



- News
- Sport
- Travel
- Weather
- What's On
- Your view
- E-Edition

- Business
- Features
- Politics
- Blogs
- Community
- Eduzone
- Fun & Games
- eakids
- SHOP LOCAL

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Rural poverty fears as numbers revealed

22 April 2008 | 06:45

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ANTHONY BOND

A NEW report has revealed a much higher proportion of deprived people living in rural Suffolk than previously thought, a charity has said.

Suffolk ACRE said the report, which was carried out by the Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI), gives "conclusive proof" that Suffolk people are living in deprivation "cheek by jowl" with more affluent residents.

The report, which has revealed the 'hidden pockets of deprivation', comes at the same time as a Government-appointed inspector has warned that people in rural Suffolk are "struggling to get by".

Wil Gibson, chief executive of Suffolk ACRE, which commissioned the report working in partnership with Suffolk County Council, said he was pleased with the findings which would help the group in its attempts to tackle the issues around rural deprivation in the county.

"We are very surprised by the level of some of the numbers there but to some extent it confirms what we have known for some time - that there are major issues in rural areas and large numbers of people affected and sometimes this does not get the profile that it needs.

"We noticed from the report that 39 per cent of adults with no qualifications in Suffolk live in rural areas and if they have no qualifications it means that there ability to improve there life through work and new skills is hampered.

"We need to look at the numbers and see how they are spread across the county and begin to look at how we address them and see what we are currently doing and if that is the most effective way in helping them."

The report found that 42% of the total Suffolk population live in rural areas with 40% of all people with limiting long-term illness in Suffolk living in rural areas.

In a separate report based on visits to Suffolk and Essex, Government-appointed inspector Dr Stuart Burgess found that rural deprivation is hidden in the countryside and there is a misconception that life in rural areas is "affluent and idyllic".

Dr Burgess warned that there is not enough affordable homes being built in rural areas and there is a need to protect rural services. He is now asking the Government to set up a

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special recovery fund for communities coping with the impact of bluetongue, foot-and-mouth and bird flu outbreaks.

The hidden pockets of deprivation revealed in the OCSI report are the following areas - to the east of Barningham, near Stanton; in the estate around Seaward Avenue in Leiston; Peasenhall; three areas in Saxmundham are highly deprived; the area north of Upthorpe; Willingham; Ampton and Timworth, near Bury St Edmunds; Whitehouse in Ipswich covering the mobile homes to the west of the A14 and Kessingland.

YOUR VIEW

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Well, what do you think. In the last 10 years, house prices have quadrupled, as have fuel and food prices, not to mention council tax, utilities etc, yet salaries stay the same... And to add insult to injury, the Government tell the small guy to cut down on his carbon footprint, drive a more eco-friendly car... The salaries today in my sector are the same as they were ten years ago... the small man is dying quietly in the forgotten corners....

Simon Cockerill, Offton

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