3. THE PROBLEM: KEY FACTORS LEADING TO RURAL DEPRIVATION FROM SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 GENERAL

This section briefly reviews the main factors that contribute to S&R deprivation, as highlighted by consultation and review of relevant literature. Firstly it summarises the issues of cost and economic viability affecting many S&R facilities which generally mean they are difficult to justify in rural areas. It discusses one of the key methods used to define and identify geographical areas suffering from Overall Deprivation, and why this method does not tend to work in the interests of rural communities. It then goes on to discuss some of the ‘needs modelling’ techniques used as a basis for directing investment in S&R facilities, and why they may not generally be appropriate to rural areas. The section also identifies other factors that compound the difficulties in providing and maintaining S&R opportunities in rural areas.

This section was compiled on the basis of comprehensive discussion via questionnaires and focus groups with a variety of stakeholders throughout the region, including local authorities, sports clubs, governing bodies of sport, health agencies, village groups, parish councils and organisations working in the countryside. A full schedule of the barriers affecting S & R in rural areas is set out in Appendix 2.

3.2 POPULATION AND COSTS OF PROVISION

3.2.1 Catchment populations and economic reality

The basic constraint on opportunities for rural S&R in the region is the distribution of population. There is simply not the critical mass to sustain facilities and activities of the kind found in urban areas.

Where small communities and populations are spread over large geographic areas there may be insufficient threshold population to justify some facilities and opportunities. For example:

- Although there are no hard and fast rules it might be expected that a reasonably sized leisure centre would require a catchment population of about 14,000, and a swimming pool about 21,000 within a reasonable travel catchment, to be justified in terms of potential usage.¹

- Whilst (in contrast) research from various playing pitch studies suggests that a population of anything between 1400 and 4340 people might generally support two football teams (and therefore one football

¹ Source: Sport England Facility Calculator
pitch), many rural settlements and their catchments would still be unable to muster this number of people.²

- A small multipurpose community/village hall sufficiently large to accommodate a range of activities from meetings, playgroups, indoor bowls and tea dances might have to be located in a village catchment of at least several hundred people if it is to be used on a regular/daily basis.³

There is also the major issue of cost. Taking the above three examples again:

- The capital cost of a leisure centre might be expected to be anything between £1.5 million and several million pounds. Running costs vary in a similar fashion and normally more than offset income.⁴
- Whilst the costs of providing a couple of football pitches and changing accommodation is much less at upwards of a quarter of a million pounds, it is still very expensive and there are considerable ongoing maintenance costs.⁵
- Even a small village/community hall can be surprisingly expensive, with a figure of over £1 million plus for a modern well-designed and high specification building not uncommon.⁶

So, whilst even 'local use' facilities such as pitches and small community halls might be easier to justify in rural areas, they are still expensive both to provide and run and require quite large local populations to make full use of them. Theoretically this study covers settlements of a population of up to 10,000. However, even with settlements of this size it may be difficult to make the case for investment in major facilities, although much would depend on the size of the rural hinterland upon which they would also need to draw.

The message is therefore both stark and bleak: for most rural areas the type of facilities that have come to be expected by urban residents are completely out of the question. Even where there may be sufficient people to justify modest facilities the cost can sometimes be prohibitive to local fundraisers (more on this later).

### 3.2.2 Different ages and different needs

It is not just overall population size and cost that determine the viability of and justification for many S&R facilities. The age structure will also be influential in this regard. It is in rural communities where the 'ageing' phenomenon within the overall population can be most evident and acute. Many villages fail to

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² Based on the evidence of a large number of playing pitch demand studies undertaken for local authorities
³ There is little if any research into population levels that will support village halls and other community venues, and there are clearly no hard and fast rules. However, consideration of several rural areas suggests to the authors that the high hundreds/low thousands is generally the minimum catchment required to run a good sized venue with a good range of regular activities.
⁴ Capital and revenue costs clearly depend on the facility concerned.
⁵ Again costs depend on the quality of the facilities.
⁶ As above.
regenerate as young people move away to the urban areas. This often leaves the age structure of many rural communities dominated by older people. Older people tend not to be heavily involved in traditional sports and formal recreation activity when compared with young people. Their needs will therefore often be markedly different. So, not only may the overall catchment population be small to begin with, but it also fractures into different splinter 'client groups', each with their own distinct needs. For small rural communities it may therefore be that only a 'people based' assessment of need will tease out the true picture in terms of deprivation from S&R opportunities. This approach is in stark contrast to some of the strategic needs modelling techniques discussed earlier.

3.3 TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY

The fact that many types of S&R opportunities are not catered for in rural areas may not be a problem if there is reasonable access to facilities within the nearest town or city. All too often accessibility to 'non-local' services is measured by 'drive time', the assumption being that most people will have access to a car. In this regard for those with independent access to a car there may be little difficulty in getting to the nearest major community sports facility. To illustrate this point the following maps have been derived from information on the new Sport England 'Active Places' database for part of North Norfolk. This area is probably one of the least well-served areas in the Region in terms of geographical access to leisure centres. The same exercise can be undertaken for any part of the region.  

Figures 3.1: Access to sports halls in part of rural Norfolk (10 and 20 minute drive time)

7 See Active Places link at www.sportengland.org.
The maps show that whilst some areas in this part of Norfolk are not within 10 minutes drive time, all are within 20 minutes.

The conclusions of a national survey commissioned by Sport England suggest that 87% of visits to sports halls and 86.7% of visits to swimming pools involved a journey time of 20 minutes or less, although there is a considerable ‘falling off’ between 10 and 20 minutes. On this basis even in areas where there are relatively few leisure centres rural residents should not have too much difficulty getting to their nearest venue with the benefit of a car. The Sport England study highlighted that the very large majority of visits were made by car, and that where journeys involved public transport, 80% of such trips came from a catchment of 30 minutes. Ease of trip is a significant factor in determining the level of use of major sports facilities. The time it takes by road to get to many leisure facilities from rural areas is generally longer by public transport (where it exists). Public transport in most rural areas is patchy or non-existent.

The Census information suggests that most households in rural East of England are comparatively well provided for in terms of access to a car. In practice though many individuals do not have independent access and are dependent on others; most notably children, youths and the elderly. This means those who may wish to use facilities in the larger towns and cities will depend on the willingness and ability of car owners to take them. Even if transport at the right time and to the right place is available, cost of use and the time involved may be prohibitive.

To illustrate this point Appendix 3 contain some case studies illustrating how difficult (if not impossible) it can be to make trips at various times of the day or evening to the nearest sports hall or swimming pool from outlying villages where:

- A car is not available and there is thus reliance on public/community transport; and,
- Neither a car nor public/community transport is available and the only other options (apart from a normally prohibitively expensive taxi) are cycling or walking.

These case studies are ‘opportunistic’ and are therefore unlikely to be the most difficult or easiest trips of all those that could have been selected. They are instead probably fairly representative.

The case studies make clear that:

- With the exception of walking and cycling which may in any event be out of the question on some occasions, the cost of the trip itself may exceed the cost of entrance to and use of the destination. This cost will be prohibitive for many potential users.

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9 16.5% of rural households in the region do not own a car or van. (The state of the countryside in the East of England. The Countryside Agency 2003).
• Where there is no car reliance on public/community transport can result in ponderous and convoluted journeys likely to kill any good intent to regularly use the "local" sports centre. This is especially the case in the evenings when public transport can be non existent.

3.4 IDENTIFYING PRIORITY AREAS FOR INVESTMENT BY PUBLIC AGENCIES

Whilst acknowledging the extremely important contribution made by the voluntary sector, it is public sector investment which has been largely responsible for the community sports and recreational infrastructure we now have. Increasingly, public sector investment has been 'targeted' in accordance with national economic and social regeneration agendas. There has also been a focus on objectively demonstrating S&R deprivation as a means to justify and defend investment choices given potentially competing priorities. Whilst this is generally a good thing, it has arguably worked out to the detriment of S&R opportunities in rural areas, as now explained.

3.4.1 Investment targeted on Overall Deprivation

Since 2000 'Overall Deprivation' (see Section 1 for a definition) has been measured on an area-by-area basis using the Government's Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)\(^{10}\). The IMD is essentially a 'basket' of indicators of different kinds in recognition of the fact that Overall Deprivation for people is multi-dimensional. The IMD has become an important tool for public agencies in helping to identify priority areas for their investment and initiatives, including some of key organisations responsible for planning and promoting S&R opportunities. For example both Sport England and relevant Lottery funds identify much of their 'Priority Areas' investment and other work according to IMD scores.

However, from the rural perspective in general (and rural S&R in particular) the way in which the IMD is designed and applied is not helpful because:

• Income and Employment indicators are given a much heavier weighting than those dealing with barriers to services. The consequence of this is that in the overall IMD assessment it is almost invariably urban areas that score highest (or worst) and very few rural areas are identified as suffering significant levels of overall deprivation.

• Because the rural population is geographically ' thinly spread' their needs (be they S&R or other) will not be focused within large population clusters, as tends to be the case in many urban areas. As such they may fall under the IMD's radar because of the way in which the IMD's spatial unit of analysis is designed\(^{11}\).

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\(^{11}\) The IMD of 2004 has adopted Census 'Super Output Areas' (SOAs) as a basis for its spatial analysis. However, whilst generally smaller than the 'Wards' adopted in earlier versions they are probably still too large to identify the small pockets of deprivation that clearly exist in rural areas.
• The IMD does not in any event include any indicators specifically reflecting access to S&R opportunities.

Other spatial bases have been developed for the allocation of funding that have some relevance to rural S&R opportunities. Most notably, the EU Structural Funds exist to help areas of Europe that for one reason or another are suffering difficulties. This could be due to the decline of local industry or falls in income (e.g. because of falling commodity prices reducing farm incomes). The funds are intended to be used to help sponsor projects which will directly address locally identified needs. For example, EU Objective 2, LEADER+ and other funding streams are distributed to projects within these areas. They cover large tracts of rural area within the region, including much of the Fens, Broads, and parts of the North Norfolk coastal area. However, the overall grant aid available from these initiatives is comparatively small, invested over large areas and S&R will be just one of a number of potential beneficiaries. It is understood that this funding is now already largely committed for the foreseeable future.

Those championing rural communities have sometimes come up with alternative suites of indicators that are argued to be better suited than the IMD to highlighting some of the particular problems faced in rural areas.12

3.4.2 Investment in S&R based on objective assessment and modelling techniques

There are several modelling techniques widely used by local authorities and promoted by public agencies to identify certain forms of S&R deprivation. These include computer-based models to assess the unmet need for sports halls, swimming pools, and artificial turf pitches. Other modelling techniques have been devised for sports pitches, and Sport England is currently examining the scope for expanding such assessment to cover other facilities.13

Such techniques have proved their worth in many ways as a basis for informing rational and apolitical decision making. However, from the perspective of this study they can again be criticised in a number of ways:

• They tend to be based on a 'population/user' component and a 'distance component', and few rural areas meet the threshold levels when set in these terms. Whilst (for example) a large town might have sufficient population to justify a clutch of sports halls, such a facility could only be justified in rural communities drawing on a very large geographical hinterland. However, a large hinterland in turn means long journeys for users which is off-putting (as discussed later).

• The facilities for which these modelling techniques are used are both expensive to provide and maintain and in sparsely populated rural

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12 For example, the Countryside Agency has developed a basket of 15 indicators under the themes of People and Communities, Services and Lifestyle, Environment and Recreation, Economy and Enterprise.

13 See for example the developing facility planning ‘kitbag’ at www.sportengland.org.
areas they will be difficult to justify in simple economic terms. (The cost of facilities is discussed fully later in this section).

- The 'conventional' facilities upon which these 'needs' modelling techniques focus only cater for a very limited part of the spectrum of potential activities falling within the definition of S&R used in this report. Most sports halls and swimming pools are used regularly by a relatively small cross section of the community. This is also the case for most sports pitches.

3.5 FUNDING ISSUES

3.5.1 Bias of many funding regimes and sources against rural areas
In addition to potentially prohibitive costs, there are other issues concerning the availability of funding that also impact upon the prospect of providing S&R opportunities both large and small. Both public and commercial leisure providers will inevitably prefer to locate their facilities and services where there are the largest potential catchment populations. This is a particularly telling factor with public sector and local authority investment in leisure facilities. S&R is part of local government's leisure services function, which is non-mandatory. Perhaps largely because of its discretionary nature those in local government championing investment in S&R opportunities will inevitably focus on the potentially 'easy wins' in terms of being able to demonstrate high usage and returns relative to investment made. The implication of this will be a pre-occupation with meeting the needs of urban residents first where justification for provision is perhaps most obvious.

The advent of commercial involvement in the development and running of local authority S&R services (through PFI finance schemes and management companies) may have increased risk aversion towards rural projects of high social value, but which would struggle to survive without considerable high levels of on-going subsidy.

Over recent years investment in many S&R facilities has been supported heavily by a range of grant schemes, which local authorities and others have relied upon to realise projects for new or refurbished facilities. The general prioritisation of external grant funding schemes tends to favour urban-based projects. As mentioned earlier, prioritisation for such funding is largely focused on urban areas primarily because this is where accepted methods of 'measuring' deprivation tend to identify the worst incidences.

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15 Evidenced by a wide range of playing pitch studies conducted throughout England.
3.5.2 Planning/Developer contributions

In urban areas an important potential contribution to funding of leisure and other community facilities is made by developers of housing, given that their residents can generate additional demand for such facilities. However, under the relevant planning legislation it is clear that there should be an explicit link between what is provided and where, and the needs of the new residents. Most new housing continues to be located in the urban areas, and so too as a consequence are facilities resulting from developer contributions.

Given that only a relatively small amount of new housing is sanctioned in rural areas, the potential level of likely developer contributions generated would rarely finance the provision of large-scale S&R facilities. Equally though it is clear that many local planning authorities don’t seek developer contributions from small-scale housing schemes. The general lack of proactivity on the part of many local authorities in seeking such contributions means that new residential development in villages may provide a disproportionately low contribution towards local S&R facilities upon which its residents place a demand.

3.5.3 Confusion over potential sources of funding

Many projects in rural areas are conceived and realised by local community groups and volunteers, involving much precious time and effort on their part. As is highlighted later, the Government's new rural strategy identifies and praises the important role voluntary groups and organisations play in delivering services and opportunities. The Government's intention appears to be that the voluntary sector will be given an enhanced future role. However, for this to be successful better professional support infrastructure must exist to encourage and advise.

An example where such help might be required is in the 'sign-posting' of potential sources of funding and candid professional advice for different kinds of project. Local 'project champions' suggest that whilst they are willing to pursue projects and raise funds, they feel they receive little frank and detailed guidance upon which grant sources to best pursue. Without such help considerable difficulty is experienced in finding a path through the bureaucratic quagmire. Lots of paperwork and administrative burden can be a sobering and off-putting experience for volunteers, especially if it ultimately to no avail. Potentially such bitter experiences can stifle future enthusiasm to 'become involved'.

3.5.4 Fundraising within the community

Low population levels mean that the scope for fundraising within rural communities (as distinct from financial assistance from external organisations)

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16 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004 repeals the well-known Section 106 agreements for planning obligations and replaces them with planning contributions under Section 46 of the Act. The contribution can be made either by a payment by the developer of a local tariff or by them complying with what will be prescribed as relevant requirements. The contribution can be made by the developer either by payment of the sum required or by the provision of benefit in kind of the same value or a combination of both.
for projects is limited compared to urban areas. Although parish councils have the ability to levy additional moneys for particular projects off householders this may prove of little worth if the rateable household base is small.

3.6 FACILITIES

There are relatively few purpose built facilities, particularly indoor, available for S&R in the rural area, for the reasons outlined above. Villages tend to have to ‘make do and mend’ utilising multi-purpose village halls and the like for sport, many of which are out of date, poorly maintained and clearly not fit for purpose. Essential changing rooms on playing fields often do not exist. Village schools are rarely available for community use outside the curriculum and ancillary equipment is poor. Facilities for S&R in the countryside, particularly rights of way, often suffer from a lack of suitability or maintenance.

3.6.1 Over-refined and over-specified projects

Another issue linked to developing projects reliant upon external funding sources is the perceived requirement to satisfy needlessly strict and expensive design criteria for capital projects. Consultation highlighted a concern in this regard, but with a distinction drawn between satisfying legal requirements (health and safety, disabled access etc) on the one hand, and over-elaborate design requirements often considered by project champions as detrimental to a project’s utility and prospects for securing enough funding.

Changing rooms were cited as one example when applying for lottery funding. However governing bodies of sport were also criticised for seeking adherence to strict technical specifications for basic community facilities, which might make them ideally suited for a given sport, but unusable for others. This point is seen as important in rural environments where low potential catchment populations may mean that ‘shared use’ facilities offer the best justification for being built.

The feeling is that if required specifications were altered to make them cheaper to satisfy and/or result in greater flexibility of use facilities could be more affordable whilst also improving their overall utility. Concern over legal and technical requirements increasing costs also extends to insurance not only for facilities but also to underwrite activities.

3.7 CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS

The way of life in rural areas can militate against opportunities for S&R. There is often a lack of motivation or enthusiasm in villages, and a reliance on individuals. Villages often have a limited capacity to make a difference for themselves, and there are lower expectations or unrealistic aspirations. Decision makers in rural areas may not represent village communities as a whole.
3.7.1 Social isolation and exclusion
Linked to the issue of low population is that of social isolation- if fewer people live in rural areas, there are going to be fewer to engage with on a social basis, especially within any given age group. In one way this is a cause of rural S&R deprivation - if there are few people with similar interests expressing a need for particular opportunities or facilities there may be little prospect of them ever being provided. However, in other ways it can also be a symptom of S&R deprivation. Consideration of social isolation and exclusion is relevant to any discussion of S&R in rural communities simply because the primary objective for many people engaging in leisure activities may be to meet more people, make new friends, and ‘feel part of something’. Social isolation and exclusion is regularly highlighted as a major problem afflicting residents (young and old) living in rural areas.

3.7.2 Lack of 'Sense of community'
There are probably relatively few rural communities that share the ethos manifest in the Ambridges and Emmerdales of this world. In practice many rural communities are geographically incoherent and diffuse. This means that residents may not feel they are part of a strong social fabric often romantically described as 'Village Life'. This lack of any sense of community is likely to be to the detriment of efforts of some local people to get projects off the ground.

The aforementioned migration of many young people to urban areas may be partly offset by 'incomers' who through their ability to commute or else flexible working arrangements seek the 'Rural Idyll'. Some will genuinely make themselves active members of village life and inject fresh energy and ideas. However, the normal complaint is that many incomers in practice contribute little to the community they have chosen to live within as much of their lives (through work and social connections) remain in urban areas which they continue to commute to, simply using the village as a dormitory.

The declining 'social capital' in many rural communities doesn’t just affect their ability to work together to get projects of the ground. For example where longstanding farmers might have offered a field for a village event or informally allowed walkers or riders access, incomer farmers may not be integrated into the community and unaware of the need or unwilling to make the offer.

3.8 CO-ORDINATION, LEADERSHIP, AND VOLUNTARY HELP
Consultation with local groups highlighted the importance of local 'leaders' and motivators both in developing projects and organising and running activities. In sparsely populated rural areas such gifted volunteers may not be so forthcoming compared with urban areas. Where individuals with these special qualities exist they can help greatly in 'getting things off the ground'. Local groups also felt that the support of paid 'leaders' in the form of coaches, sports development officers, and project development managers where they are employed by local authorities was normally focused on urban areas at the expense of smaller rural communities.
Consultation did suggest that there was in any event a shortage in volunteers in general (whether to ‘lead’ or to ‘follow’). The feeling was that the enthusiasm of volunteers was stifled to some extent by concerns over increased legal requirements (such as arising from the Children’s Act, Health and Safety), fear of litigation, and ‘form filling’ all of which contributed to taking the enjoyment out of much voluntary work. In this sense such fears and problems afflict the potential voluntary sector in rural communities in the same way as they do in their urban counterparts.

3.9 LACK OF AWARENESS OF OPPORTUNITIES

Consultation with local groups identified some concern over lack of awareness about potential S&R opportunities accessible by rural communities, poor marketing and promotion of opportunities, the dearth of examples of good practice and a sense of poor communication between providers and village communities. The validity of this concern is difficult to judge, and certainly when such comment was made it was occasionally countered by the view that "lack of awareness" was more to do with "lack of motivation to go and find out". This aside, it is noteworthy that local consultation conducted through focus groups tended to concentrate upon the availability of opportunities requiring ‘constructed’ facilities, as opposed to the natural environment. Given that rural areas are surrounded by countryside which potentially provides a very wide range of outlets for S&R; and in view of the broad definition of S&R adopted by the study, this paradox is considered more fully later in this report.

3.10 MULTIPLICITY OF ORGANISATIONS

The number of agencies and organisations involved (directly or indirectly) in providing S&R opportunities is both large and expanding. However, as Section 2 and later in this report make clear the way in which these interests interact will be critical to influencing future S&R opportunities in rural areas. Public agencies are frequently guilty of not thinking and acting in a joined up way. All too often investment decisions are made without wider consideration as to how value can be added for the community (and costs shared) through achieving cross organisation co-operation.

One of the most striking examples of this in rural areas is (still) the planning and management of schools. Consultations suggest that many people living in rural areas feel village schools (of which there are still plenty) are potentially important community facilities, but many (probably the majority) are not available for outside use.

National legislation and guidance, as well as local reports and strategies identify the potential for better use of school facilities by the community in general\(^7\). The extent to which they are available to the community when not

\(^7\) A good contemporary guide to community and dual use of schools is contained on www.teachernet.gov.uk. The **School Standards and Framework Act 1998** specifically requires governing bodies to have regard to the desirability of school premises being made
required by the schools is at best patchy. Community use of school facilities is most developed at larger campuses where facilities and management structures are normally better equipped to deal with public use. Larger secondary schools tend to be the focus of much recent school-based investment under relevant lottery and other programmes. Despite undoubted progress in recent years, significant obstacles continue to exist in the form of concern on the part of headteachers, governors, caretakers over damage to facilities; lack of supervision over opening and locking up; insurance and more. These are valid concerns, and as they stand facilities at many schools would be unsuited for use by much of the community. However opportunities undoubtedly exist for further shared use and (therefore) shared costs.

3.11 LOCAL AUTHORITY AND SPORTS DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS

Local Authorities are still the main agents in providing opportunities for S&R in rural areas, albeit that their role has changed over the years. Their influence has been affected by changes in legislation, regulations and roles – relative priorities will always favour provision in towns for the reasons set out above, performance indicators and targets are more difficult to achieve in rural areas, officer time is constantly restricted and there is a general lack of funding. The development of sport and physical activity continues to be a key role of local authorities, and is still generally well regarded in the region. Inevitably however activities in rural areas suffer – some rural local authorities no longer have sport and physical activity officers, and there is difficulty in providing opportunities for groups at a specialist level. Competitive opportunities, provision for the talented and gifted and for disabled participants inevitably suffers, though the Active Sports Programme seeks to redress this. The constraints on sports development apply equally to the work of national governing bodies in rural areas.

3.12 PLANNING ISSUES

Restrictions on providing for sport and recreation facilities in rural areas arise from the application of land use planning policies. Apart from the financial aspects covered above the development of purpose built facilities for sport and recreation is often constrained by resistance through the planning system. In particular, sports facilities are sometimes considered inappropriate in scale in rural areas, while the perceived unsuitability of floodlighting in quiet rural locations militates against the construction of outdoor facilities which can be used in the evenings and throughout the winter. Opportunities for funding sports facilities through developer contributions are also minimised because of the relative lack of new houses built outside the main towns.

available for community use. The Education Act 2002 (ss27-28 and related provisions) includes a new power for school governors to provide family and community services and facilities.
3.13 COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

In addition to the general barriers restricting opportunities for S&R in rural areas, there are specific factors applying to access to countryside resources. These include the inadequacy and poor condition of some countryside facilities, such as rights of way, the lack of awareness, knowledge, confidence and empathy with the countryside, restricted access in the east region to the wider countryside resource, which is predominantly agricultural, the conflicts between formal activities for sport and informal access, and the lack of positive promotion of the role of the countryside in providing opportunities for physical activity. These factors gleaned from consultation with a wide range of countryside agencies are set out in more detail in Appendix 2.

3.14 SUMMARY

It is clear from the foregoing that the barriers to taking part in S&R in rural areas are many and complex:

- Deprivation from S&R opportunities within rural areas is but part of a bigger problem of lack of access to services and facilities.
- Increasingly, public sector investment has been ‘targeted’ in accordance with national economic and social regeneration agendas. There has also been a focus on objectively demonstrating S&R deprivation as a means to justify and defend investment choices, and this has arguably worked out to the detriment of rural areas.
- The lack of some S&R opportunities in rural areas boils down to (lack of) economic viability. As with other services and facilities, it can be difficult to justify expensive capital and revenue investment to meet the needs of only very small catchment populations.
- Where opportunities do not exist locally it can be difficult or impossible to reach those elsewhere, especially for those without independent use of a car.
- If a genuine attempt is to be made to encourage more people to participate in S&R a better fit must be achieved between the needs and aspirations of people in this regard and what is on offer or being promoted. As will be argued, if this approach is taken to its logical conclusion it may well mean that the natural features of the countryside environment could and should be better utilised as recreation opportunities for rural communities.
- S&R is essentially about people and individuals, and if the aim is to promote participation the specific needs and aspirations of those people and individuals have firstly to be identified. People-based (as opposed to area-based or any number of pseudo scientific demand modelling) approaches will be the only way to establish such needs.
- S&R can bring people together, and it is this cohesive effect that could potentially be so beneficial both for rural communities with threadbare social fabric, and rural dwellers who feel lonely.
- Although ‘economics’ might be seen as the root problem, this section highlights factors that aggravate the situation, and provides some general pointers to where improvement might be achieved.
3.15 SOME EMERGING 'THEMES'

The problems and issues can be distilled into a series of 'themes' which will form the basis for the discussion of solutions, as well as recommendations provided later in the report.

- Economics
- Access and transport
- Identifying needs
- Matching needs with opportunities
- Joined up thinking and working
- Signposting and availability of mentor support
- Land use planning.