



Rural proofing for policies and plans

Ensuring your strategy, reform or service works as well in rural communities as it does anywhere else.

The challenge

Most strategies are built with strong evidence and good intentions. Yet rural communities often experience services differently.

Distance shapes access. Infrastructure is thinner. Communities are smaller and more dispersed. Deprivation is often hidden within averages. What appears efficient on paper can operate very differently in practice.

Rural proofing is not about resisting change. It is about strengthening it. It helps ensure that new structures, commissioning decisions and long-term plans are realistic, equitable and deliverable across the whole geography, not just the most populated areas.

When rural considerations are built in early, outcomes are stronger and implementation is smoother.

Our approach

We take a proportionate, practical approach grounded in data and lived experience. Our work typically includes:

- Reviewing assumptions about access, scale and delivery
- Analysing rural data and identifying evidence gaps
- Applying a structured Rural Communities Impact Assessment tailored for Cambridgeshire
- Identifying unintended consequences
- Recommending practical mitigations and alternative delivery approaches
- Providing relevant case studies and applied examples
- Supporting consultation and engagement with rural stakeholders, including under-represented or digitally excluded communities

We work alongside officers and members, not at a distance, to strengthen your document and support confident decision-making.

Anything that affects people can be rural proofed, from strategic reform to service redesign.

Why Cambridgeshire ACRE

We are the rural experts for Cambridgeshire and have a practical understanding of how policy translates into community-level reality. We combine strategic insight with place-based knowledge. That means we understand both the policy context and the operational realities.

Case study: Strengthening rural consideration in Local Government Reform

During preparation of East Cambridgeshire District Council's Local Government Reorganisation business case, Cambridgeshire ACRE was asked to review the draft through a rural lens.

We undertook a structured Rural Communities Impact Assessment and:

- Provided rural baseline data to strengthen the evidence base
- Highlighted risks around representation, service access and digital assumptions
- Supplied applied case studies from elsewhere in England
- Recommended practical mitigations and governance considerations

Several recommendations were incorporated directly into the business case. Others informed transition and implementation planning.

The result was a stronger document that made rural implications visible and measurable rather than assumed.



Who we currently support

We have worked with:

- District councils
- Parish councils
- Local partnerships and networks
- Voluntary and community sector organisations

We are open to supporting any organisation whose decisions affect rural residents.

What you can expect

- Clear scope and agreed deliverables
- Constructive, proportionate recommendations
- Written reports suitable for publication
- Transparent pricing
- 10 per cent discount for Cambridgeshire ACRE members
- Flexible support, from light touch review to full Rural Communities Impact Assessment and facilitated workshops



Start a conversation

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