

Positively Rural: A Place to Call Home

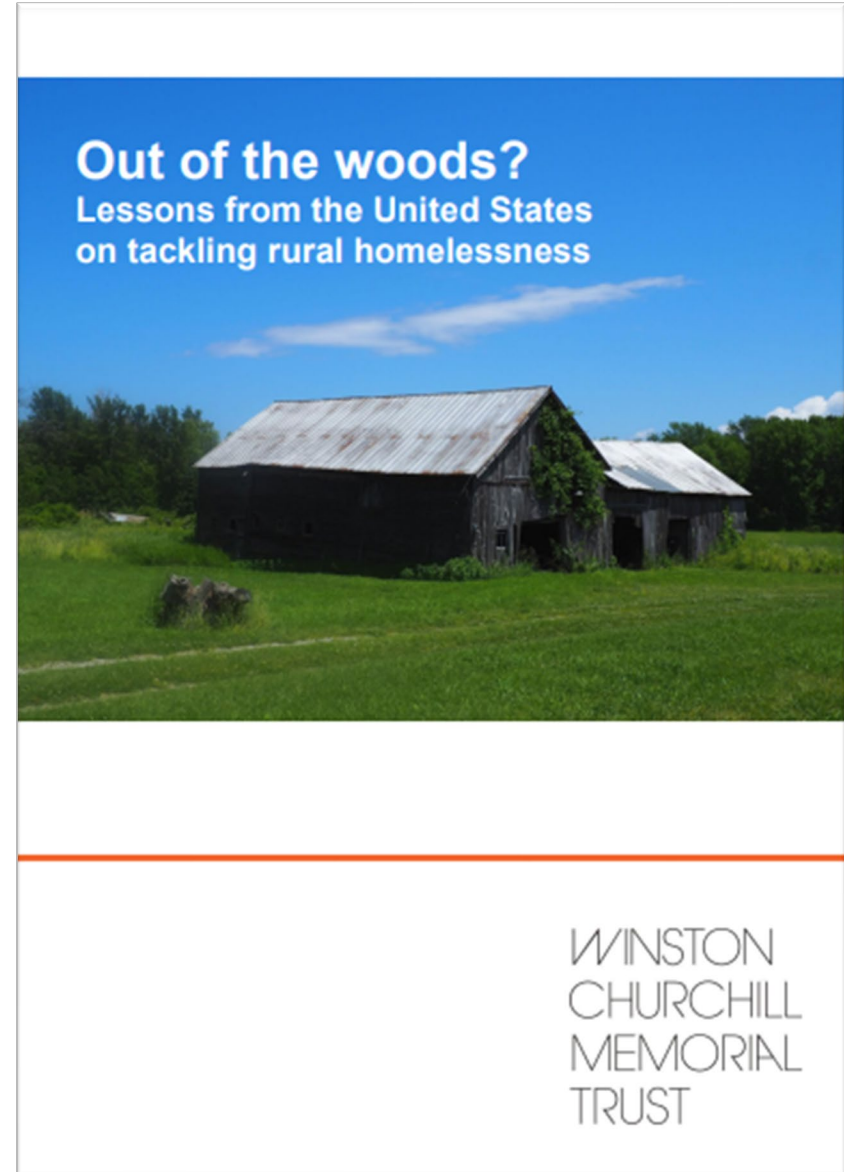
Homelessness in the Countryside: A hidden Crisis

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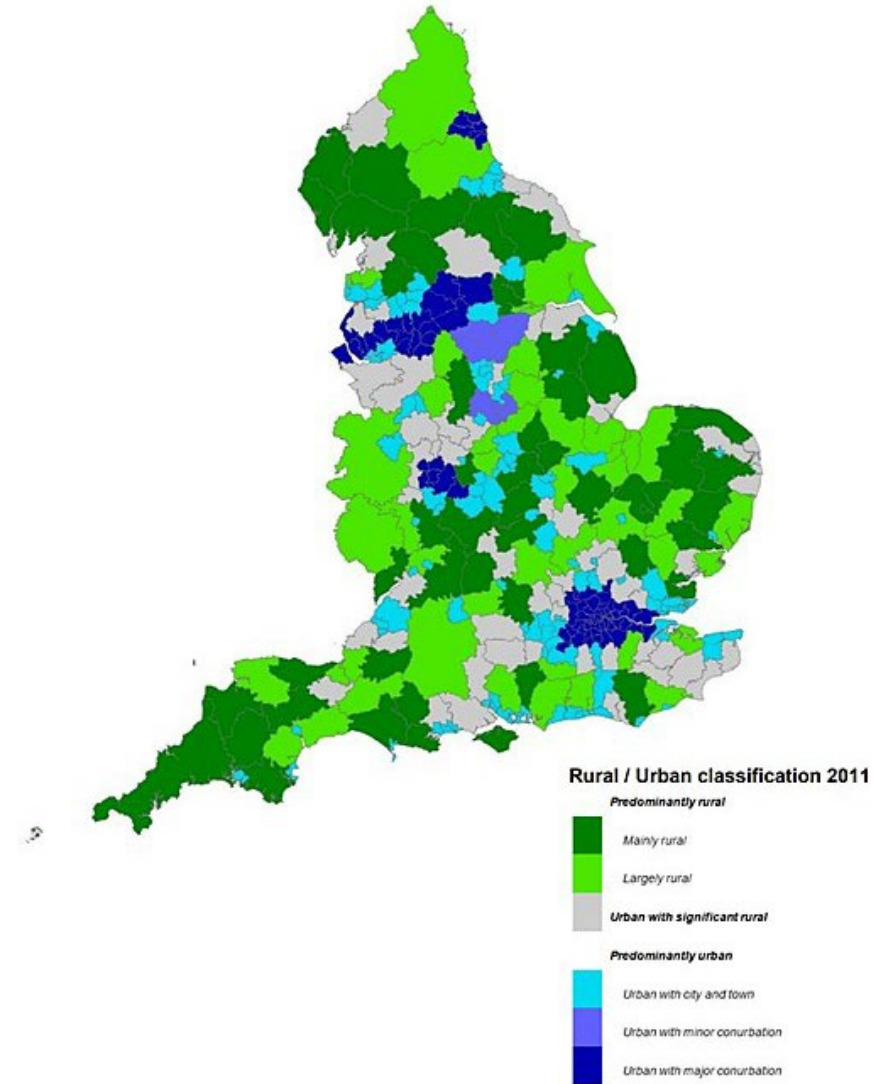
Background

- **Rough sleeping had been rising for almost a decade** going into the pandemic.
- The government's rough sleeping strategies contained **no references to rural** or targeting interventions.
- Signs that **policy wasn't working in rural areas** – while overall rough sleeping fell for the first time in a decade between 2018 and 2019 (9% reduction in England) in rural areas numbers increased.
- Lack of attention from policymakers and **insufficient funding for support services** leave people facing isolation and danger. But **international evidence showed change was possible.**



What happened next

- A group of rural and homelessness organisations: English Rural, NHF, CPRE, RSN, Homeless Link, etc. **identified research and evidence gaps and formed a steering group.**
- Commissioned **Universities of Kent and Southampton** to conduct research.
- **Co-production** between sectors and with experts by experience.
- **UK-wide survey** completed by LA's, housing and homelessness organisations (N=157)
- **Ethnographic research:** South Cambridgeshire, Kent, Herefordshire, North Yorkshire.
- Examined the impact of austerity and welfare reforms on rural homelessness.





HOMELESSNESS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: A HIDDEN CRISIS

Executive Summary March 2023

Dr Carin Tunaker, Professor Helen Carr and Dr Laura Burke with Dr Guillermo Reyes-Pascal



- **Dr Carin Tunåker**, University of Kent, Kent Law School
- **Professor Helen Carr**, University of Southampton, Southampton Law School
- **Dr Laura Burke**, University of Kent, School of Anthropology and Conservation
- **Statistics: Dr Guillermo Reyes-Pascal**, University of Kent, SSPSSR

- Report available:
www.research.kent.ac.uk/rural-homelessness

What we found

- **The rising levels of homelessness in rural areas:** rough sleeping numbers has risen by 24% in one year.
- **Insufficient resources to tackle the problem:** 83% of survey respondents in rural areas reported their job has become more difficult in the past 5 years. 65% funding gap between per capita spending on the homelessness prevention grant in rural areas compared to urban areas.
- **Shame and stigma in rural communities acting as a barrier to support**
- **Physical isolation and limited transport options increases risk**
- **Informal support networks can play a key role in rural areas:** positive examples of farmers, communities providing support, but not helped by local authority often enough.
- **The challenges in rural areas push people into urban centres, at which point needs are higher:** the above problems mean that many people experiencing homelessness in rural areas leave for urban areas against their wishes, to seek out support services.
- **London commuters shield real figures of rural poverty and homelessness and push up rents and housing prices.**



#RuralHomelessnessCounts

86%

Of Housing and Homelessness Providers consider rural homelessness to be a **Significant or Acute problem**

91%

Of respondents in rural areas have seen **homelessness increase** in the past **five years**

80%

Of organisations in rural areas believe a lack of **funding/ resources** is the **main obstacle** in addressing homelessness in their area

81%

Of respondents believe that **rough sleeping is experienced differently** in rural compared to urban areas

23%

of respondents think **stigma is a barrier** people experiencing homelessness face when seeking support

24%

increase to official rural rough sleeping figures in **just one year**

Case Study **Mary's Story**

Mary* has two children. She was evicted from her house and moved into a caravan. When her children were taken into care she moved into a tent. Someone disturbed her tent when she went into the local town to get food so she slept on a bench in the entrance of the church.

She was able to collect clean water from the farmer whose land she was staying on. She had been in trouble with the police for lighting fires to keep warm.

'Like if I'm in a tent, obviously, I've got to – I know I've had the police come to me a couple of times, like for making a fire... they came there and told me to put the fire out, I'm like,

"How else do you want me to eat?" I've even had friends, obviously, I can't steal, I've even had friends who are saying, "Have you eaten today?" And I'm like, "No." And they've gone into town and they've actually stole food for me so I could eat that thing.

'...some of me family don't drive and they've said come over and they can stay with me and I'm like – and that's down in [place], and it's going to cost you about £60 a train ticket and I'm like I haven't even got 60p.'



* Names have been changed to protect people's identities.

Solutions to Rural Homelessness

Local Level

- Engaging and working with local communities
- Information campaign with parish councils
- Improving signposting, particularly to mental health and LGBTQ+ support
- Mobile support
- Legal advice clinics.

Structural Level

- Rural-proofing policy: specific goals and challenges recognised in policy work
- Affordable housing, supported housing, LHA levels in rural areas need more than unfreezing.



Problematizing 'hidden' homelessness

- The word '**hidden**' used, but **not defined**, in policy and advocacy
- Rural rough sleeping and poverty often referred to as 'hidden' – closely linked with experiences of **stigma in the countryside**
- Marginalised groups within homelessness more hidden than others;
 - **LGBTQ+**
 - **Disabilities**
 - **Ethnic minorities**
 - **Care leavers**
- New research project together with **Albert Kennedy Trust**
- **Intersectional** approach





What does the future hold?

- The rural homelessness counts coalition is a collective of organisations and stakeholders working towards improving cross-sector working and government policy
- “Our mission is to raise awareness, develop solutions, and foster partnerships to ensure that everyone, regardless of their location, has access to safe and affordable housing.”

Thank you to:

- All of the people who have, or are, experiencing homelessness who talked to us and showed us the reality of homelessness in the countryside.
- Special thanks to those with experience of homelessness who helped shape our research by participating in media appearances, in steering group meetings and in the Parliament roundtable.
- To our funders, English Rural and the steering group, and the University of Kent.
- To the University of Kent's Research and Innovation team for support throughout the project and for organising this event today.



Information and contact

www.research.kent.ac.uk/rural-homelessness

<https://englishrural.org.uk/about-us/research/rural-homelessness-counts-coalition/>

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