



Rural Wales has faced many challenges over the last few decades including depopulation by young people, a decline in household incomes, the increased price of housing (especially for first time buyers), a decline in public services and transport, and the closure of rural schools.

The [latest population estimates for Wales](#) show the expectation that the population of areas such as Blaenau Gwent will continue to fall over the next 20 years – therefore extending the historical trend. In other areas such as Monmouthshire, Torfaen and Caerphilly, whilst the population is expected to increase marginally, this is only due to net internal migration. The natural change is for those populations to decline as the population ages. The future sustainability of rural areas is heavily dependent on their ability to attract people to come and live in those areas, particularly younger people.

These population trends are also reflected in the [latest household projections for Wales](#). These projections show that number of households will increase by over 10% in all of the major cities in Wales (including Newport) to 2039. In comparison, in rural areas, only very marginal increases in households are expected (i.e. in Blaenau Gwent +1% and Torfaen +4%), and this is only driven by a change in household composition i.e. typically smaller households. These projections also show that by 2039 nearly half of rural households will be aged over 65.

There is currently a resurgence of population growth in cities which is partially reversing the long-term trend towards ruralisation. The 'life-cycle effect' (whereby young people move to cities for work and education, whilst older people and families move out to rural areas) is meaning that rural areas are ageing more rapidly than urban areas. This will have implications for public service delivery in rural communities. The 'liveability' of cities in the future will play a significant role in whether the cycle will continue.

However, the appeal of living in the countryside will still remain for many. This may continue to create upward pressure on property prices. As a consequence, the provision of flexible, affordable housing in rural areas will remain a prominent issue in the future. 'Affordability' in a rural context will remain a particular [issue of debate](#).

New technologies will increasingly be important to help to deliver public services in innovative and sustainable ways to rural communities, particularly in the healthcare sector. Strict performance benchmarks for public services could act as a future barrier to rural provision, meeting targets in rural communities tends to be harder to achieve than in urban areas due to higher cost.

Public policy debates are currently focused on the role of cities in devolved decision-making, and 'city-regions' as an appropriate level for governance. It is not clear what devolution will mean for rural areas - will decisions made in cities, for instance on public services and infrastructure provision, reflect the needs of rural communities? What will devolution mean for more remote rural areas that do not clearly fit into a 'city-region'?

Rural areas are at cross-roads, they could simply shift more to being a commuter belt for cities, which will be the locus of economic dynamism. They could shift more towards environmental sustainability (particularly given the enhanced environmental focus in [agricultural policy post-BREXIT recently announced by the UK Government](#)), coupled with more efficient and resilient food production. Alternatively, they could focus on developing diversified economies, although this will be dependent upon flows of private sector investment.