

Strawberries & Champagne

OR

BAKED BEANS & TEA

**A report on Poverty
in Rural Rutland**

The logo for Citizens Advice Bureau, featuring a black circle with a white vertical bar on the left side. The text "citizens advice bureau" is written in white lowercase letters inside the circle.

**citizens
advice
bureau**

Executive Summary

The last Rutland Citizens Advice Bureau rural poverty report (1998) identified issues of social exclusion as they impacted on the local communities within Rutland. It sought to show that rural poverty had its own particular profile and was easy to overlook in the context of the benign English landscape.

Ten years later we have re-visited the issue of rural poverty with a wish to see what, if anything, has changed in relation to poverty in Rutland and the social exclusion which results. We found that many of the issues remain the same. The rural dimension, where affluence lives immediately next door to poverty and lack of affordable housing and transport continues. In this way poverty remains invisible to many, including the statisticians who are instrumental in deciding the parameters by which poverty is measured. Our analysis shows that in some areas the indicators are, if anything, demonstrating a larger gap between rich and poor.

Nonetheless some important changes have taken place. There is a greater appreciation that all in the countryside are not affluent. The local authority now recognises both the importance and need to collect statistical data on for example, homelessness. As a result, it is just beginning to assess the impact of strategies designed to reduce and respond to homelessness. Previously, without any statistics this task was impossible. Additionally, the local authority took part in a rough sleeping survey. The common misconception that there were no rough sleepers within the county was shattered. While the numbers were not high the fact that they existed at all will have been a shock to many.

Rutland CAB's statistics have always reflected national profiles and we welcome the fact that there is now a recognition that all is not necessarily well within the county; the rural idyll is, as we have always maintained, a myth. The country is a lovely place to be if you are affluent, mobile and with good friendship groups. If you lack these advantages then life may well have a very different perspective.

Yes; domestic violence within the county is a real and measurable matter; similar in percentage terms to the urban experience although inevitably less numerically, due to our small population. At last these figures are being recorded and they make disturbing reading.

Perhaps the most that has changed over the past ten years is not the existence of social exclusion, but more positively, that it is beginning to be recognised by those in authority and this is the most important starting point in being able to tackle these extremely difficult areas of social welfare law. As a result of this statistical recording, initiatives are being introduced to combat social exclusion. Managing a problem needs to start by measuring it. As Rutland begins to measure the problems associated with rural poverty so ways of managing those problems starts to emerge.

We hope that in the next ten years we will be able to report on many initiatives that will be introduced to tackle effectively some of the causes of poverty, which are a part and parcel of the beautiful countryside in which we live.

RURAL POVERTY AND ACCESS TO SERVICES IN RUTLAND

“People in rural areas can face disadvantage just as severe as in our conurbations – low incomes, difficulty in accessing good quality public services and poor transport links - leading to feelings of isolation and powerlessness”

Department of Work and Pensions, Sixth Annual Report, 2004. ¹⁹

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INTRODUCTION

In 1998 Rutland Citizens Advice Bureau published a paper ¹² in which we looked at the region which we serve to identify issues relating to social exclusion and to examine the nature of these. This was done so that we were clear in our own minds as to the needs of those clients who live in rural areas and by so doing to help us improve the service which we are able to offer to the Rutland community. As it is easy to forget the passage of time and to overlook the societal and economic changes which influence people's needs and circumstances it seems sensible, nearly ten years on, to look again at these issues and their consequences.

One of the difficulties we encountered was the sheer volume of information concerning rural affairs which is now available. Much of this is the work of government or local government departments as well as the publication of academic research papers and much statistical data. The decennial census returns are also a valuable source of information. A further difficulty is to keep abreast of changes which are taking place, for example, the decline in the number of village shops and sub post offices and the increase in the price of property in recent years.

Accordingly, this paper attempts to outline issues which are widely acknowledged as resulting from rural poverty and isolation and to examine them in the context of our own community. Material drawn from published work is printed in italics and a list of references appears on the final pages.

The issues surrounding rural poverty have been researched by a number of organisations including the Commission for Rural Communities - *Rural Disadvantage, Reviewing the Evidence, September 2006* ¹, by DEFRA (*Rural Services Review, 2006* ²) as well as in papers published by many other organisations and individuals including those produced in partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and by locally based Community Councils.

An ACRE briefing paper on Rural Poverty in 1997 stated that "*Rural Poverty is often hidden. It is physically hidden because of the scattered communities, culturally hidden because our national image of the countryside is beautiful and idyllic and statistically hidden because poverty is identified only as an inner city problem. In the countryside people seldom live in groups according to their wealth as we see in cities. People on low incomes live cheek by jowl to those who are affluent. This can make those experiencing difficulties feel more isolated and stigmatised which in turn leads them to further efforts to keep their problems hidden.*" ³

WHAT IS DISADVANTAGE?

Disadvantage: “A wide set of difficulties preventing people from participating fully in society.”¹

The Commission for Rural Communities, 2006.

A definition of disadvantage is “*an inability to participate fully in society*”. It is about how individuals and households can participate in either having, or doing, the things that the majority of people have or can do. It is clear that being disadvantaged is about much more than not having money. Whilst poverty and financial disadvantage are clearly important a proper understanding of disadvantage indicates that someone may have adequate financial resources but be unable to participate in other aspects of life, therefore also being disadvantaged. The state of not having or being unable to do something is also termed “social exclusion”.

“Social exclusion is life below the minimum acceptable level in a decent society. It is when people do not have the things that most of us take for granted, for example a decent home, a job and the ability to read and write. These are simple things but hugely important. Social inclusion means that opportunity is open to all and that no one lives below an acceptable level.”
Phil Woolas. Minister for Local Government, 2005.

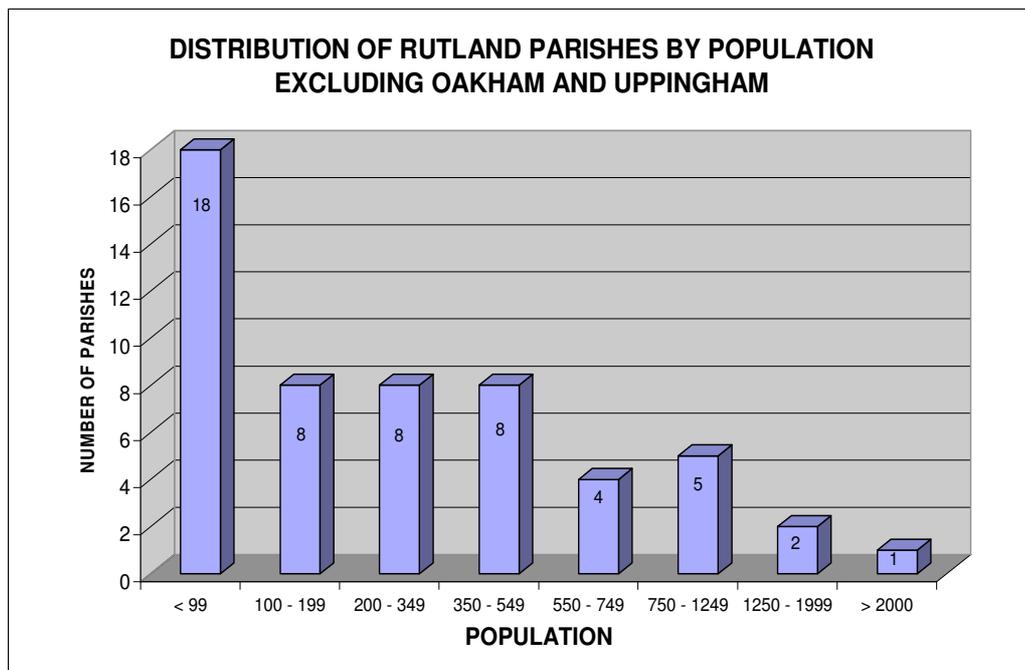
It is clear that disadvantage is about much more than not having money and in rural areas there are many additional factors, either on their own or together, which may influence those who are disadvantaged. These may include problems arising from lack of transport, employment, housing, and difficulties of access to health, social, educational and other facilities.

WHAT IS RURAL?

There is an agreed definition of rural and urban which was set out in the Government’s Rural Strategy published in 2004. This recognises that 9.51 million people live in Rural England and broadly equates to settlements of less than 10,000 people. It also recognises smaller communities in the form of small towns, villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings. In Rutland this means that 71% of the population may be regarded as rural and only one settlement, Oakham, lies on the borderline. This paper attempts a more detailed examination of the position in Rutland based on data from the most recent census along with other material and data gathered by the Rutland Citizens Advice Bureau.

RUTLAND IN THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK

Rutland is a sparsely populated area . Although it extends over 392 km² the population is only about 37,500 (mid year estimates 2007). This indicates an average density of about 96 persons per km² with 34% of the population living in parishes of less than a 1000 inhabitants, by any standards a markedly rural environment. The 2001 census showed that only Oakham had around 10,000 and there were only seven other parishes with more than 1,000 population. The overall increase in population since then has mainly occurred as the result of housing developments in the larger parishes, especially Oakham and Uppingham, but there will also have been some changes in most other parishes. In 2001 there were 48 parishes with less than 1000 people living in them.



In the decade between 1991 and 2001 the population of Rutland increased by about 15%. Based on the mid year estimate for 2004 there appears to have been a further increase of 5.6% for the county as a whole since 2001. It is likely that the rate of increase has been higher in Oakham and Uppingham where the building of new houses has been extensive and rather less so in other parishes. A analysis of Rutland parishes., and the number of people living in them is shown above (Census data for 2001).

TRANSPORT

The availability of transport is key to participating in other activities, so many other forms of disadvantage are in fact transport related.¹

In Rutland with its widely dispersed rural population many inhabitants have limited access to public transport. Oakham is served by a railway station providing passenger services to Leicester and to Peterborough and there are also railway stations at Melton Mowbray and at Stamford which serve the adjacent areas of Rutland. Outside Oakham easy access to the rail network is likely to require the use of a private car or a taxi.

The villages are served by a bus network and Rutland County Council is working with Leicestershire County Council and Peterborough City Council to extend the network across the three counties. Improvements are being introduced such as low floor vehicles for improved accessibility, co-ordination of services and improved waiting facilities. However, it is important to recognise that bus services may be of little help to those whose work times are at irregular hours or who need to travel in the evenings or at weekends or at particular times of day to attend medical or dental surgeries or other appointments. For some who live in hamlets or isolated settlements access to public transport can be even more difficult. In Rutland the difficulties inherent in the transport network are exacerbated by the high number of car owning households in the county, 85% of households own a car and 43% have two cars or more. A minority of 15% of rural households may, therefore, be dependent on public transport or hire vehicles.

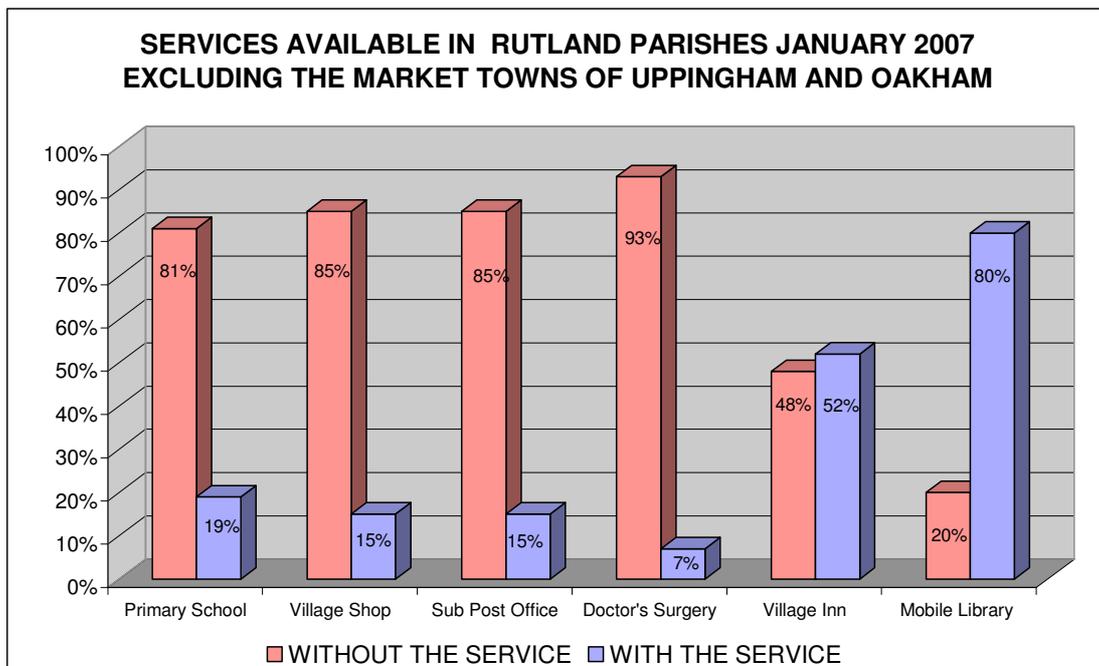
As is usually the case in rural communities a lack of access to transport facilities is likely to fall most heavily on young families, the elderly and those who are handicapped or in ill health. For those needing to travel some distance to reach a bus route the problem may well be acute. Rutland County Council recognises the difficulties that a rural area has with transport and one of their first moves on attaining County Status was to implement a transport policy for Rutland to address the needs of its community.

The Commission for Rural Communities have summarised the difficulties relating to transport in rural areas:

- *Transport related disadvantage is more widespread than might be commonly perceived.*¹
- *The high mobility of some sectors of the rural population (a large majority in the case of Rutland) has negative impacts on those at risk of disadvantage.*¹
- *A small minority are very disadvantaged in terms of transport.*¹

SERVICES IN RURAL PARISHES

An overview of the services available in Rutland parishes is shown below. Four of these categories merit further consideration – education, shops, sub Post Offices and access to health facilities. We have also looked at the availability of those services which are more centralised including benefits agencies and legal support



EDUCATION

Although only 19% of parishes have their own primary schools, and secondary school pupils go to one of the three community colleges in the county, transport is provided by the Local Authority, either by bus or in some cases taxi. Nevertheless those at risk of disadvantage will also include adults with poor basic skills, those with childcare responsibilities and those on low incomes and without private transport.¹

SHOPS AND SUB POST OFFICES

According to recent research older people in rural areas especially were found to value the post office or local shops beyond their shopping value as they offer “ the opportunity to meet neighbours and pick up information about events and services” Older people also felt that their non-appearance, perhaps to buy a daily paper might alert the community to a problem.¹⁴

The paucity of shops and post offices in rural areas is evident and Rutland is no exception. Currently only 15% of Rutland parishes have a village shop and only 15% a sub post office. Significantly, since 1998 there has been a fall of 10% in the number of village shops in Rutland and a fall of 16% in the number of sub post offices, a decline in services which seems likely to continue. For those who are dependent on public transport or are constrained by responsibilities for children or as carers or by old age these can be immediate and serious problems. It has been pointed out that either no shops at all, reduced choice of fresh foodstuffs and branded goods, often higher prices than in urban areas with larger stores and reduced social interaction are likely to exacerbate the position of those in rural communities who are already disadvantaged. Sub post offices still provide valuable, and, for some, essential services and the present drive by the Post Office to reduce still further the number of sub offices must be seen as detrimental to rural communities.

*Research has shown that Post Offices play a social role as much as a functional one and are an important local informal meeting place. One survey found that over 90% of customers in both rural and urban areas think the community role of post offices is very important.¹ More recent research found that disadvantaged groups rated the branch post office as a focal point in the community.*¹³

HEALTH CARE

Distance, travel times and availability of transport are critical for patients in accessing healthcare in rural areas. Those without private transport are particularly disadvantaged.¹

Only 6% of Rutland parishes have a doctor's surgery within the parish but the real problem is the difficulty of access to health facilities where the bus network does not coincide with times of need or locations, especially for those who are unwell, elderly or with young children. Taxis, which may have to come some distance, are increasingly expensive. Dental practices are only available in Oakham, Uppingham, Melton Mowbray and Stamford. For those without a car and dependent on public transport access to health care may be extremely difficult.

CENTRALISED SERVICES

There remains no legal aid available in Rutland. People with limited means and an urgent need for legal advice do not have access to a legal aid solicitor and have to travel considerable distances to obtain the advice they need. The bureau gives general advice over a wide area of legal issues. Additionally we are able to provide not only advice but also advocacy and representation as well for those whose concerns are with Welfare Rights, Debts, Housing, Employment, and Special Educational Needs. There still remains, however, an unmet need for clients requiring the services of a solicitor in other areas of legal advice.

The Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) no longer have a presence in Rutland and clients seeking to make claims or obtain advice have to do so by telephone and this in itself may be a form of exclusion. Clients needing to attend work focussed interviews have to do so out of county. Rutland CAB enquiries show that 30% of all enquiries relate to Welfare Benefits and nationally there is evidence of underclaimed benefits including housing, income support and council tax benefits. There is a decline in local services as centralisation becomes more widespread.

HOUSING

The Commission for Rural Communities comments that “there is a growing body of research evidence on the lack of affordable housing for some people in rural areas . Young people are particularly affected and the lack of affordable housing is contributing to the migration of some young people from rural areas. Homelessness appears to be a growing problem. It is also the case that considerable numbers of non-decent homes are located in rural areas although the reasons for this are poorly understood”.¹

As in many other rural areas housing presents considerable difficulties for some in the community. National trends in the demand for housing are reflected in Rutland and these coupled with a public perception of the area being an attractive one in which to live or from which to commute have resulted in the price levels for much privately owned property, especially village properties, being out of reach of many prospective purchasers. The average house price in Rutland in 2005 was about £237,000.

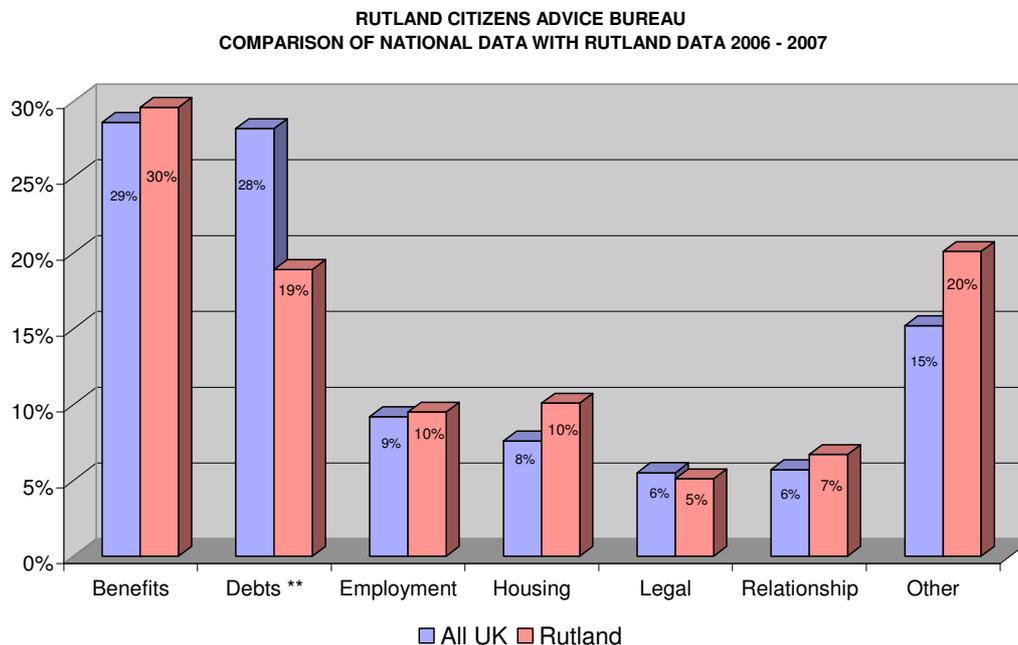
The overall effect of high demand and a substantial core of relatively wealthy residents has a knock on effect throughout the housing market in both the privately owned as well as the rented sectors. Rutland County Council is committed to the provision of affordable housing, but as in all rural area there some for whom access to housing is extremely difficult.

HOMELESSNESS

Although in Rutland there has been a perception that homelessness as a problem did not exist, recent figures collected by Rutland County Council have demonstrated otherwise. In fact homelessness in Rutland is very similar to national levels as are the circumstances which give rise to it. These may include, amongst others, domestic violence, non violent relationship breakdowns, mortgage arrears, termination of shorthold tenancies, illness and unwillingness of family or friends to provide accommodation.

Locations used by rough sleepers may include under railway bridges, church porches, supermarkets, parks or woodland. In practice homelessness is often part of a broader range of problems and this is borne out by the experience of the Rutland CAB in supporting clients. For example, advocacy at the appropriate time may enable clients to stay in their own homes and will often come as part of a larger package of support dealing with other issues. The existence of homelessness and its problems have been confirmed by the enquiries made by County Councils and other bodies throughout the UK in recent years.

CLIENT ENQUIRIES AT RUTLAND CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU



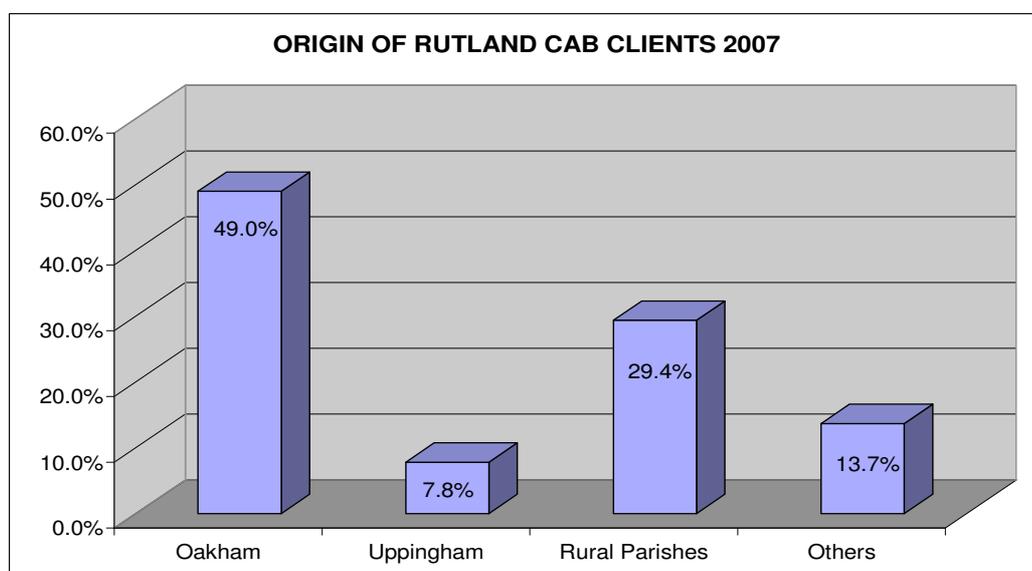
A perception of Rutland as an area providing an idyllic rural way of life is commonplace and also the belief that there are very few deprived, vulnerable and socially excluded people living within our community. Many of our colleagues in the CAB Service envy our rural location and think that a rural caseload is light both in content and number. We know that the reality is different and this is borne out statistically and from the surveys which we have carried out over the last ten years. Most of the indicators used to measure deprivation are those suitable for an urban environment and do not highlight problems in the mixed communities where it is not uncommon to have affluence living next door to poverty.

In our previous paper in 1998 the Rutland CAB looked at illustrating the indicators of rural poverty through actual examples. We did this through an analysis of our case records and looking at the characteristics of four rural settlements to illustrate particular problems of isolation. In all of these locations we were asked to provide support and advice, often on more than one occasion. The range of problems covered means tested benefits, disability benefits, employment problems, housing difficulties and relationship problems, a wide but important range of advice issues. It is clear that for some of these clients the physical difficulties imposed by their isolated home location was a further hindrance to their obtaining the necessary support and advice. For those of limited financial means or ill health the matter of access to support becomes even more difficult. In many ways there has been very little change in these issues since 1998.

The diagram above shows the percentage distribution of enquiries in the main advice areas both nationally and in Rutland. It can be seen that enquiries made to the Rutland Bureau are very similar, both in type and numbers to the those experienced elsewhere throughout the UK. The only major area of advice not included in the diagram is that relating to Immigration and Nationality. This is a reflection of our area which in the past has had a very small immigrant population, however more recently the widening of the European Community is resulting in increased immigration of foreign nationals, especially in largely agricultural communities who may experience particular difficulties over language and employment rights. We are currently looking at ways of making our service accessible to all so that no one is disadvantaged by a language barrier.

Rutland CAB has endeavoured for many years to make its services available to all in Rutland and has developed access through internet and telephone facilities as well as home visits and advertising its services throughout the whole community. Interestingly, over the last two years clients from the more rural parishes outside Oakham and Uppingham have increased by some 10% overall.

The Rutland CAB is already helping many clients with a wide range of problems although welfare rights predominate and we are aware that there is still an unmet need in these and other problem areas, not least for those potential clients who may be identified as being isolated in one way or another. Currently we are the only organisation in Rutland with the specialists available to meet this need.



FINAL WORD

“Winding country lanes, village greens, charming stone built cottages...the British countryside is seen as an idyllic place and perhaps it is for the commuters and those rich enough to retire there. But for many, the picture postcard image belies a life of poverty and hardship”¹⁰

“There is a growing awareness that poverty is not confined to urban areas and that significant numbers of people in rural areas experience hardship. There is also concern over the fundamental societal and economic changes which are taking place in rural Britain and their effect on rural communities”¹¹

Rutland reflects the national picture of rural disadvantage and the Rutland Citizens Advice Bureau remains, for many, the only accessible provider of advice, advocacy and representation.

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