests through complex interactions between geographical isolation, seasonal economic patterns, and reduced service accessibility that the IMD inadequately captures. The four themes - transport dependency, hidden poverty, employment vulnerability, and community resilience - demonstrate how rural disadvantage requires alternative measurement approaches that account for scattered settlement patterns, distance-dependent costs, and seasonal variations.

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