Faith in Rural Communities:

Contributions of Social Capital to Community Vibrancy

Research supported by the UK Government
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Glossary

Alpha course: a training course introducing the Christian faith.

Anglican: the adjective used of the Church of England and associated churches in other countries.

Benefice: the area for which an Anglican priest has responsibility, typically including four to five churches, but can be a larger number.

BSE: Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, a disease in cattle linked to the human condition variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease [vCJD].

Church: may describe either the building used by the Christian community, or the people themselves who form the Christian community.

Churchwarden: individuals elected by those on a church's electoral roll to be the Bishop's officers to share responsibility with the clergy for the church building, finance and mission.

Circuit: a cluster of Methodist churches cared for by a superintendent minister.

Diocese: 43 Anglican Dioceses cover the whole of England, each is led by a Bishop providing supervision of the clergy. A smaller number of Roman Catholic Dioceses provide the same function.

District: a similar purpose to a Diocese, within the Methodist Church.

Ecumenical: usually describes a situation where more than one Christian denomination is involved.

Faith community: those who show allegiance to a faith, usually described in rural Christian communities as church, or chapel.

Foot and Mouth Disease: an infectious disease affecting cloven-hoofed animals, last experienced in the UK in 2001.

Friendly Society: a society or association formed for mutual insurance, as among tradesmen or in labour unions, to provide for relief in sickness, old age, and for the expenses of burial.

Home group: a small group of people meeting in a home, usually midweek, for prayer, Bible study and fellowship.

IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation): the IMD measures deprivation for every local authority area in England. It combines indicators across seven domains into a single deprivation score and rank where one is the most deprived area and 354 the least deprived. Factors incorporated in the index are: income deprivation, employment deprivation, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training deprivation, barriers to housing and services, living environment, deprivation and crime.

Incumbent: a priest with legal security of appointment at parish level.

Lay worker: a person working in the life of the church who has not been ordained as priest or minister.

Local Development Framework: statutory policies and plans prepared by the local authority for the development of land and property.

Minister: the ordained leader of a church, a member of the clergy, a priest.

Multi-faith: a sharing between people or organisations of more than one faith.

Ordained minister: a person who has been selected, trained and authorised for the work of a priest or minister within the Christian churches.

Parish: the traditional base unit in the Anglican and Roman Catholic tradition, which has given meaning to the secular equivalent which was created at the end of the C19th.

Parish Council: the first English tier of democratically elected representatives. These bodies were created by the Local Government Act 1894. The Act abolished vestries, and established elected parish councils in all rural civil parishes with more than 300 electors. These were grouped into rural districts.

Parish Plan: a process led by the Parish Council to discover the wishes of residents for the future of that area, leading to a document which influences the policy and programmes of the higher tiers of local government.

Parochial Church Council (PCC): a body elected by those on the local church's electoral roll to share responsibility for the mission of the church with the parochial clergy.

Pastoral visiting: visiting church members in their homes by ministers and lay people.

Priest: a person in the Anglican or Roman Catholic Church ordained by a Bishop with responsibility for pastoral and liturgical work in a parish or benefice.

Rural Officer: most Anglican Dioceses and Methodist Districts have a person so designated with a wide range of responsibilities on rural matters. The Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed Churches have staff with national responsibilities based at the Arthur Rank Centre.

Social Inclusion: policies to reduce inequalities between the least advantaged groups and communities and the rest of society.

Stipendiary Minister: ordained ministers who are appointed to posts in the church, in connection with which a stipend or salary is paid.

Superintendent Minister: the Superintendent has a responsibility for leading and managing the life and work of a Methodist Circuit and acts as a focus for its mission.

Voluntary Aided School: school with a church foundation which, whilst part of the maintained sector, has to make financial contributions towards buildings and other expenses.

Voluntary Controlled School: school with a church foundation which is part of the maintained sector and where the foundation bears no financial responsibility.

Executive Summary

1. The Research

The Countryside Agency (2004) draws attention to five local facilities that "are highly rated by rural communities in strengthening rural communities", the pub, village hall, shop, primary school and church. It is the latter with which this research is concerned. The activities of faith communities in rural areas, usually but not exclusively the various denominations of the Christian church, have been neglected in both the development of policy and in research activity. This investigation explores and assesses those factors that encourage and those that discourage faith contributions to vibrant rural communities, especially those rural communities that are experiencing changes that, for some, result in disadvantage and social exclusion.

Ideas of social capital (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003) provide a useful means of investigating the activities of, the potential for and the barriers to faith contributions to vibrancy and to the creation of wider socially inclusive rural communities. Social capital is "the very process of working together. It is the shared knowledge, norms and sense of trust that is brought to an activity and that, in turn, makes the activity more likely to succeed" (Stoker et al, 2004).

It is an intermediary concept which helps structure an investigation of the extent to which people of faith in rural communities produce:

- bonding within particular groups,
- bridging between different groupings and
- linking with centres of agency and power.

Why are these matters of importance? They are essential elements of a vibrant, inclusive community, able to respond positively to countryside change. Such social capital, with both its personal and organisational dimensions, is crucial to both supporting and renewing rural communities.

The central aim of this research, therefore, is to identify the contribution of rural faith communities to community vibrancy, and set out practical implications for policy.

The research focuses on what people of faith are doing towards the creation and maintenance of active, caring, welcoming and influential communities. Qualitative data is used to uncover the complexity of their local networks, and the manner and extent of their involvement in the production of social capital.

Contrasting geographical case studies, which focus on particular village situations, provide an appropriate means of generating these types of data.

The research was developed through four key stages:

- Five locations were selected across England: **Acle** in Norfolk, **Austwick and Clapham** in Yorkshire, **Bridge Sollars** in Herefordshire, **Fence** in Lancashire and **Iddesleigh** in Devon.
- Preliminary field research was conducted to access faith groups within the case study areas. Semi structured scoping interviews were held with initial contacts to form an understanding of the faith communities and identify issues of local concern.
- The main body of case study research comprised a series of focus groups with people of faith. These sessions placed emphasis on participants' experiences, their motivations and storytelling. A short questionnaire was completed by focus group members to collect details of their backgrounds and local involvements.
- Finally, data collected from faith group members were triangulated through semi-structured interviews with people from outside the faith communities concerned. These individuals, drawn from the villages and various agencies included, for example, village store keepers, parish councillors, local authority officers, and school teachers.

2. Research Findings

The extent and significance of the faith groups' contribution of social capital to community vibrancy is summarised, followed by perceived inhibitors of that contribution and by indications of motivation for involvement.
The contribution may be summarised as follows:

- Village history and tradition are important. Identity is shaped by many things but some aspects of local rooted-ness come from the presence and involvement of the church at crucial stages of life. Notions of the home church, rites of passage, the significance of graveyards, the church building as a special sacred place and the annual church cycle of prayer and celebration contribute to a sense of belonging and well being.
- People who attend church regularly make a significant contribution to community vibrancy, both

through their engagement with church based activity and through their roles in village life more generally.

- There is considerable evidence that people who are involved in the church also volunteer to lead or help organise a wide range of the other activities contributing to rural community vibrancy, such as the parish council, the Women's Institute and the village hall.
- This contribution is expressed not just through organised activity, but more informally through giving time to care for others and in helping them to experience a better quality of life. Sharing of information about people's needs and quiet visiting are characteristic of many faith group members.
- The involvement of ministers of religion should not be underestimated. Many interviewees mentioned the important role played by the minister in visiting, organising and being there.
- Finally, these contributions to community vibrancy should not be exaggerated. There are, of course, many other people in these villages who make a vital contribution, but who do not share the faith of the churchgoers. There are non faith social networks in all these places, whether centred on sports activity, educational and leisure activity or the local pub. These people also make an important contribution to rural community vibrancy.

What inhibits the contribution of faith communities? Most stem from the age profile of churchgoers and from their view of themselves and their communities. There are six points to make, as follows:

- Although there are exceptions, those who participate in the life of the village churches are at the older end of the age profile. This reflects the age structure of many rural communities and many congregations.
- The impact of this profile is reinforced by a tendency for some young families to commute, not just for work and shopping but also to church in nearby towns and cities, where choices of worship style and approach to church life are available.
- The nature of the local housing market has an impact on the numbers of younger people able to live locally and thus on the householder profile of the worshipping community. In most of the villages house prices preclude ownership by those wishing to live independently of parents and family. Privately rented property is available in two of the villages, but there is a consensus that affordable accommodation for local people is a priority.
- Many focus group members are long standing village residents and see themselves as long serving participants in village life. They feel that

they are probably too busy and would like to do less, but also continue to recognise local needs and that others are unwilling or unable to help share responsibilities.

- Of course, willingness to participate is affected by many things, not just age. For some people it is a decline in energy and enthusiasm, but for others it is the priorities of work and family. There is evidence from at least one village that some older people have a growing apprehension, if not fear, of youngsters, that affects their willingness to relate to others. Some interviewees, in commenting on their own villages, hinted at the existence of xenophobic and racist attitudes, but without working through the implications of this for their own contribution to community vibrancy. Others note fragmentation in society at large and see evidence of it in their own villages.
- Finally, commentators and national politicians alike are concerned about what is interpreted as a growing scepticism about institutions of the state and the church. Focus group members are not immune from this thinking. Whilst there is widespread support for and involvement with the structures of local governance, such as parish councils, there are other, clearly articulated, views to the contrary.

During the focus groups, participants were asked to reflect on their motivations for involvement in village life. Why, as people of faith, are they so involved? Explanations are varied. Some find this a difficult question to answer, reflecting the implicit nature of their faith. Six propositions serve to summarise the evidence:

- First, some are clear about the contribution they bring as persons of faith. Regular prayer and worship provides the basis for 'right living', care for others, trusting relationships, and a willingness to forgive and to accept forgiveness, all seen as vital ingredients in establishing healthy communities.
- Second, others express a clear motivational link between faith and action. Their behaviour is a practical and visible outworking, in private and public life, of their personal faith. This is seen in individual care and support and in community activities.
- Third, some feel a social obligation, encouraged by the shortage of willing volunteers. They might be eager to pass on their responsibilities to a new generation, but the problem is not just a lack of volunteers to help out but a scarcity of people who are prepared to take on roles of leadership or responsibility.

- Fourth, others are just keen to be involved in voluntary and community activity whether through Age Concern, farmer support, village festivals or working to get broadband into the village. Sometimes organisations like the church need to be involved to bring people together and to make things like this happen.

- Fifth, the research identifies a blurring in self awareness as some respondents find it difficult to identify the source of their motivation. We are involved in the village "because this is just part of life".

- Finally, many respondents reveal overlapping motivations. There are aspects of all the motivations listed above, plus as one person expressed it: there are "issues of justice, which as Christians we really ought to be fighting for, all the time".

3. Implications for Policy

If faith communities make such a contribution what *implications* does all this have for those who have a responsibility to pursue policies and practices that promote rural community vibrancy?

General implications

1. **There needs to be a wider recognition of this contribution amongst all stakeholders**. This message is relevant for Defra and other central government departments, regional agencies, local authorities and for the voluntary and community sectors. Recognition implies taking steps to listen and take note of the issues and concerns voiced within these groups. To what extent are policies, structures and programmes in place to support this?

2. Recognition has to stimulate a process of learning about that contribution and about the resources that are brought to activities by the church and churchgoers. **Religious literacy has to be extended amongst professionals at all levels.** Could Defra work together with the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government to ensure that full attention is given to the rural situation? How might sources of information and training be better known and accessed by government agencies at all levels?

3. The message to come from this research is that **there is scope for a greater degree of partnership and co-operation with faith communities than has been seen in the recent past**. This is a challenge 'both ways'. It is a challenge for policy makers and implementers to appreciate the resources potentially available and for faith institutions and their members to relate to potential partners, openly, critically and following better training.

4. Decisions about housing development and the consequent provision of infrastructure and services have to be taken in the light of changing household structure and age profile. The contemporary debate about affordable housing has a long history and the provision of such housing through the release of 'exceptions sites' or development plan allocations is again being debated. **The need for subsidies for rented and low cost, sustainable, home ownership is reinforced by concerns about social structure and has implications for churches, people of faith and their contribution to community vibrancy**, matters noted below.

5. These issues of social structure, the housing market and new development are a concern to all stakeholders in central as well as local government and for voluntary agencies committed to rural development. Faith communities too face challenges at a number of levels. With general reductions in church membership and a relative lack of younger people in many rural communities, questions are raised not just about the maintenance of church buildings but also the changing role of ordained ministers. These matters are already of considerable concern. This research suggests that both **ministers and church buildings are a significant resource in these villages and add a considerable amount to community vibrancy. How might support be given without threatening independence and the ability to take initiatives within civil society?**

Bonding implications

6. What implications follow from the research finding that **people of faith make a significant contribution to bonding social capital? This insight should inform attempts by government to measure 'quality of life'**. Mutual care and support are vital ingredients of personal wellbeing. Policies derived from the principles of 'care in the community', devised and implemented by local authority social services and National Health Service primary care trusts, would face considerable problems of execution in the absence of such informal, everyday, neighbourly activity.

7. **To what extent do public and voluntary sector grant making agencies recognise this bonding social capital** provided by people of faith for the benefit of the whole community? These contributions are often enhanced by

development activity to improve organisation and to provide training. How might grant aid be directed towards such initiatives?

Bridging implications

8. The research indicates that people of faith also contribute bridging social capital to their rural communities. Within church congregations people from different backgrounds and with different incomes meet regularly for worship and other organised activities. **Bridging takes place within the faith group as well as beyond its boundaries**. Networks of association interlock. **How might such networks be understood better and used more fully to encourage community vibrancy?**

9. There is support for faith based schools in the villages studied and the contribution of churchgoers to the life of these schools is acknowledged. **How might a more complete understanding of the views of rural communities on faith schools be obtained** and fed into the debate? How might recruitment to school governing bodies be strengthened and the quality of governance improved?

10. Opportunities for rural communities to meet through village events and the celebration of church festivals are noted, together with the use of church buildings to provide community meeting space. **How might further support for such events be encouraged through the local authority's role in economic and community development and through grant making programmes?**

11. The need for affordable rural housing is a constant theme of the research. **How might the church and church people play a more active role in assessing local housing need and making a contribution to meeting that need** through decisions about the use of land within their control?

12. Church people are often seen to take the initiative in responding to **the needs of the young and the old in their communities**, whether organised through the church or not. **How might these initiatives be encouraged** by, amongst other things, the development of stronger partnerships and greater capacity?

13. **Faith groups have a contribution to make to promote the inclusion of people who are excluded for whatever reason including, for example, poverty, ethnic origin or disability. Sometimes this opportunity is not grasped**. How might all stakeholders be challenged to

greater engagement with these issues? Should parish plans have the scope to include policies on community cohesion?

Linking implications

14. Linking social capital is understood as the capacity to relate to others who have power and influence over village life, in one way or another. Churchgoers can bring benefit to the local community through their **links to business, voluntary activity and to national church structures. How might these resources and opportunities be better accessed to improve community vibrancy?**

15. To what extent are **local strategic partnerships and regional assemblies** taking government advice to include faith community representatives? Are issues of rural community vibrancy being addressed? Whilst this research suggests that people of faith make a central contribution to governance at the parish level, their involvement elsewhere may be limited. **How might people of faith be encouraged to contribute to higher tiers of government?**

16. Church groups appear to be fully involved in parish plan making. **How might they be encouraged to participate in the statutory development plan process**, including the production of local development frameworks which contain policies for property development and affordable housing?

17. The **government's commitment to democratic renewal**, local community empowerment and devolution to local neighbourhoods opens up the possibility of church people contributing to the debate and being part of the resulting arrangements. The significant role played by people of faith in parish councils, including the development of Quality Parish Councils, is particularly important in this context. **How will they engage with this debate?**

18. Finally, from 2007 all local authorities will have **Local Area Agreements** between themselves, local stakeholders and central government. One of the themes of these agreements is working for 'stronger communities'. This is to be measured by how much people feel that they can **influence decisions** that are made about their locality, how they feel **people from different backgrounds get on** and the **level of volunteering** in the community. This research suggests that people of faith are keen to see more of the first, need to be challenged about the second and provide a wealth of good examples of the third.

1.1 Research aims and policy relevance

1.1.1 Introduction

Differentiation and change in the English countryside continues to accelerate in response to powerful national and international process (The Countryside Agency, 2004b). Current drivers of change include the in-migration of affluent commuters, contributing to house price rises and a shortage of affordable property for local people. The result is often poverty amongst wealth and an out-migration of younger local people, leaving behind an ageing residual population which finds difficulty in gaining access to essential services. In addition, the decline of mineral extraction and continued agricultural restructuring have shifted the focus of the rural economy away from production and towards consumption, particularly in relation to the growth of organised outdoor pursuits and tourism that use the countryside as an open space.

Over recent decades, these changes have been accompanied by a parallel desire on the part of new, often more-affluent, rural residents to advance a type of environmental conservation designed to preserve their own rural idyll: a countryside of experiences, exclusive consumption and enjoyment (Philips 2002; Cloke *et al*, 1995). This trend has further alienated long-standing inhabitants of rural areas, who are often cast as the victims of restructuring, increasingly under-represented and marginalised in policy-making arenas. Moreover, despite the apparent affluence of many rural residents and the success of new rural service industries, recent crises in the agricultural sector, including BSE and Foot and Mouth disease, have highlighted the continued vulnerability of many rural local economies and have brought further, perhaps more sinister, pressures to rural communities (Phillipson *et al*, 2002).

It is crucial to recognise, however, that the impacts of such changes are not ubiquitous, and that Government policy aimed at alleviating their worst effects is wide ranging, stressing the role of all sectors: private, public, voluntary and community. Its policies

include the support of individuals and communities through such change, and recently the notion of community vibrancy has helped to express the aspirations of government, and others, for the future of the countryside and rural communities.

The Countryside Agency (2004a) draws attention to five local facilities that "are highly rated by rural communities in strengthening rural communities: the pub, village hall, shop, primary school and church". It is the latter with which this research is concerned. The activities of faith communities in rural areas, usually but not exclusively the various denominations of the Christian church, have been neglected in both the development of policy and in research activity. This investigation explores and assesses those factors that encourage and those that discourage faith contributions to vibrant rural communities, especially those rural communities which are experiencing changes that, for some, result in disadvantage and social exclusion.

A recent study of faith community involvement in urban regeneration funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) (Farnell *et al*, 2003) has considered some parallel questions, especially in relation to the interface between faith communities and public sector regeneration professionals. That study concluded that there is often a failure to recognise faith groups and even where there is recognition there is often misunderstanding. A second JRF funded study, on 'Faith as Social Capital' (Furbey *et al*, 2006), explores the issues of conflict and cohesion in relation to faith communities, but predominantly from an urban multi faith perspective. Little attention has been paid to the role of faith groups in rural communities, something which this research attempts to address.

Ideas of social capital (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003) provide a useful means of investigating the activities of, the potential for and the barriers to faith contributions to vibrancy and to the creation of wider socially inclusive rural communities. Social capital is "the very process of working together. It is the shared knowledge, norms and sense of trust that is brought to an activity and that, in turn, makes the activity more likely to succeed" (Stoker *et al*, 2004). It is an intermediary concept which helps structure an investigation of the extent to which faith communities in rural communities produce: first, bonding within particular groups; second, bridging between different groupings and; third, linking with centres of agency and power. Why are these matters of importance? They are essential elements of a vibrant, inclusive community, able to respond positively to countryside change. Such social capital, with both its personal and organisational dimensions, is crucial to both supporting and renewing rural communities. The central aim of this research, therefore, is to identify the contribution of rural faith communities to social inclusion, rural regeneration and community vibrancy, and set out the practical implications for policy.

1.1.2 Research questions

In the light of the questions raised about the extent of faith communities' contributions to rural community vibrancy, the research outlined in this report has five specific aims. These are:

- To identify the strengths and weaknesses of this contribution, the factors which inhibit it and the practical outcomes for rural communities.
- To identify good practice and opportunities for rural faith communities to play a role in the development of rural community vibrancy.
- To make recommendations for policy to government, local authorities, public sector agencies, the voluntary and community sectors and faith communities themselves.

In order to fulfil these aims, the report also seeks:

- To explore the contribution of faith communities to social capital and community vibrancy in selected rural situations.
- To assess the particular significance of that contribution, using the notions of 'bonding', 'bridging' and 'linking' social capital, to the support and renewing of rural communities.

1.1.3 Policy relevance

Answers to the above research questions are of relevance to the development and implementation of policy in a number of ways. First, there is demonstrable concern about the impacts of ongoing rural change on both social inclusion and the economic viability of rural areas. This has found expression in concerns over the lack of affordable housing, the inability of long-standing, often elderly, and young residents to access essential public services and the quality and sustainability of new rural employment based on sectors such as leisure and tourism. The key theme running throughout these issues is the effect of rural change on the quality of life of local people in their communities (The Countryside Agency, 2005), and their capacity to identify appropriate solutions to the problems which they face. Clarifying the activity and role of faith communities in enabling and supporting a wider community response to these issues forms a central element in this report.

Second, there is a growing recognition in government that the partnership working required for achieving regeneration and renewal must not exclude faith communities. The policy statements are now in place, as is indicated by the Home Office publication, Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities (2004a). The Home Secretary in the foreword to the report comments that, "*There has never been a more pressing need for productive and respectful engagement between public authorities and faith communities*." Similarly, at the more local level, the message has gone out from the Local Government Association (2002) that "*faith communities and local government can make a significant contribution to promoting community cohesion*" and, we might add, social inclusion and community vibrancy. Whether it is in relation to the development of Regional Assemblies or of Local Strategic Partnerships, issues of faith involvement are on the agenda. Rural interests are an essential component of these developments, yet often lacking resources and recognition.

> *"There has never been a more pressing need for productive and respectful engagement between public authorities and faith communities."*

Third, 'The Compact', a framework for partnership between Government and the voluntary and community sector was published in 1998. Since then, codes of good practice have been developed, including the 'Compact Code of Good Practice on Community Groups', (Home Office, 2003). The Code recognises that, "*faith groups contribute to the whole range of community involvement, from membership of strategic organisations to small scale project work at neighbourhood level.*" Drawing conclusions from a study of 'Social Capital in Action', the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO, 2003) state that "*faith based community organisations appear to be the most active civil society organisations, at present*". "*They are the ideal types of organisations through which the measurement of social capital should be carried out.*" Moreover, through its commitment to civil renewal Government has set a ten-year agenda for capacity building and infrastructure provision in relation to the voluntary and community sector (Home Office, 2004b), a sector in which faith communities play an important role.

Fourth, the work being undertaken by faith groups themselves, often with some support from regional and local agencies, is beginning to construct a picture of the extent of faith involvement in local communities.

Much of the published material relates to the cities and the conurbations but some include comment about rural areas (e.g. Yorkshire Churches, 2002; East of England Faiths' Leadership Conference, 2003; Northwest Development Agency, 2003). Other studies attempt to place a financial value on the voluntary activity that church people carry out in their local communities (Opera Community Research, 2003), whilst the Rural Churches Survey (Francis & Martineau, 2002) provides a useful insight into the extent to which members of church councils in rural areas are also involved in other local organisations such as parish councils. This present research into 'Faith in Rural Communities' extends the scope of previous work by using qualitative research methods to look closely at a number of villages. It contributes a further insight into the role of faith groups in rural situations.

1.2 Defining terms

This study investigates the contribution of faith communities to rural community vibrancy, using notions of social capital as the conceptual vehicle for developing the research. All three terms used to structure the work require elaboration. What is community vibrancy? What do we understand by faith communities and what does social capital mean? In this section there is an attempt to set these terms in their appropriate context before clarifying how they are used in this study.

1.2.1 Community vibrancy

In the Foreword of the Rural White Paper (DETR, 2000), John Prescott and Nick Brown state that "our vision is of a living, working, protected and vibrant countryside", and the relevant section begins, "We want to see a vibrant countryside, which can shape its own future and whose voice is heard by government at all levels". Thus, the notion of community vibrancy in rural areas is one that reaches to the highest layers of government. Although not containing a definition of vibrancy in either the countryside or the community, the White Paper sees as important: rural policy delivery at local and regional levels, community buildings and services and the voluntary and community sectors.

Attempts have been made elsewhere to define rural community vibrancy, some of them direct, others using parallel terminology such as quality of life (Defra, 2004), community well-being and the 'good' community. These are on-going debates which this research will not conclude, but their introduction helps definition.

The Countryside Agency has tried to define and measure vibrancy, with little success (by their own

admission), and in their State of the Countryside annual reports eventually measured it "in terms of settlement characteristics" (Countryside Agency 2004b). In 2001, they developed five measures for parish level analysis:

- the presence of a village hall or similar in active use;
- the presence of a pub;
- the existence of local village traditions and annual events;
- contested parish councils; and
- whether the parish council had co-opted members.

Thus, vibrancy was closely related to population size. In 2002, the approach changed and was based on a national rural survey that asked respondents what produced good community spirit. Answers included: village halls and community centres, local groups or societies, schools, an active church, local shops and post offices, good neighbours, and fêtes and events. Respondents were also asked about improving local democracy, and this was agreed to be important. In 2003, the State of the Countryside changed yet again, and tried to look at local facilities and services, social capital and organisation, and community organisational capacity. As may be expected, the information obtained for local facilities was much more comprehensive than for the other categories specified. Thus for the Countryside Agency, vibrancy seems to be related to facilities and local democracy.

Following a review of the policies described above, Edwards and Woods (2004) point out that there is often considerable disinterest and apathy in governance at the local (parish) level, and that contested town, parish and community council elections are the exception rather than the norm. This is especially noticeable in wards with less than 1,000 voters. Where elections are contested, a vibrant community should not automatically be assumed; contestation more often occurs in larger populations and may stem from local conflict and division, something that can work against community development. Edwards and Woods also found that voluntary activity had grown in rural areas, partly through individual enthusiasms and engagement and partly through the opportunities provided by funding programmes and community initiatives.

They conclude that an alternative way of understanding vibrant communities is to ask "*not* what is present or absent in a place, but instead what are local people doing, *who* is doing *what* to improve circumstances in particular places, and *how* is 'community' being performed. In essence 'vibrant communities' are those involved in engaging with their own futures and shaping how this can be achieved" (emphases in original). They suggest that it relates to "the capacity of a community to mobilize [sic] itself and to secure resources for its own benefit and manage them effectively", and admit that although the Countryside Agency's most recent proposals for measuring vibrancy are along the right track, it will be difficult to achieve this. Problems will include combining existing disparate data into meaningful aggregate indicators, the need to make adjustments for local contexts and the recognition that a high level of perceived activity may result from the intensive involvement of only a few people (Woods *et al*, 2002).

In the Government's preparation for its policies on neighbourhood renewal consideration was given to the notion of the good community. Perhaps vibrant communities equate to good communities. Such a community is:

- A learning community, where people and groups gain knowledge, skills and confidence through community activity;
- A fair and just community, which upholds civic rights and equality of opportunity;
- An active and empowered community, where people are fully involved;
- An influential community, which is consulted and has a strong voice in decisions which affect its interests;
- An economically strong community;
- A caring community;
- A green community, with a healthy and pleasant environment;
- A safe community, free from crime, fear of crime and other hazards;
- A welcoming community, which people like, feel happy about and do not wish to leave;
- A lasting community, which is well established and likely to survive (Active Community Unit, 1999).

This definition of a vibrant community is all embracing and is valuable for just that reason. Those aspects concerned with involvement, empowerment, caring, welcoming and lasting seem particularly relevant to this study of the contribution of faith communities to vibrancy.

Although undertaken in an urban area, research in the Diocese of Birmingham shows that the church can achieve much that may be a factor in vibrancy (Cairns *et al*, undated). The distinctive features of the contribution made by local parishes to their communities are:
- social capital and community cohesion – through networks and relationships;

- social inclusion – helping people feel involved and included in their communities;

- responsiveness to local needs – through being flexible with resources such as buildings and people. This was highlighted as particularly significant, as statutory agencies and voluntary organisations find that they must work on a more formal contract basis;

- motivated volunteer workforce – which can be a link between the worshipping and voluntary communities;

- leadership by the clergy – seen as crucial in recruiting and motivating volunteers, addressing problems and forming links with other agencies and wider diocesan structures;

- physical capacity – the importance of church buildings; and

- availability of funding – the parish's ability to secure external funding and deliver its benefits to the community.

In this set of factors vibrancy is seen to cohere around the quality of relationships between people and the motivation to be involved in what happens, and is made to happen, in the community. Personal and community well-being is a product of many things, often impossible to fully capture, but the symbolic and the non-verbal are part of it. The ability to construct "satisfying and meaningful images and stories" (Sandercock, 2003) should not be discounted from our definitions of well-being and community vibrancy. As introduced below, this spiritual and religious capital (Baker & Skinner, 2006) or faithful capital (Commission on Urban Life and Faith, 2006) as some commentators express it, has resonance with the contribution of people of faith to rural community vibrancy.

Community vibrancy is, then, a multi-faceted concept. Within this study the central focus is not on those aspects that concern the economy and employment, nor the environment. It is concerned with what people of faith are doing towards creating and maintaining active, caring, welcoming and influential communities, communities that have a sense of their history and of their future. It is, to use different terminology, concerned with the extent to which people give time to their community, through volunteering or engaging in the tasks of local governance. But it is more than this; it embraces some of the more intangible aspects of life that, arguably, are of special significance to people of faith. Such people conceivably contribute many things to community vibrancy, social capital being just one, the meaning of which now needs to be introduced more fully.

1.2.2 Social capital

Although social capital is a widely-used term that has occupied theorists and practitioners over many years, there appears to be a lack of consensus over its definition. Paldam (2000), for example, has identified at least five definitions of social capital, grouping them into three families: trust, co-operation and networks. However, attempts have been made to produce a single definition; Gray *et al* (2006) draw upon several authors when describing social capital as "the connections and relationships among and between individuals". It has been termed "the 'revenge' of the 'soft' social sciences against the 'hardness' of economics" (Paldam 2000), often associated with concepts that are not particularly benign, such as capitalism, efficiency and growth. It is a tool used by the World Bank, for example, perhaps in an effort to turn a 'hard' institution into "something softer and nicer".

Despite their attempt to define social capital, Gray *et al* recognise that it is not a static concept, but will "vary considerably across and between communities, regions and nations". They argue that "inherent in this variation is the difference in the nature and scale of linkages". Borrowing from Putnam, they suggest that differences in linkages will be seen within existing social groups or networks, which they term 'bonding' capital and which can exclude those outside the network, and in broader connections between groups, termed 'bridging' capital, "which are inclusive by virtue of their ability to promote trust and reciprocity among people of different social backgrounds".

The term is generally used to denote something positive, and appears to have "evolved into something of a cure-all for the maladies affecting society at home and abroad" (Portes 1998). Its evocative power is thought to come from its focus on "the positive consequences of sociability while putting aside its less attractive features" and its highlighting of how such "non-monetary forms [of capital] can be important sources of power and influence, like the size of one's stock holdings or bank account".

A key element of social capital is the perception that the relationships involved provide benefits to those caught up in them. These may include "access to contacts, resources, skills, influence, reassurance and mutual support, and research indicates that extensive social capital is associated with good health, low levels of crime and fear of crime, economic growth, an efficient labour market, high educational achievement and more effective institutions of government" (Gray *et al* 2006). One particularly relevant example is providing assistance with travel, such as community transport schemes or, more informally, lift-giving; activities

described as "aspects of rural life which imply vibrant communities and strong social networks". Indeed, the significance of giving lifts is such that a study in Northern Ireland found that even those in non-car-owning households make most of their journeys by car rather than public transport (Nutley, 2005).

This is not to say that social capital is always a benign force. Portes (1998) has found at least four negative consequences of social capital: "exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restriction on individual freedoms, and downward levelling norms". All of these consequences relate to a failure to fit in with the expected norms, and may be perceived as keeping the standards up. However, the fourth consequence is based on a "common experience of adversity and opposition to mainstream society". Thus, social capital can act as a form of social control, both positively and negatively.

Indeed, Portes (1998) describes social control as the first of three basic functions of social capital. The second is as a source of family support, while the third is as a source of benefits through extra-familial networks; this final function is the one most commonly considered, as illustrated by the definition given earlier. Similarly, the most common use of this form of social capital is in the field of stratification, where it is frequently invoked "as an explanation of access to employment, mobility through occupation ladders, and entrepreneurial success".

On a more practical level, social capital influences debates on the emphasis that should be given to social and civic development (Shortall, 2004). Shortall argues that the concept of social capital has served to stress the importance of civic and social development as a means to economic development (rather than as an end in itself). This is frustrating to practitioners "who believe this aspect of their work is overlooked and not properly recorded". The author concludes by pointing out that there is a need "to establish that civil society matters – beyond economics".

As indicated above, some commentators have suggested that social capital is incomplete as a way of describing the contribution of faith communities. At their best, faith communities offer particular beneficial gifts to communities, variously described as spiritual and religious capital (Baker and Skinner, 2006) or faithful capital (Commission on Urban Life and Faith, 2006). These concepts hold that faith communities have an additional spiritual resource that comes from the numinous – to inspire, strengthen and increase the qualities of persistent love and the ability to forgive – essential

ingredients in the growth of relationships in vibrant communities. For example, The Commission on Urban Life and Faith (2006) expresses it as follows:

"In corporate and personal worship, prayer, reading and meditation there is regular and explicit reminder and celebration of the gift of life and recognition and remembrance of guilt, forgiveness and healing. This inspires the commitment to personal and collective transformation, love for neighbour and care for 'the stranger', and to human dignity and social justice. Genuinely distinctive and important contributions to wider social capital are made when faith is acted out in the wider community in authentic local engagement."

In summary, social capital is understood as the very process of working together. It is about relationship building and the development of trust between people. Gilchrist (2004) summarises three aspects of social capital.

There is that which *bonds* people of like background, origins and interests. There is that which *bridges* between people of different backgrounds, origins and interests and that which *links* people to centres of power and influence, outside their normal circle, that may produce benefits for the community.

This study attempts to use this three fold categorisation as a means of structuring the research, of developing an analysis, distilling conclusions and suggesting implications for stakeholders.

Of course, the concepts are used as instruments of the research. The reality of communities and the nature of the relationships between people are more complicated than such notions suggest. The boundaries between bonding, bridging and linking are porous, as is indicated in the subsequent research findings.

Clarity about how the terms community vibrancy and social capital are used is vital. So, too, is the interpretation that is given to faith. Is the focus of attention on religious institutions and agencies, churches in particular? Is it on individuals who espouse a religious belief? What is a faith community, anyway? There are different faiths and countless interpretations of each one, with the consequence that even the concept of faith communities, in the plural, has its drawbacks.

1.2.3 Rural faith communities

There are many links between faith and social capital. Furbey *et al*. (2006) find much common ground between the major world religions, including "commitments to peace, justice, honesty, service, personal responsibility and forgiveness". They argue that these "can contribute to the development of networks and the trusting relationships which characterise positive social capital". They further make the connection between faith and particular types of social capital, in that all faith traditions "contain the hope and possibility of tolerance, and indeed a *respect* and obligation to 'the other', suggesting potential for a contribution to bridging and linking social capital". However, as with social capital, they also recognise that while faith can bring people together, it can also exclude, with some believing that their faith requires segregation from other religions and from non-religious life.

This study is concerned with the contribution of faith community groups in a selection of rural settings. Almost without exception the only faith communities present are expressions of the Christian faith. There are very few non-Christian places of worship in rural areas; people of Jewish, Sikh, Islamic, Hindu or other faiths usually have to travel to towns and cities nearby. In this study Anglican and Methodist denominations dominate, but there are two independent chapels and a Roman Catholic congregation. In rural England as a whole there are 9,639 Anglican churches, 2,690 Methodist churches, 506 Baptist chapels and numerous Roman Catholic, United Reformed Church and Congregational churches as well as churches belonging to other denominations. The presence of such a large number of churches (at least 13,000 in total) in England's rural areas over many centuries is indicative of the long-term nature of the commitment by the churches to rural communities in both buildings and leadership.

Anglicans and Roman Catholics structure their local activities in relation to parishes. The smallest unit of local government in rural areas is also called a parish, which creates considerable potential for misunderstanding. The word *parish* started as a church term to describe the most local area of operation, and has come to mean the most local community for which a democratically elected council is responsible. Thus there can be some confusion between the ecclesiastical parish and civil parish, the boundaries of which are not always coterminous.

Christian churches have been a central feature of life in England for over 1500 years. Originally all churches were part of the Roman Catholic Church. The establishment of the Church of England in the sixteenth century was more than a personal whim of the monarch; it was part of a widespread reforming process in both spiritual and political spheres. Subsequent denominational developments have mirrored the growth of democracy. Since that period other reforming churches have come into being, although currently areas of common ground and schemes for working together are being explored and implemented at local and national level.

Churches of most traditions provide for their own leadership usually through an ordained minister. In nearly every situation in rural England this ordained person will have leadership responsibility for more than one church. As many as 16 churches may be looked after by one ordained minister, more usually, the figure is three to seven churches. Clergy can also work in teams over a large area and many churches. There is no longer one minister to one village community. In the case studies of this project there were 12 ordained clergy working in the six communities, but in total they looked after 47 churches and communities. This situation of fewer stipendiary clergy means that most rural churches are led and administered by local lay people, supported by the stipendiary minister who may live elsewhere. However, in this research project four of the six settlements had a resident minister. In all cases except the Roman Catholic Church women and men have equal opportunity for ordained ministry at the local level.

During the investigation it became apparent that people from a variety of Christian traditions live in the case study villages, but some travel out to worship in another church of their choice. Rural areas have traditionally relied on the effectiveness of the loyalty to a church of place. Some are now questioning the sustainability of this, preferring to focus on a church of choice as expressing the culture of contemporary society. A small number of Muslim and Jewish people also lived in the case study villages but without a local mosque or synagogue in the immediate vicinity.

Faith community groups are required to fund all their activities themselves, including contributing significant sums of money towards the cost of stipendiary ministry (Archbishops' Commission on Rural Areas, 1990). This applies as much to small rural congregations as it does to larger congregations in towns and cities. Almost without exception, all churches are part of larger structures at a regional and/or national level, such as a Methodist Circuit, Church of England Diocese or Synod of the United Reformed Church.

In small rural faith communities local leadership will be shared with ordained ministers. The case study com-

munities showed that some 250 different people have some involvement in leading the worship and other activities of the 12 churches in these six settlements. Many more will be involved in church councils and local decision making. Church activities not only take place on a Sunday but during the week as well.

In Lowndes and Chapman (2005), the term 'faith group' is used to focus on the contribution of faith communities to civil society. Specifically, they "set out to uncover the often implicit – and sometimes competing – rationales for faith group involvement in civil renewal". Whilst this work explored faith in an urban setting it is helpful in developing an understanding of the motivations of rural churches' engagement with their local communities. They developed a model that identifies three of these core rationales: normative, resources and governance. The normative rationale stresses "the role of faith groups in relation to community values and identities, linked both to their theology and their enduring presence within communities" and is the one most often emphasised by faith groups. They argue that there are at least three significant characteristics in this rationale:

- "Faith groups express a holistic commitment to communities, rather than a concern with a specific issue or segment of the population.
- Faith groups express embedded identities within communities and are associated with long-term local commitment, perspective and presence.
- Faith groups are an expression of diversity."

The second rationale - resources - "focuses upon the organisational capacity of faith groups (in developing members' skills, mobilising volunteers, providing staff and venues), and their role in reaching socially excluded". Finally, the governance rationale "highlights the representative and leadership role of faith groups in communities and within broader networks and partnerships". They conclude that "the normative rationale relates most pertinently to the motivation for faith group involvement; the resources rationale to the capacity of faith groups to engage, and the governance rationale to the potential outcome of their involvement in civil renewal". Faithful Cities (2006), the report of the Commission on Urban Life and Faith, asks whether the presence of faith communities makes a difference. Their conclusion is that "faith-based organisations make a decisive and positive difference to their neighbourhoods through the values they promote, the service they inspire and the resources they command".

The categories developed by Lowndes and Chapman around motivation, capacity and outcomes are relevant to this research into community vibrancy, too. In a sense, this provides an alternative perspective on faith communities, one which also threads through the present work.

"…highlights the representative and leadership role of faith groups…"

This research starts with people of faith in its quest for data, using individual expressions of their role and involvement in the village community and contribution to community vibrancy. Of course, this immediately brings into focus the groups and networks to which these people belong. It also enables them to refer to the organisational structures of which they are a part. These structures, networks and groups are plural. There are many faith communities and there is a danger of assuming that a wide range of people can be categorised as one group. In this report some of these terms are used interchangeably but it is important to refrain from tendencies to talk in the singular about faiths.

1.2.4 Summary

This section has introduced the core terms of community vibrancy, social capital and rural faith communities. In summary, the research focuses on what people of faith are doing towards the creation and maintenance of active, caring, welcoming and influential communities. This activity is a contribution of three types of social capital, bonding, bridging and linking, essential ingredients of community vibrancy and well-being.

1.3 Research methods, case studies and data sources

1.3.1 Research methods

The approach to examining the role of faith groups in enabling and supporting a response to change in rural communities has been to investigate their contribution to community vibrancy. The primary emphasis of the research methodology has been the collection of qualitative data that can be used to uncover the complexity of local networks in which the members of rural faith communities are engaged, and the manner and extent of their involvement in the production of social capital. This includes bonding social capital, within faith

groups, bridging social capital, between the faith community and other groups and networks, and linking social capital, between the faith community and institutions including agencies of government.

A range of contrasting geographical case studies, which focus on particular village situations, provides the most appropriate mechanism for generating these types of data. The case study selection process and details of the villages where research took place are outlined in the next section.

The methodology applied in each case consisted of three key stages. First, preliminary field research was conducted to access faith groups within the case study areas. Routes into faith communities were sought through initial contacts with group leaders (e.g. clergy and lay leaders). Semi structured interviews were then held with these contacts to form an initial understanding of the faith community and identify any issues of local concern. These scoping interviews also helped to inform the development of research tools for the following phases of fieldwork.

The main body of case study research comprised a series of focus groups with faith group members in each of the study areas. These sessions placed emphasis on participants' experiences, their motivations and storytelling. They aimed to explore bonding within particular faith groups, bridging to other people and groups and linking to agencies and organisations with power and influence in decision-making. Focus groups were also used to consider the significance of faith based social capital as well as barriers to its effectiveness and future growth. A short questionnaire was completed by focus group members to collect details of their backgrounds and local involvements. Focus group recruitment and composition is discussed in section 1.3.3.

Finally, data collected from focus group members were triangulated through semi-structured interviews with people from outside the faith communities concerned. These individuals were drawn from various institutions and agencies mentioned during the focus groups including, for example, Parish Councils, Local Authorities, and local schools.

Further details of the research tools used in this investigation can be found in Appendix A.

1.3.2 Case studies

Research findings presented in this report are drawn from five village case studies: **Acle** in Norfolk, **Austwick and Clapham** in Yorkshire, **Bridge Sollars** in Herefordshire, **Fence** in Lancashire and **Iddesleigh** in Devon.

The process of selecting these case studies initially involved a mail shot to over 750 clergy and other workers of six denominations with responsibility in rural areas, inviting them to complete and return a detailed proforma providing information about their village. This included, for example, the number of different faith groups present, the types and number of village amenities, and the nature of the local economy (See sample proforma in Appendix A). This generated a total of 46 named respondents providing information for 60 different communities. The majority were from Anglicans and Methodists (See Table 1). Similarly, most responses (37) came from villages with a population of fewer than 1,000 inhabitants (Table 2). In terms of geographic distribution, responses were drawn from each of the eight English Regions, with the South East, South West, East and North West providing the biggest totals (See Table 3). Whilst an adequate level of response to the postal questionnaire was received, a larger return would have provided a greater degree of choice for the case studies.

Table 1 – Denomination of respondents

Denomination	Responses
Anglican	26
Methodist	12
URC	3
Baptist	3
Roman Catholic	2

Table 2 – Population size of responding villages

Size of Communities	Responses
Less than 200	8
Between 200 and 499	12
Between 500 and 999	17
Between 1,000 and 2,999	18
3,000 or greater	3

Table 3 – Region of responding villages

Region	Responses
East of England	9
West Midlands	6
East Midlands	5
North East	3
North West	12
South West	11
South East	12
Yorkshire and Humberside	2

In order to select five settlements from amongst the 60 responses received, information provided by respondents was subjected to rigorous assessment against a set of evaluation criteria. These were ranked according to importance as primary, secondary and tertiary considerations, with the intention that the selected group of case studies as a whole should, as far as possible, reflect the full breadth of possible options under each set of criteria. The individual criteria used are listed in Table 4, below, and provided the bases for selecting a balanced set of case studies from across rural England.

Table 4 – Case study selection criteria

Primary Criteria	Secondary Criteria	Tertiary Criteria
Regional distribution	More than one denomination present	Church projects
Sparsity	Multi-faith?	Coastal
Community size	Patterns of leadership	
Social exclusion		
Economic characteristics		

The following sections of this chapter provide a set of pen portraits for each of the case study villages. These are important in helping to contextualise the research and in providing an indication of the types of settlements from which findings are drawn. However, in subsequent chapters research findings are presented anonymously in so far as quotations are attributed neither to specific case studies nor individuals. In this way the anonymity of research participants has been assured.

Acle, Norfolk

Local Authority / IMD	Broadland (302/354)
Population Estimate:	2,500
Churches:	Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic
Sunday Attendance:	Anglican (58), Methodist (50), Roman Catholic (120)

Located midway between Norwich and Great Yarmouth, Acle is the largest of the five case study settlements. Whilst no longer host to a weekly livestock market, Acle continues to function as a small market town, providing a focus for both public and commercial sector amenities which also serve the surrounding agricultural hinterland. These include a Church of England voluntary controlled primary school, a secondary school, a Post Office, public houses, banks, estate agents and a small supermarket. There is a home for the elderly offering short term respite care, a health centre, optician and dentist. In addition to service activity, there are a number of industrial units and workshops providing local employment opportunities to village residents. However, the close proximity of Norwich, together with a regular connecting rail service, means that the village is also home to many commuters.

Three Christian denominations are represented in Acle: Anglican, Methodist and Roman Catholic; the latter uses the parish church for worship. Over 200 people form the regular worshipping congregations of Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches. The Roman Catholic has the most even spread of age groups, but all three churches experience 50-70 year olds as the largest age group. Nearly a third of those involved in congregational life take a share in leading worship, a sign of a vibrant faith community. Both church buildings are open during the day for anyone to use. A rich variety of church-led and non-church related activities take place involving members of all churches. This is made possible by a recently constructed multipurpose Methodist church which has rooms suitable for meetings, a kitchen and bathroom. The Anglican church hall or the primary school are used for other activities. All three congregations pray regularly for the life of the local community.

Austwick & Clapham, Yorkshire

Local Authority / IMD	Craven (262/354)
Population Estimate:	Austwick (470), Clapham (680)
Churches:	Anglican – Austwick & Clapham, Independent – Clapham
Sunday Attendance:	Austwick Anglican (50), Clapham Anglican (26), Independent (35)

Austwick and Clapham are two of the three parishes in one Anglican benefice in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. A good road network give easy access to nearby towns and Clapham has a railway station with links to Leeds and Lancaster. Much of **Clapham** remains in the ownership of a benevolent land owner who lets properties at reasonable rents trying to ensure a diversity of age groups are able to live in the village. The village attracts many visitors each year and contains a National Park car park which serves as the setting off point for walkers visiting Ingleborough, the second highest peak in Yorkshire. In comparison, **Austwick** attracts fewer visitors and, without a major landowner to govern the distribution of housing stock, properties tend to be bought by older, wealthier people, increasing the age profile of the village.

Across the two villages there are two schools, two Post Offices, shops, public houses and a garage. While members of several different denominations live locally there are buildings for worship only of the Anglican and Independent Churches. Members of non-Christian faiths are also present, specifically representatives of the Buddhist and Jewish faiths. Some 110 people form the regular worshipping congregations. Both Anglican churches are open every day with the one at Clapham receiving a large number of visitors. A variety of other groups and services are found in the villages, including the Women's Institute, Age Concern and sports clubs. The church produces and distributes the community newsletter that goes to every household.

Bridge Sollars, Herefordshire

Local Authority / IMD	Herefordshire (202/354)
Population Estimate:	12 households
Churches:	Anglican
Sunday Attendance:	6

Bridge Sollars is the smallest of the case study villages, consisting of scattered housing arranged between the River Wye and the busy Hereford to Hay-on-Wye road. Strictly speaking, the village consists solely of a few houses, farms and the parish church, although a pub and garage are situated on the opposite side of the main road and are generally felt to be 'at' Bridge Sollars. There is no public transport in the parish, and the main road has no pavement and is, therefore, extremely hazardous for pedestrians. The surrounding area is entirely agricultural, with some housing being owned by a nearby estate. A Parish Plan was produced in 2003. The church is open at all times; the worshipping numbers are in single figures reflecting the small population with most people taking a role of responsibility. Nearly every resident adult is on the church roll, an indication of latent support for the presence of the church. Church news is distributed through the community newsletter. The monthly benefice service is well attended.

Bridge Sollars is linked in a civil parish with four other places, and in ecclesiastical terms with six places. The ecclesiastical parish boundaries are not identical to those of the civil parish.

Fence, Lancashire

Local Authority / IMD	Pendle (71/354)
Population Estimate:	1,750
Churches:	Anglican, Methodist, Inghamite (free evangelical)
Sunday Attendance:	Anglican (70), Methodist (60), Inghamite (50)

Fence is the second largest of the case study villages. It has a predominantly linear morphology covering a distance of approximately one mile along a main street. As such, the village does not have a functional centre, and there is no focus for entertainment or casual meetings. To the north of the village, lies the Forest of Pendle and Pendle Hill, infamous for witch trials in 1612, while to the south the M65 provides a connection to the culturally diverse towns of Nelson and Burnley. However, for those without private transport, there is little public provision available. The local authority operated Pendle Wayfarer bus service can be booked in advance for journeys to Nelson, whilst a service to Colne runs once each school day. The nearest rail services operate from Brierfield several miles from the village.

There are three denominations present (Anglican, Methodist and Inghamite, the last such chapel in Britain) whose regular 180 worshippers are distributed across a broad age range. Over 50% of the worshippers are involved in some leadership role in the faith communities, perhaps indicating how church membership provides a training ground for wider responsibility. Daily public worship in the Anglican church and regular prayer in other churches for the life of the community demonstrate a commitment to the wellbeing of all. The ministers of the three churches work very closely together, mirroring the benefit of ecumenical commitment at Acle. While there is no community newsletter the Methodist church provides one which goes to every household. The village also has a Methodist primary school. Other local amenities comprise a Scout Hut, Post Office, shop, public houses and several businesses, including a stonemason and working mill. There is also a successful sports club which attracts people from a wide area. Unfortunately, some services for the elderly have been lost in recent years, including a care home and chiropody clinic. The library has also recently closed, but residents, supported by the Borough Council are currently looking at ways to restore a service.

Iddesleigh, Devon

Local Authority / IMD	West Devon (187/354)
Population Estimate:	190
Churches:	Anglican, Methodist
Sunday Attendance:	Anglican (14), Methodist (25)

Iddesleigh is situated in a largely agricultural area, outside the main tourist hotspots associated with the Devon coast and Dartmoor National Park. Thus, it has largely avoided the social change caused by new residents and holiday homes that has affected much of the county. The village is located on a B-road, with the nearest public transport provision a railway line several miles away, which is itself a branch line with an infrequent service. Village amenities are also limited and include a village hall, pub and shop. Despite the generally low level of tourism in the village, the pub has gained national awards and attracts visitors from a wide area. Within Iddesleigh there are Anglican and Methodist places of worship which over 20% of the population attend regularly. Church activities include a Friendly Society, a discussion group for farmers and a weekly young person's "coffee bar" as well as regular social barbecues in summer linked with a time of informal worship. Operating on a wider scale, one of the host farms involved in the Farms for City Children educational charity is located nearby.

1.3.3 Data sources

As indicated above, once the case study locations had been selected, the route to answers to the research questions had three main stages. First, scoping interviews were undertaken with contacts in each village, usually clergy and one or two other village residents.

Second, in the core section of the research, six focus groups were held in the five case study areas. These focus groups were for people with some involvement with faith groups and were selected by the initial village contacts for their detailed knowledge of and involvement in the life of the village. At the end of each meeting the participants were encouraged to complete a simple questionnaire asking for personal details and for an indication of community activity. The participants were asked about:

- Length of residence in the village.
- Faith affiliation, if any.
- Employment, past or present.
- Informal activity in support of people in their community.
- Involvement in activity organised through the faith group.
- Involvement in activity organised by the wider village.
- Involvement in organisations outside the village.
- Motivation for involvement.

Table 5 – Summary data from focus group questionnaires

Gender Breakdown / Residence	
Male	30
Female	15
Mean length of residence	31 years [Range 2-72 years]
Faith Affiliation	
Anglican	30
Independent	2
Methodist	6
Quaker	1
Roman Catholic	4
Jewish	2
Employment	
Public service professions	12
Farming	9
Business	8
Clerical and administrative	8
Clergy	8

No claim is made that this membership is a balanced representation either of the village or faith communities (see Table 5). Most members were middle aged or older. More women than men attend church, yet the predominantly male gender balance of the focus groups could well indicate something of the profile of lay and ordained leadership within the various churches. It is important to recognise that, primarily, members of the focus groups attended because of their willingness to discuss the research questions. So, in terms of research method, it was vital to check the conclusions of the focus groups against the perspectives of others who know the villages well, but had little or no faith involvement, as indicated below.

The final data collection stage of the research provided the opportunity to conduct a further twenty interviews to gain an important alternative perspective on the villages under study. Interviewees were selected by researchers once they had more detailed knowledge of the village, its people and the agencies working there. They were selected for their knowledge of and role within these communities and because they were not regular churchgoers. The intention was to triangulate the information gained from the scoping interviews and the focus groups, both of which had been held with people belonging to churches and other faith groups. During the research analysis the views expressed by people of faith were cross-checked with those expressed in these triangulation interviews. No significant discrepancies were found, providing an appropriate measure of confidence in the development of the research findings. Interviewees included local councillors, local authority staff, voluntary sector workers, post office and shop owners, head teachers and parish council clerks (Table 6).

Table 6 – Triangulation Interviewees

Gender Breakdown	
Male	11
Female	9
Role	
Businessman	1
County Council Officers	2
District Councillors	2
District Council Officers	4
Voluntary Sector Executive Director	1
Head-teachers	3
Parish Councillors and Clerks	3
Shop keepers / Post Offices	2
Voluntary Workers	2

Eight of these interviewees are resident in the villages under study, the remainder non-resident, a balance which provides complementary perspectives on the local communities and the activities of churchgoers. A fuller picture might have been obtained if it had been possible to interview a broader range of local people including youngsters and those more on the margins of the community. These semi-structured interviews explored respondents' views of the level of trust and support in the villages - especially in relation to those on the economic and social margins of the community - with the role and significance of the church and people of faith in these relationships, the principal focus of attention.

In the following discussion attention has been given to maintaining the anonymity of those interviewed and involved in focus groups and, where possible, to refrain from identifying the particular villages from which the evidence originates.

2.1 Bonding social capital

2.1.1 Introduction

As discussed earlier, notions of social capital are used in this research to help interpret the contribution that churches and people of faith make to the life of rural communities. Three types of social capital have been used; bonding, bridging and linking.

It may be best to conceive of these types as three perspectives on the resources and assets that people bring to villages to give, maintain and enhance their vibrancy. In other words, the focus of our attention is not the economic structure and work activity of these communities, but the quality of relations between people as they engage in everyday life. These everyday relationships are expressed through family, friendships, organised social activity and participation in local governance.

In asking participants about their involvements an a priori assumption was made that it would be possible to distinguish between activities facilitated through the church and through other village based associations. However, in practice, such a clear distinction was not necessarily perceived by respondents. For some faith and non-faith respondents, church community and village community were viewed as aspects of the same thing.

In addition, a second assumption, that it would be relatively straight forward to apply notions of bonding social capital to church and faith based activity and that other activity engaged in by church people within the villages would be representative of bridging social capital, was also called into question. This overly simplistic assumption, whilst of some conceptual value, does not tell the full story. For some interviewees, especially in the smaller villages, the dominant bond is with the village, as a whole. Those who attend church are a sub-set, often a variable sub-set of this. For other people, 'bridging' takes place within worshipping

communities as people of very different backgrounds develop relationships of trust and friendship. 'Linking social capital' can be isolated more easily by considering activities that extend outside the village to district, regional and national networks.

To be a little more precise, bonding social capital has been defined by some authors as occurring in relationships which are enduring and multi-faceted between similar people with strong mutual commitments, such as friends, family and other close-knit groups (Gilchrist, 2004). Thus, as indicated above, our initial assumption was that 'bonding' would be characteristic of relationships within faith communities and is the starting point for this presentation of evidence.

The approach to this study is qualitative. The five case study areas and six villages have been investigated through interviews and focus groups with local people. It is the voices of these people that are to be heard in what follows. Insight into their stories provides the research with both findings and challenges to policy and practice. The following discussion derives from the initial scoping interviews, the focus group discussions and the triangulation interviews held in each village.

2.1.2 Bonding activities

In an attempt to understand bonding social capital, focus group members were asked to list how they support other people in their community, especially the things they do without being organised by others. This informal care and support includes:

- Visiting people in their homes
- Visiting those who are sick, at home and in hospital
- Voluntary work with young people
- Shopping for the elderly
- Providing transport to health services
- Supporting sports clubs
- Helping with gardening and repairs
- Informal child care and family support
- Baking for special events

Respondents from all the villages do these things. Lists grow when respondents are asked about activity organised through the church. Contributions to the life of the church community, with its patterns of worship and service, and to maintenance of the church building include:

- Member of the Church Council
- Churchwarden
- Fund raising for the church
- Leading worship
- Prayer group membership
- Pastoral visiting
- Choir membership
- Home group membership
- Alpha course membership
- Publicity team
- Church flowers and decoration
- Bell ringing
- Supporting church schools
- Church administration
- The Mothers' Union
- Collecting for Christian Aid
- Graveyard maintenance
- Transport to church

Most respondents contribute to church life in more than one way. For many there is little distinction between the activities listed as for the church and those indicated as for the community. In terms of social capital, these activities provide bonding, giving support, identity and companionship. They also give the opportunity to bridge to those who have different backgrounds whether of wealth, social class, lifestyle or religion. Some of these activities also provide opportunities to build linking social capital with wider networks outside the immediate locality.

2.1.3 Formal and informal bonding

Identification with any community, neighbourhood or group depends upon the quality of relationships. How well do people know one another? Is there a sharing of the ups and downs of living? For some, companionship will be the characteristic, for others it will be the experience of joint activity and interest, for others it will be expressed in care and support. Perhaps the primary feature of bonding social capital is that important, but sometimes intangible, sense of being valued as part of a wider group.

These matters are illustrated by comments from those involved in their village churches.

"We have a quiet trust and respect and commitment…it is still quite significant in this parish."

"It is very much a caring village. The size of it is one thing that contributes to that. It's more a caring attitude rather than being nosy."

"There is a saying from the old days that goes, 'we won't see ye passed!' It's like that, illness or

death or anything like that, people are very supportive."

"I mean there are not many people [in the village] that I don't know because I'm involved on so may levels that you get to know the people who are coming in."

"I think there is probably a fair bit of quiet visiting that goes on but not necessarily that we are aware of. It's not something that people shout about, but it goes on."

"I think this is a great village. I mean forty eight years living within three square miles, involved with our previous community totally, and move away from everything and find such friendship, such support here. I feel that within the short time we have been here I have made as many deep friendships as I did in forty eight years. I think that says everything."

"One of the long term residents just across the bridge from where we live is in a very sorry state. We have been supporting her as much as we can. There is not a lot we can do but we can pray and help wherever we can."

"One thing that has impressed me here is that anyone who is new, I go and see them a week or so after they have arrived and they would say, oh someone has been round and given me a plant, look at these cards and they are just overwhelmed by the welcome."

"It wouldn't necessarily be seen to be organised by the church or the chapel, but generally speaking in any good community people do help themselves, don't they?"

"It's a sort of network, isn't it? Do you go and visit? Of course, the answer is yes and that is why you don't necessarily think of it in those sort of [terms]…as coming from either the church or the chapel."

These quotes are illustrative of two things. First, in all the villages studied there is a considerable level of mutual support and care exhibited by church people and by others. Indeed, in many focus groups no distinction is made between people who attend church or not as they discuss the quality of care and support in the village. However, the evidence suggests that this may be less so in larger villages with higher populations and significant levels of commuting. Second, adopting these types of behaviour, or living in this way, is not necessarily a conscious decision. Focus groups frequently showed that people didn't regard this type of bonding as out of the ordinary. Rather, many simply felt that this is how life in the community is lived, whether motivated by their faith or not.

This informal pastoral care, as it might be termed within the church, is often facilitated by more formal organisation and by the use of staff, lay and ordained, within church institutions and independent, voluntary or community based charities. The extent of these contributions of bonding social capital to community vibrancy is illustrated below.

"Inevitably, people who have been professionals or who have perhaps retired or even those still in work, are often those that are on committees because that is using the skills that they have elsewhere to add to the village community."

The [original] Methodist church and manse were demolished; hence the new building is 16 years old. It is a fantastic community resource, designed especially, and it's in a good position near the library, health centre and the recreation ground, and with car parking!"

You know, whether you are an Anglican or a Methodist or what, people do like to see somebody, whether it's in the hospital or in the village. I hope other people agree that there is quite a community involvement in the village. The three churches are quite close to one another and a lot goes on."

"It was difficult to begin. Up till then we had been six individual churches and I remember the first time we'd even met each other…was at the final meeting of our last incumbent and we didn't even know each other's names at that point. Since we've been thinking as united benefice, it's had tremendous rewards."

"The only way we can get any viable children's work is by working as a benefice and not as individual churches. Also the 'coffee triangle' originating in another church."

"In church leadership I would like it to be a team, but it can be difficult. There is no formal rota, but I've asked people to nominate others for pastoral duties. There is a befriending scheme for those wishing to marry or have a child baptised in church; they get visits before and after."

These comments illustrate something of the more formal structuring of bonding that churches use. In summary there are three points to make. First, the churches provide resources, both of people, with time and skills, and of buildings, some old and some new. Second, there is the leadership to organise activities and events consistently, both from ministers and lay people. Third, from all the villages there is evidence of collaboration between churches, both from within the denominations and across them. Local, regional and national church structures undoubtedly help to facilitate these developments.

2.1.4 Strengths and weaknesses

The previous section has indicated some of the strength to be found in the case study villages. Each one has something to give in illustrating the presence of bonding social capital. In one of the villages a care and support project was established 25 years ago:

"to give help in a crisis and to run a day centre and lunch club. We distribute equipment to people who need it, commodes, wheelchairs etc and all this happens in over 20 villages."

The work is based at one church but has volunteers from all the local churches. In another village, comment is made about the numbers of people willing and able to make a contribution to the community:

"Our people are particularly vocal, confident and able, so if there is a function there are more potential people to call on. You could probably find lots of very capable and competent people without trying too hard."

Almost without exception, this particular village is also viewed very positively by triangulation interviewees. It is seen as full of life and as a real community. It's a very friendly and supportive place, says one. Another person comments that:

"I never locked my front door for five years; there is a real sense of community. Everybody knows your business, but you have to accept it. People are very supportive."

A triangulation interviewee from another village comments that others agree that "it's a very special place" and "a very good community". One of the respondents living in the parish, but not in the village, comments that:

"It's a fairly idyllic place. There is a fantastic level of mutual support in the village. No-one gets in anyone's way, but if something happens, they are there."

In all the discussions about bonding social capital the importance of building trusting relationships is encountered:

"We have loads of support here through friends, through the actual church itself."

These are the places where people listen to one another:

"It's the sense of listening where the faith comes in. The faith within this community is because people listen to each other, they respond to what they see happening around them."

It's what people do together that counts:

"The building doesn't make the church, but what happens in it".

The quality of these relationships is born out of lengthy histories of churches and chapels and often local family connections:

"It hasn't just happened here, it has been a long process and part of it is because the parish church stands as a witness to the generations who have gone to it. The chapel hasn't been there quite so long but it still gives the opportunity of faith; it's a meeting point and a social point."

"It's funny, in the places where I've worked, I have found there is a 'home church idea' even for non churchgoers. It is feeding that sense of place, that link with the place you come from. I don't know why it should surprise me because I have that home church mentality with my own church, that is where my family are buried and where the generations have gone to worship. It's quite an important thing, I think, for many people."

Whilst it is fair to conclude from the evidence of the focus groups and interviews that there is considerable bonded social capital in these rural communities, weaknesses are also readily apparent. These weaknesses indicate the limits to what is achieved at present and also bring into question the impact of time on ageing communities.

There are four main areas of weakness to specify, which crucially are interlinked. First, there are a limited number of people involved in the networks. One respondent comments that:

"Whenever you go to anything, you see the same faces. Sometimes we say it is a sad thing because we wish more people would become involved."

It isn't just getting people involved it's finding people to take a lead. Another resident said:

"You have a good committee, but it's getting somebody to take the chair, isn't it?"

A second issue is closely related to the first. In general, it is older people within the community who take the lead. And whilst some now wish to hand over their roles and responsibilities to others, they feel that younger people within the villages are either unable or unwilling to help shoulder responsibility for organising community activities.

Triangulation interviewees often talked about the increasing age profile of village residents. Gaining access to services is already an issue, partially relieved because "people are so good at taking others off shopping or to the hospital", but there is considerable worry about the way in which the problem of an ageing rural population will develop over the coming decade as young people move away for education and work and do not return:

"The church is mainly old people. New people moving into the area don't generally go to church."

There tends to be an absence of younger and middle aged people in the rural faith communities studied. This is the third point to make. Some younger families, whilst living in the village, commute out to a church of their choice in another rural community or in a larger town or city nearby. Others commute to work:

"A lot of people I know simply use the village as a convenience, in a way. It's handy for access, the city or whatever. They don't become involved in things."

"They come into the village in transit. They will come here for six months; they might hire a house, rent a house and then move on."

Finally, the upheavals in farming have a wider impact:

"Agriculture is not as good as it was. Younger people don't seem to have the time to join us as much as a community. All the farms are getting to be one man bands and it's very difficult."

These issues have a dual impact on the development of bonding social capital. If people don't meet then there is no possibility of building strong and supportive relationships. If people are not available then the opportunity to facilitate bonding in more formal ways will be very limited.

In summary, the more than fifty people interviewed or attending focus groups share the common view that there is a significant level of bonding in their communities, facilitated significantly by people of faith. Moreover, this is thought to contribute to community vibrancy in at least two ways.

First, for those people who feel that they participate in supporting the community, there is a sense of mutuality essential to most definitions of quality of life. The notion that someone cares and is prepared to put themselves out on your behalf has an immediate impact on self esteem, self value and personal identity. Perhaps this also contributes to healthier living and a more general sense of well-being.

Second, there is significance, even if it is indirect, for those with a statutory responsibility to provide health and social care. At the simplest level, bonding means that patients wishing to attend a health centre or hospital appointment are able to travel there through the willingness of neighbours and friends to take them. The objectives of care in the community are achieved a little more fully because the elderly or those with mobility problems are supported in getting the shopping they need or in providing companionship. Of course, it is not just people of faith that behave in this manner. Indeed, many in the focus groups indicated that they regard such patterns of behaviour as ordinary, making no distinction between themselves and other village people on the grounds of faith commitment.

However, these contributions to community vibrancy can also be seen as fragile. Overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, this bonding is generated by older people, presenting a clear threat to its sustainability. This fragility was recognised by many of the focus group participants themselves, and led them to raise the question "what will happen in a few years when we are too old to do this?" Those of middle or younger years are generally thought to be too busy with work and the pressures that brings. They work in farming or they spend hours of every day

commuting. Outside work, family responsibilities take priority, so the contribution to wider village life is necessarily limited.

Arguments such as this are commonly presented. The extent to which the age pyramid in these villages is moving towards an older average population probably supports this case. Nevertheless, middle aged people will become the next cohort of the elderly; and their life circumstances will change. Will their roles in village life also change?

2.2 Bridging social capital

2.2.1 Introduction
The preceding section emphasises aspects of positive bonding demonstrated by churches and people of faith. Issues that tend to inhibit its formation are described as weaknesses. This section moves onto a type of social capital which has been labelled bridging, and describes the extent to which people of faith are able to make connections with those who have less in common, but may have overlapping interests, for example between neighbours, colleagues or between different groups within a community (Gilchrist, 2004).

To some extent the discussion on bonding has already ventured into a description of links between different people within their village communities. How readily are different groupings recognised in the village? Is it possible to identify those who are more marginalised in these communities? For some people in the focus groups, answers to these questions were far from easy. There was awareness that some residents are wealthier than others; that some rent their homes whilst others are owner occupiers; that some are dependent on benefits and others are not. Often, when asked about people suffering disadvantage the conversation would focus on the elderly and those in poor health. There are almost no ethnic minority residents in five of the six villages. Only in one village does the 2001 census record a small group of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and, according to local residents interviewed for this research, the majority run businesses or are health care professionals working in neighbouring towns.

Using the data from the case studies the following sections outline additional dimensions of the contribution to social capital by people of faith, as the focus shifts to bridging between different groups.

2.2.2 Bridging activities
The picture broadens as the focus group participants discuss their involvement with organised non church activity in the village, which has the capacity to encourage bridging. Some village organisations provide services to the community; others provide entertainment or social activity and a third group are about local governance in its various forms.

First, people of faith list the following community services in their questionnaires:

- Voluntary health and social service provision
- Care in the Community initiatives
- Organising youth events
- Annual street markets
- Pensioners' coffee mornings
- The talking newspaper
- Age Concern volunteering
- Meals on Wheels
- The Women's Institute
- Lunch clubs
- Village Hall duties and committee membership
- Fund raising
- Parent-teacher associations

Not all these things happen in all six villages. The particular activity profile depends on factors such as size, history and assets.

Second, each village apart from the smallest has some social activity whether sporting, hobbies or entertainment, in which respondents play a part, including:

- The pub, with pool, darts and quizzes
- The village hall, with its yoga and art club
- Sports clubs, including bowls, fell racing, badminton, table tennis, tennis, football, hockey and point to point
- The flower club and show
- Local history societies
- Drama society

The distinction between community service and social activity is, of course, far from precise. The range of activity in the villages that contribute to community vibrancy is extensive. Not all operate in all the villages and not everyone is involved in everything. Indeed, it is a fair assumption that many are not involved at all. However, one conclusion can be confidently drawn and that is that many of these activities will make a contribution of bridging social capital to community vibrancy.

A number of themes emerge from the analysis of the interviews and the focus group discussions that serve to illustrate this contribution to bridging and its limitations. The earlier discussion of social capital and community vibrancy suggested that the creation and maintenance of active, caring, welcoming and influential communities is a prime consideration. The case studies suggest a number of key indicators of such characteristics, including:

- Village events through the year, including the major church festivals.
- The availability and management of community meeting space.
- The significance of the role of schools, some of which are faith based.
- Provision of housing that is affordable for local people, especially young people.
- Relationships between the generations and the needs of young people.
- The existence of other networks which do not necessarily overlap with those of the faith communities.
- Consideration of whether some people suffer exclusion from the village community and the extent to which this is recognised.

Each of these indicators is introduced in turn.

Lots of activities are connected to the church...

2.2.3 Village events and church festivals

Two of the villages under study have, over the years, developed a calendar of events, some linked directly to church festivals. These events are seen as village wide and draw on the resources of many local people. However, evidence suggests that churchgoers, in particular, play an important part in these activities. Three examples from one of the case study villages help to illustrate this. The first is an annual street market held in the village each July:

"Lots of stalls provide fundraising for the church. Last year it raised nearly £5,000. It's really a village event. People running the newsletter manage to raise enough money from their stall to pay for the newsletter for the year."

The second is a Sunflower Festival held in early September. The village gardens are full of sunflowers, the cottage windows decorated with paintings and drawings and the church with plants and art

work based on sunflowers. This festival is part of the church harvest festival activities.

A third illustration of activity that enabled a degree of bridging in the community was a 'Magic, Myths and Legends' event organised with support from public authorities. This was intended as an economic development initiative linked to tourism policy. Initially some church people were uneasy about the focus of the event but, in the end, concluded that to put their energies into a celebration of angels with displays in the church building would be appropriate. Comments suggest that this was a great success.

There is consensus amongst those interviewed who do not go to church, that people involved in the church and the chapel play a significant role in the life of the village. This is not just in terms of church organised events but in relation to many village activities and associations:

"Lots of activities are connected to the church. The street market at the end of July is a church event, in theory, although everybody in the village does something."

For some the "church provides a social structure to the year, even for atheists like me; we still go to the carol service". This sense of structure also extends to the village newsletter:

"We try to stop it becoming a church newsletter because church and the people involved tend to have loads to put in every week; we've deliberately drawn in other people. But if the church wasn't here, we'd lose social structure to the village."

Discussion about the role of church in the village is further confirmed by people not involved:

"I don't go to church, but for a significant part of the community it's the base of their lives: for me it's a background to the village. These faith communities provide a social cohesion to a village like this, which is not necessarily reflected in the numbers involved."

"It's a very active church and is well supported. Not everyone goes but they still support it."

The church in this particular village is seen as active, organising worship and prayer, and making a contribution to the community through this. But of equal significance is the part played by church people in the general life of the community:

"They have a good solid base of people that use the church, and they are really some of the main forces that drive the other activities within the village. They are very keen to keep the village active and prosperous. There isn't a distinctive set of people who go to church and then others who don't; they are all integrated in the life of the village."

An outsider to the church comments that:

"The vast majority who are involved in the church keep this a throbbing, thriving community – and if they weren't here, it would be dire. They are the ones with the motivation to do things in the village, because they want people involved. People who go to the church want that sense of community. They are the ones who push and drive and build the community. Without it the village would be dead, really."

2.2.4 Community meeting space

One of the villages lacks a village hall, thus limiting the opportunities for meetings and other community activities. However, in that particular case, initiatives are underway to remedy this. In this example, one of the main recommendations of the parish plan prepared in 2004, was to create somewhere for the community to meet. The parish church provides the opportunity for this. The proposal is to reduce the amount of permanent seating for worship and adapt the west end of the church for community use. This model has already been tried locally with considerable success. In addition to providing the space, the development is intended to create basic toilet and kitchen facilities and suitable car parking on site, together with a solution to the problem of access from a busy road.

"I love the idea that it was included in the Parish Plan and that such a dispersed group of communities could come up with this idea. The community wanted somewhere to meet. It seems that there is a genuine desire to support the church building itself, a building that they do see as the heart of the community."

The Anglican benefice concerned has multiple churches scattered across the countryside, whilst the Parish Council is also a group. In this context:

"the people from the other parishes could see straight away …that this was the obvious place because it was central and had good access from the other places."

The practice of using church property as community meeting space is quite widespread. The Millennium Commission funded 'Rural Churches in Community Service' project was oversubscribed with many more applications than could be funded. However, there is acknowledgement by the focus group that there are negative voices about the use of the church for these purposes. Some people wish to keep the place of worship as a sacred space with a special and quiet atmosphere.

2.2.5 Primary Schools

Four of the six villages studied have primary schools and, as might be anticipated, in all the focus groups and interviews there was unanimity about their importance to the life of the villages concerned. Maintaining numbers and ensuring survival are high priorities in local thinking. Generally speaking all these schools participate in village events and activities where this is appropriate. Parent-teacher organisations vary in strength between the villages and over time and they sometimes struggle to recruit parents for the committee, but no-one doubts their significance.

Neither do the interviewees question the importance of connections between the schools and local churches. Of the four schools three are Church of England voluntary controlled and one is Methodist voluntary controlled. This title does not mean that they are controlled by the church, but that they are fully funded [controlled] by the local authorities. They are controlled by public authorities but have foundation governors who are appointed by the local churches alongside governors appointed by the local authorities and elected by parents. In all four cases the schools have close links with the churches not just for purposes of governance but also, through clergy, in day to day activities such as pastoral care and leading assemblies.

One of the head teachers comments that the school is over 100 years old and has a special place in the life of the village:

"It's a village school, because it's the only one in the village. Although it's associated with one particular Church, we have visiting clergy from all the others. It does have a good reputation. There is a very powerful sense of community in this school. It's one of the things that sets us apart, I think. But that's often the case with church schools."

From the head's perspective, the school is at the heart of the village and "a fair number of the children go to the churches and so they are an extension of it." She feels that:

> "To have a church and school together, working in harmony, is beneficial to the school, the children, the parents and it's an absolutely perfect opportunity to reach out to the community."

Such comment from triangulation interviews lend support to the views expressed by church people in the focus group. Reference to the one secondary school in the case study villages is made in section 2.2.7, below.

"There is a continuity here. It just fits."

2.2.6 Affordable housing

If the existence of village wide events, community meeting places and active primary schools are positive indicators of community vibrancy, then a lack of affordable housing may be seen as a negative indicator. There are many aspects to affordable housing, some of which are introduced below in considering matters of exclusion, other are discussed later in the section on linking social capital, as they relate particularly to planning control. Put simply, the housing market in each of these villages has pushed prices up to a level where local people, especially younger families, are no longer able to buy. The availability of rented property is also very limited. There are few, if any, properties to rent from the local authorities or housing associations, although private renting appears to be important in at least two of the villages.

The history and development of one village is dominated by the presence of a landed estate. The estate owner's policy is to let the cottages at modest rents, originally for farm workers but now for a wider group of people. The emphasis is on letting to those with families and who work locally. The impact of this guiding principle on the life of the village, especially the sustainability of its primary school, shop and post office, should not be under estimated.

Another village has seen little resident turnover in recent years. One of the local land owners has a number of rented cottages to let to local people, although the most recent tenancy was started about 20 years ago. Few properties have changed hands recently and there are no holiday cottages:

> "This has left a lot of houses with single elderly folk, mostly widows."

In both these cases a degree of bridging social capital is created by landlords' decisions over lettings. Local people are housed rather than having to move away and the age profile of residents is regulated with an eye on the viability of the services available in the village. Both landlords are churchwardens and talk about their duty:

> "There is a continuity here. It just fits."

2.2.7 The old and the young

Two issues demonstrate the importance to community vibrancy of encouraging bridging between different groups and the role of church people in doing so. The issues relate to the old and to the young.

In one of the villages a voluntary organisation has, over a long period, provided help and assistance to older people with a wide range of needs. Working closely with statutory social service provision it makes services available to people in their own homes and at a centre, based in the church hall.

This work with the elderly is valued by triangulation interviewees who know the project. Isolation is a real problem for this elderly population in a part of the country noted for its insularity and lack of diversity. In this situation the county recognises the role played by the project in providing a "responsive local delivery mechanism". Its origins in the church are recognised, as is its continued use of the church building, although it is not perceived as a church driven organisation.

But there are other factors playing on the minds of older people. Interviewees comment that one aspect of this is a fear of young people, whilst another respondent points to the problem of security:

> "There are a great number of frail elderly and retired people in the village who can be intimidated by large groups of teenagers."

> "Elderly people are told over and over again, 'don't allow people in who you don't know, unless they have badges'. So that immediately puts up barriers, doesn't it?"

Some attempts to respond to issues like this are being made, but there are few easy solutions.

A recent undertaking that focus group members believe had helped to bridge the gap between young and older people in this village, was a project to collect and publish reminiscences about

the war years from people who had lived through it. A booklet was published and an archive established:

> "They had a wonderful display at the recreation centre…they [the organisers] filled a huge hall with photographs and maps and research. There was a service in the church as the culmination of the whole thing, which was broadcast on the radio. Many people have commented on it since."

Someone in the focus group made the judgement that:

> "I think it helped the young people to understand what some of the older people actually went through. They hear so much about it on the television, but when they can see that man in the road, that person, it helps. A lot of young people bought the book."

Responding to the needs of young people is the second issue deserving comment. Over the years the churches in the village have set up youth projects:

> "There was a drop-in centre at the Methodist Church on Friday nights for six years run by a youth worker funded by local churches. It became impossible to continue because of the volume of users and their lack of willingness to accept any rules at all. Issues came to a head when a gang came and wouldn't let people in the building leave. The police were called."

Other initiatives have started since then. The three churches sponsor a youth worker who spends time in the secondary school:

> "They invite us [the youth worker and clergy] in at lunchtimes, we do lessons, assemblies and an after school club. It's fantastic. So there is a relationship with the community straight away. You reach the whole family then and also the local youth club, the LEA Youth Club; we do things together, we get the police in now and again, so overall, generally, it's a whole community thing."

The significance of this provision is not lost on the local authorities and the school, as indicated by the triangulation interviews. There is a general view that the churches make "an immense contribution to community support." Indeed, the local councillor for the village, although not a member of any local church, has identified with the churches' youth work by becoming a volunteer leader.

Concerns about young people are also expressed by the head teacher of the local secondary school, in particular the use and abuse of alcohol and the general lack of aspiration amongst young people in the village. However, in seeking to address these issues he appreciates the important role of the churches in the provision of the youth club, and through the involvement of clergy and the youth worker in the school. The after school club is vital in that it provides for "those children perceived to be on the margins".

The local councillor makes an interesting comment in relation to this point about recognition. She says that:

> "People do not perceive a boundary between the faith community and the village community. These projects benefit the whole community. However, people are not necessarily conscious of the work being put in or the difference it makes, until it stops!"

She also comments that:

> "People who attend church are from a variety of different background and walks of life, but they do work together on projects. That's not always true of other agencies that tend to work on their own."

Such comments have significance. There is a pointer here to the way that churches provide not just a means of bonding between people but of enabling the development of those aspects of social capital characterised as bridging.

2.2.8 Non church networks

In each village there are a range of social networks, sometimes linked, sometimes separate. In a couple of places, for example, comment is made that there are other networks that revolve around the pub "although you don't get many locals" there, according to one view. Local schools were also cited as the focus of activities in several of the villages and an important focus for community life. For some focus group participants, however, the lack of crossover between these different networks can help to reinforce divisions within communities, particularly where they reflect social status or occupational backgrounds, including for example, between tenants

and owner occupiers in a village, or between those who make their living by farming and those by leisure and tourism:

"It is a disparate place with different organisations; whilst there is some crossover they don't come together as a whole community".

Despite this, one of the triangulation interviewees reflects on the contribution of the churches as follows:

"I don't have much involvement with the church, but it does bring stability and if people from the church weren't involved, I don't think the community would be as vibrant. There isn't a lot in the village that brings people together, so I suppose the two churches are places where people naturally gather."

Circumstances vary between the case study villages. In one of the larger villages many residents commute to work not just locally but throughout the region. In this case the scope for bridging is somewhat limited to the primary school and the public houses, although the catchment for these with their restaurants and jazz evenings is certainly sub-regional. The churches work well together, with joint worship and study groups on a regular basis, but there seems to be a paucity of village organisations and activities that might provide for bridging.

"There isn't a lot in the village that brings people together."

Initiatives for bridging by the churches in this village focus on provision for children and younger people. One church hosts a daily play group and pre-school and after-school clubs. Another has a youth club on a Friday but this provides largely for their own young people many of whom come from outside the village. The faith based primary school is a prime location for potential bridging, both through normal school activity and the work of the parent-teacher association. However, evidence suggests that there is little or no contact with the small number of people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds who live in the village. One of the focus group participants comments:

"There are no two ways about it, they are very devout people, who take their religion seriously … but we have no reason to interact with them because we don't see them."

"It's like a little enclave in a way, isn't it? They are just on the end down there and they seem quite happy."

These views are expressed by long standing residents of the village who would appear to be content with a lack of bridging in this case, a matter for further question and comment in the conclusions of the report.

Sporting activity often provides a basis for the development of networks that may or may not involve people of faith. In one village a sports club was established 50 years ago and, whilst there are many participants from the village, its catchment area is wide. The chair comments that:

"I wouldn't say that the sports club is integral to the village. I'd like it to be integral and certainly there are strong connections, not least with the school, as they feed young players through. A lot of children from the school play for junior sides. There is some connection with the church, although not as much as there used to be but, obviously, a number of people still go to church there."

One of the management committee attends the Anglican Church and participated in the focus group. One of the triangulation interviewees comments that:

"The church and chapel are reasonably thriving, but a lot of people come to the church from outside the village. There used to be whist drives and dances, which don't happen any more, as people go elsewhere for entertainment."

"One church tends not to get involved. Both other churches contribute to village life and they do drag the parents in from the school and things like that. They still do events; Christmas Fairs, organ recitals etc. and people do go."

Reflecting on the life of the village overall, there is the comment that a lot of people just don't want to be involved, even so:

"If you went to an event at the church and then went to one at the sports club and then one at the scout and guide group, you'd find it's the same group of people doing the organising and supporting generally."

So even where the churches seem to be less significant in the life of the village there continues to be

some correlation between active involvement in village life and involvement in the church, small though the numbers might be.

What about the village pubs? Reference has been made above to the wide catchment that village pubs often have. Commercial interests welcome customers from wherever they originate, although attitudes amongst local people differ. Triangulation interviewees in the same village comment that:

"it's a fine community with a good pub which is central for a lot of village life". For another, the "local doesn't have the significance that it had 20 years ago … the village doesn't support it in the same way any longer".

In another village the consensus is that the pub not only has a wide market but also plays a vital role in the life of the village, including those who are church-goers:

"You have to understand that every two weeks I do a lunch for the village, which is nothing to do with old age pensioners or the Women's Institute. It's a village lunch. Everyone is welcome to come; I charge as little as I possibly can to cover costs, so every two weeks we do a lunch and today we had twenty seven."

This lunch is organised by the landlord and the churchwarden.

2.2.9 Inclusion and exclusion

The extent of bridging between differing sub-sets of the community is a relevant indicator of the level of inclusion or exclusion in that community. All the villages under consideration have people who group around a particular interest or activity. Main points of contact are through the pub, the school, the village hall or the church. For some the contact points are multiple, and, as shown above, some communities have a range of village wide activities which enable bridges of trust and support to be built. This would appear to be less so for the larger villages with higher proportions of commuters.

During group discussions the following issues were raised in relation to inclusion and exclusion. First, few focus group participants are prepared to admit to the presence of excluded people in their village. This may be a question of awareness, or the lack of it, but, as suggested in at least one of the scoping interviews undertaken with village clergy, could also reflect a lack of willingness to recognise or engage

with these issues so close to home. Second, just occasionally, participants acknowledge that there may be more problems in their village than they generally admit:

"I think there are some very lonely people in this village. There is a lot of need that we don't know about and there will be a lot of people on their own who do have problems, both financial and relationship problems."

"That is the changing nature of villages, isn't it? One time, people knew everyone in the village, but now there are people that you don't know, you nod to them and ten years later you still nod."

People of faith undoubtedly make a contribution to bridging social capital in the case study villages, but it would be wrong to assume that all are aware of the bridging that could or perhaps needs be done.

Third, there are no migrant workers in the case studies, although for two villages there are some nearby. In some of the villages there is a dependency on visitors and on tourism more generally and, as the economy benefits by such arrivals, they are generally welcomed.

Fourth, all the participants are concerned about housing opportunities, as indicated above. In particular the rise in house prices has meant that young people are not able to purchase property in the village. They move away to other locations if they are not able to rent. Some see this as exclusion and argue for more affordable accommodation for rent or sale. In two of the villages this problem is not as acute because the local landowners rent out cottages to local people. The sustainability of such policies and approaches comes into question with the prospect of property passing to heirs, or indeed, having to be sold in order to pay inheritance taxes.

Finally, respondents admit that poverty in rural situations is often hidden. People do not want to admit to poverty and often accept their situation:

"The problem with rural poverty is that it is hidden. Recently we had some money given to us which we were asked to distribute to those in need. Actually it was quite a problem, because if you go to somebody and say, oh this is a gift because we know you are in need, they don't want charity!"

In summary, whilst the significance of the faith contribution to bridging social capital should not be under-

played there are questions about the extent to which focus group participants in this study had thought much about issues of inclusion and exclusion. Often, there is a tendency for people to consider exclusion a problem which is suffered elsewhere, in other villages, in urban areas or, on a broader scale, in other countries. In contrast, awareness at the local level could be seen as partial but, then, it could also be argued that in these particular communities few people are or are perceived to be excluded. Nevertheless, limited concern with these matters could be a factor which inhibits the contribution of bridging social capital to community vibrancy, not just of people of faith, but of others in the local community, as well.

2.3 Linking social capital

2.3.1 Introduction

A third type of social capital has been labelled linking. In addition to social capital being created when people bond with those of similar backgrounds or bridge to people with different histories, it is also created, so the notion suggests, when people are able to relate to others who have power and influence over their lives. Such social capital is derived from links between people or organisations beyond peer boundaries, cutting across status and similarity and enabling people to exert influence and reach resources outside their normal circles. (Gilchrist, 2004).

In this section evidence concerning the extent of the linking capital that exists in faith networks in each of the case study villages is introduced; evidence that is generally substantiated by findings obtained from triangulation interviews. Second, the voices of focus group members and other interviewees are used to indicate some of the more challenging issues around linking social capital and the extent to which people of faith are interested in growing it.

2.3.2 Linking activities

In the questionnaire completed by focus group participants, they were asked to indicate their commitment to local governance in its various village based forms, including:

- The Parish Council
- Local Government
- School governing bodies
- Village hall committees
- Community / development associations
- Charity trustees

Not all respondents participate in these activities but, in each focus group, at least one person has some such involvement. In others just about every participant in the focus group is shouldering responsibilities of this type.

Indications of linking social capital can also be found in answers to questions about involvement in organisations outside the village. All focus group participants have links and connections outside the village through family, friendships, volunteering, work or travel. In principle, all these can be a source of influence to the benefit of the local community. Nevertheless, an indication of more formal roles in the wider district and region could be valuable in understanding the potential for influence.

The list of agencies and organisations in which respondents play a part is extensive and depends on the particular village and its location. Some roles are public and possibly political, such as:

- County Councillor
- Justice of the Peace
- Deputy Lieutenant of the County

The following list indicates many other roles in the voluntary and other sectors:

- Fine Arts organisation
- Museum friends
- Triumph Motorcycle Club
- Ambulance Care Volunteer
- Independent School Governor
- Young Farmers Club
- Fell Runners Association
- Rugby Clubs
- Christian Aid
- Church of England Diocesan Property Committee
- Chamber of Trade
- Church of England Diocesan posts
- Age Concern organiser
- National Park Committee
- Woodland Trust
- Round Table
- Veterans Association
- Prison Visitor
- Charity shop worker
- Estate owner of land and property

The following sections give an indication of the relevance of these activities to the benefit of the village communities.

2.3.3 Opportunities for linking

Evidence suggests that there are at least five categories of association and activity engaged in by people of faith that might be seen as contributing to linking social capital. This research has not developed a view as to whether and how this capital is used but it is able to identify its existence.

First, there is the linking that has its basis in business interests. Farming interests are still readily observable in three of the five study areas. In these places the relationships with suppliers, markets and regulators, including Defra should be acknowledged. In two of the villages, estate owners have considerable influence on employment and housing, while in the larger villages there are some medium sized employers as well as small businesses.

In some villages there are people who have had careers in business and finance and who now have a contribution to make to the life of these places, including through the church. In each village people of faith run businesses, making a living from visitors through the provision of accommodation and food, or through the sale of goods. Such activity has potential for influence.

Second, paid workers in the various churches, usually ministers, have the potential to develop and use their contacts in the locality, regionally and nationally for the benefit of the rural communities where they work. Eleven clergy work in these six villages although, as noted elsewhere, they all have churches in other villages for which they have a responsibility. There are multiple places of worship and community for them to support, either through Church of England benefices, Methodist circuits or Roman Catholic deaneries. Each denomination has its structure and organisation from the local to the area, to the national and beyond. Such networks of recruitment, training, supporting and funding are part of the rural communities' access to linking social capital.

One interesting example is a specific initiative of the Anglican Church at a regional level, expressed by one interviewee in the following terms:

"Our village has a farms group now. This was post BSE and before 'foot and mouth'. The idea is that if you are a farmer and if you are in trouble you ring the Rural Officer. Now you tell me what farmer is going to ring up and say they need help. We realised the church needed to be proactive rather than waiting for people to come. So, 'what is the major issue facing farmers today?' For many it's isolation. These farm groups were set up to encourage farmers to meet together, to share, to have ideas, to relax and to eat together. In this diocese we now have about 15 groups, supported by Defra, the latest one being here."

Perhaps initiatives like these provide bonding, bridging and linking social capital in equal measure.

Third, many of the organisations that encourage and support the private interests of village residents also contribute to community vibrancy. Whether these interests are centred in the arts (fine arts and museums are relevant examples), in sport (football, bowls, running, motorbikes and rugby) or in the association of people from similar backgrounds who meet for social reasons (Young Farmers Club, Round Table and Veterans' Association) they are often organised on a much wider basis than just the village. All the examples listed come from evidence gained from those who hold to a faith. Again the potential this brings to network more extensively should not be ignored.

A fourth set of connections where village residents find themselves getting to know people from a wider geographical area relates to the provision of welfare services by the voluntary sector. For some people there are opportunities to work on committees, in charity shops or by directly providing services on a voluntary or paid basis. Examples include:

- Age Concern (a national charity operating in a number of villages studied)
- Farms for City Children (a charity providing experience of farm life for children from urban backgrounds)
- Community Broadband (provision of access to the internet and world wide web through a village based network, supported by Defra)
- Voluntary Aid Scheme (a charity providing care and support to people across substantial rural areas in partnership with county social services)

Activities such as these are a major contributor to rural community vibrancy. Church people have significant involvements in these activities even if the organisations are formally independent of the church.

Finally, and very importantly, there are the roles that people play in local governance of one form or another. It has already been mentioned that four of the six villages have primary schools. All of them are voluntary controlled – three Church of England and one Methodist – and all have clergy and other church people on their governing bodies.

In at least two of the villages there are church people who have been board members of significant regional organisations or are current or former local authority councillors. The involvement of churchgoers on parish councils also needs to be noted. In the larger settlements little reference is made to the participation of church people. But this is in marked contrast to some of the smaller villages, where such involvement has a long history.

One triangulation interviewee comments that of the five parish councillors and the parish clerk, four are "very active in the church, with two partly active." Particular reference is also made to these people, and their friends, who also run the village hall, organise the annual street market, are involved in the primary school and help run the community broadband.

"… it's the same people who always do everything."

In another village six of the 14 parish councillors have some church connection, whilst in a third village, of the seven members of the parish council, only two have no direct links with church or chapel. Many of those running the village hall committee, in this case an offshoot of the parish council, and the Women's Institute are also church members. One respondent commented that "it's the same people who always do everything", illustrating the important part played by people of faith in the life of the village. This very perception could, of course, be a barrier to the involvement of others.

Significantly, however, there is very little self-consciousness in the activity of these people, with one triangulation interviewee suggesting:

"Well, they all do their bit. They don't wear it [their church attendance] like a badge. We just do the stuff…it's expected…it's what happens."

In these villages a small number of people have a range of roles and positions, on the parish council, in the church and on the committees of voluntary and community organisations. Whilst there may be debates about the relevance and the powers of parish councils linking social capital is often developed through them.

This is also demonstrated when planning issues of one kind or another are addressed. In at least three villages, planning exercises have been undertaken to produce parish plans. The processes used have been important in facilitating the debates about the needs of the local community, whether connected to issues of street lighting, parking, community meeting space or affordable housing development. Church people are thoroughly involved in these debates, as is evidenced elsewhere (Derounian, 2005), even if the church as an organisation has not formally participated. When a 'Planning for Real' exercise was used in the preparation of one parish plan:

"They had their Sunday morning church service and then the vicar encouraged them all to go across to the village hall to get involved".

Most of these issues, whether triggered by the submission of a planning application or the withdrawal of a local bus service, will be resolved at district or county council levels, but with the opportunity for parish council views to be heard and, sometimes, heeded.

In two of the study villages the focus groups discussed current development proposals that were attracting considerable debate and conflict. In one village the site of a vacant car showroom had been proposed for new housing. Amongst this group of faith people a full range of views was expressed, some giving reasoned support, others fearing the impact of a large additional number of properties. Concerns about parking provision for residents and for visitors also raised the temperature of the debate.

In the second village there was united rejection of major new developments of both housing and industrial uses:

"Passions were aroused."

This was justified as "keeping a rural way of life, even if we are only three miles from the nearest town"!

There is nothing to suggest that the views of these churchgoers are any different to a cross section of other village residents. The opportunity for linking social capital is demonstrated, whatever the outcome and regardless of whether it reinforces or undermines bridging and bonding within the local community, through conflict and disagreement.

It should be acknowledged that participants in the focus groups were often reticent in talking about their wider roles in the district or region and found it difficult to make judgements about the contribution that they made to community vibrancy in their village.

2.3.4 Barriers to linking

During the focus groups and interviews it became apparent that there are challenges to be faced by the church and church people in the maintenance and development of linking social capital. These challenges concern those currently involved, their attitudes to local governance and the lack of a strategic perspective on rural change. In many conversations the view was expressed that:

"I would say, as a generalisation, it's always the same people who take the lead and do a lot of the work."

Maybe this is inevitable and it is certainly a message that is constantly heard in discussions about faith community involvement in urban settings and also in discussions about local governance more generally. This is especially so when it is realised that many of those involved are elderly and often keen to scale down their commitments and find others who might share more of their responsibilities.

Second, it is not uncommon to hear scepticism about the role of parish councils. A local landowner comments that:

"As a commercial person, the parish council doesn't have too much relevance to my life. Why should it? What is its role, anyway?"

"The parish council doesn't have many powers now. I was on the council back in the sixties and we had quite a few powers then. We could allocate who rented the council houses and things like that, But now it's all been taken away."

Whilst this last comment is not strictly accurate, it communicates an attitude regarding the roles and status of parish councils which could be described as mixed. Similar views are expressed about local authorities. Whilst some are supportive of their ward councillor, others ask:

"Why should you want to have contact with the District Council?"

Whilst in areas with continuing farming interest the views are expressed that:

"They give the impression at the moment that farmers don't matter at all. This government seems quite happy that all our food should be imported."

Finally, there is evidence that for many faith respondents there is a need to take a more strategic perspective on the changes that are affecting rural communities. It is unusual to hear the following opinions:

"I think that actually in rural areas you have to have those contacts and connections. I mean the Age Concern group is part of a larger network. We recognise that we need to look across a broader base to get the things and services that we need."

Such recognition is rare:

"Because we are small numbers we can be very marginalised in the discussion. Because we haven't got the numbers we haven't got the necessary political clout to do things. One of the things that the faith communities have got is that regional and national network which by working together can make a difference in terms of building community."

Here is a call to move out of isolation and to develop friends and allies in order to achieve your aims. This is linking social capital, by other words.

This section illustrates the extent of the links that people of faith have to activity outside the general life of the village. Linking social capital is particularly evident in some of the smaller villages where people are involved in their parish council as well as other activity. It should be recognised that some of these links might not be so active these days, bearing in mind the age of some of the respondents and the time elapsed since retirement of some from full time work.

How should one interpret these involvements? Evidence suggests that strongly linked individuals are encouraged in that role by others, although it does not take much imagination to realise that others might regard them as having too great an influence or having 'fingers in too many pies'. Of particular relevance here is the developing debate about the future of local government at local authority and parish council levels. The push for improved performance, relevance and achievement at the local level may well presage change over the next few

years. From the perspective of those wishing to see change, the significant presence of people of faith in existing roles should not be ignored.

2.4 Summary research findings

2.4.1 Introduction

Having considered something of the contribution of faith communities to community vibrancy through an assessment of social capital in its three forms, this section of the report draws together the major conclusions in summary. First, an indication of the outcomes of this faith community presence in the study villages is presented. Second, consideration is given to those factors that appear to be barriers to faith communities' contributions to community vibrancy and, third, interviewees' attempts to articulate the reasons for their involvement are sketched out. These conclusions are drawn from data collected in the three main stages of the research, the initial scoping interviews, the focus group discussions and completed questionnaires and, finally, the triangulation interviews with people outside the immediate circle of church going.

2.4.2 Outcomes of faith communities' contribution

The outcomes identified in the case study villages may be summarised in six propositions as follows:

- People who attend church regularly make a significant contribution to community vibrancy, one which is nurtured by their beliefs. This is shown both through their engagement with church based activity and through their roles in village life more generally.

- There is considerable evidence from these case studies that people who are involved in the church also volunteer to lead or help organise a wide range of the other activities, such as the Parish Council, the Women's Institute and the village hall, contributing to rural community vibrancy.

- This contribution is expressed not just through the organising of activity, but also through a more informal, ad hoc style of life which gives time to caring for others, and helping them to have a better quality of life. This sharing of information about people's needs and quiet visiting are characteristic of faith group members.

- The involvement of religious ministers in each of these villages should not be underestimated.

Many interviewees mentioned the important role played by the minister in visiting, organising and being there.

- Outcomes within local communities need to be seen within a perspective that acknowledges the importance of history and tradition. Identity is shaped by many things but some aspects of local rooted-ness come from the presence and involvement of the church at crucial stages of life. Notions of a home church, rites of passage, the significance of graveyards, the church building as a special, sacred space, and the annual church cycle of prayer and celebration contribute to a sense of place, belonging and well being.

- Finally, it is important not to exaggerate these contributions to community vibrancy. There are, of course, many other people in these villages who make a vital contribution, but who do not share the faith of the churchgoers. There are non faith social networks in all these places, whether centred on sports activity, educational and leisure activity or the local pub. These people also make an important contribution to rural community vibrancy.

2.4.3 Barriers to faith communities' contribution

Has the research been able to identify anything that blocks the contribution of people of faith to community vibrancy? What barriers inhibit this contribution? There is little evidence in this study, whether using data from the focus groups of participants in faith activity or the non-faith triangulation interviewees, of readily identifiable barriers and little record of hostility or opposition, although it would be most unusual if there was no antagonism somewhere in the villages studied.

This does not mean that there is nothing inhibiting the contribution of faith communities. Most barriers stem from the profile of churchgoers in the villages, from their view of themselves and of the communities of which they are a part. There are six points to make, as follows:

- Although there are exceptions, those who participate in the life of the village churches are at the older end of the age profile. This reflects something of the age structure of many rural communities and many congregations in the traditional Christian denominations.

- The impact of this profile is reinforced in the larger villages by a tendency for some young families, where they are present, to commute not just for work and shopping but also to church in

nearby towns and cities, in order to attend places where they prefer the style of worship and the approach to church life.

- Third, the nature of the local housing market has an impact on the numbers of younger people able to live in the village and thus on the house-holder profile of the worshipping community. In most of the villages house prices preclude ownership by those wishing to live independently of parents and family. Privately rented property is available in two of the villages, but there is a consensus that affordable accommodation for local people is a priority.

- Many focus group members are long standing residents of their village and see themselves as long serving participants in village life. They feel that they are probably too busy and would like to do less, but also continue to recognise local needs and that others are unwilling or unable to help share the responsibilities which they shoulder.

- Of course, willingness to participate is affected by many things, not just age. For some people it is a decline in energy and enthusiasm, but for others it is the priorities of work and family. There is evidence that some may not be as aware of local needs as they might be and from at least one village that some older people have a growing apprehension, if not fear, of youngsters that affects their willingness to relate to others. Other interviewees, in commenting on their own villages, hinted at the existence of xeno-phobic and racist attitudes, but without working through the implications of this for their own contribution to community vibrancy. Others note fragmentation in society at large and see evidence of it in their own communities.

- Finally, commentators and national politicians alike are concerned about what is interpreted as a growing scepticism about institutions of the state and the church. Focus group members are not immune from this thinking. Whilst there is widespread support for and involvement with the structures of local governance, such as parish councils, there are other, clearly articulated, views to the contrary.

The requirement to continually raise funds to maintain church buildings, for particular projects or for day to day running costs might have been expected to be raised in the focus groups as a significant barrier. This is so for many rural churches, but in these case studies it appears not to be so significant an issue.

2.4.4 Motivations for faith communities' contribution

During the focus groups, participants were asked to reflect on the motivation behind their involvement in village and life. Why, as people of faith, are they so involved? Explanations are varied. Some find this a difficult question to answer, reflecting the implicit nature of their faith. Others are more explicit. The answers are, therefore, a mixture of the pragmatic and the principled. Some look to practicalities whilst others are more concerned with religious and symbolic matters. Six propositions serve to summarise the evidence:

- Some are clear about the contribution they bring as a person of faith. Regular prayer and worship provides the basis for right living, care for others, trusting relationships, and a willingness to forgive and to accept forgiveness – all vital ingredients in establishing healthy communities. These derive from paying attention to the spiritual dimension of life.

- Second, others express a clear motivational link between faith and action. Their behaviour is a practical and visible outworking, in private and public life, of their personal faith. This is seen in individual care and support and in community activities. People of faith want to show the "love, concern and acceptance that the church ought to show." "It's quite satisfying really; you actually feel that you are making a contribution to somebody's life, from changing the tap washer or cutting a tree down." "I've no doubt that those Christians, who are active, are doing it as part of the outworking of their faith."

- Third, for some there is a social obligation, encouraged by the shortage of willing volunteers – "there isn't anyone else". Some are eager to pass on their responsibilities to a new generation, but the problem is not just a lack of volunteers to help out but a scarcity of people who are prepared to take on roles of leadership or responsibility. The use of the phrase "faith in the community" sets the context for the outworking of the faith – as a contributor to social well-being, both economic and community based, rather than being solely concerned for the building up of the faith group. One interesting expression was "we came together as a group, a number of us were involved in the local Quaker movement and we are trying to run a business on Quaker business principles." "What we are talking about is kind of Christian values, isn't it? Love your neighbour, and my great fear is that we are losing that inheritance….in society in general."

- Fourth, other initiatives focus on voluntary and community activity which range from Age Concern and farmer support, to village festivals and fêtes and a working party to supply broadband. It is felt that organisations like the church need to be involved to bring people together and to make things happen. "The church has to be the driving force to keep the village going." "There is always a majority of church people on those committees." "There is spirit [in] worship but also a spirit of community, of love and care for one another."

- Fifth, the research identifies a blurring in self awareness as some respondents found it difficult to identify the source of their motivation. We are involved in the village "because this is just part of life."

- Finally, many respondents reveal overlapping motivations. There are aspects of all the motivations listed above, plus as one person expressed it: there are "issues of justice, which as Christians we really ought to be fighting for, all the time."

3.1 Introduction

The qualitative research presented in this report seeks to understand better the contribution of faith communities and people of faith to rural community vibrancy. It uses the concepts of social capital as a way of organising the investigation and presenting the research findings. These findings attempt to indicate the strengths and weaknesses of this contribution and to outline both the opportunities and the barriers faced by faith communities in aiding the development of rural community vibrancy. This section of the report draws conclusions and begins the task of identifying the practical implications that follow.

The research raises a number of questions which may be directed at all stakeholders, including central government, especially the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Government Offices in the regions, Regional Development Agencies and Assemblies, those involved in local governance especially local authorities and parish councils, the voluntary and community sectors and, finally, the faith communities themselves.

Overall conclusions and implications are presented first, followed by discussion of the contribution of bonding, bridging and linking social capital to community vibrancy, with suggestions for developing that contribution.

3.2 Overall conclusions

The evidence from the five case studies, and the six villages they contain, is clear. Rural Christian communities make a substantial contribution to the vibrancy of their villages. People of faith and their institutions make this contribution in various ways. Attending worship is just one of them. As this research has demonstrated, most interviewees and focus group members point to their daily lives, activities and relationships within the village as central to

this contribution. This self assessment, a reflection on their place in the local community, is confirmed by those who observe them.

These contributions are, then, of various types: daily village living, networks with other churchgoers, formal worship opportunities, community activities organised through the church, activities organised through other village groups and the networks created through family, friendships, work and community service of one kind and another, including work with voluntary organisations and the parish council, for example.

When asked about their motivation for involvement responses are varied. Some talk about the importance of prayer and worship, others about translating their faith into action or the obligation they feel, both religious and social. Some say they have never asked themselves the question, whilst others see it pragmatically as 'having to do what needs to be done'. Finally, some have a sense of their place within the traditions of the church and the village and so feel duty bound to make a contribution.

There is scope for a greater degree of partnership and co-operation with faith communities…

If faith communities make such a contribution what implications does all this have for those who have a responsibility to pursue policies and practices that promote rural community vibrancy?

- First, there needs to be a wider recognition of it amongst all stakeholders, including the faith communities themselves. This message is relevant for Defra and other central government departments, regional agencies, local authorities and for the voluntary and community sectors. Recognition implies taking steps to listen and take note of the issues and concerns voiced within these groups. To what extent are policies, structures and programmes in place to support this?
- Second, recognition has to stimulate a process of learning about that contribution and about the resources which are brought to this activity by the church and churchgoers. Religious literacy has to be extended amongst professionals at all levels. Could Defra work together with the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government to ensure that full attention is given to the rural situation? How might sources

of information and training be better known and accessed by government agencies at all levels? One of the conclusions of work on faith communities in relation to urban regeneration (Farnell et al, 2003) is that until recently there has been a lack of interest in faith communities. However, this has begun to change, and there is an opportunity for change in rural situations too. How might this be achieved more fully?

- Third, community vibrancy, and the personal and community well-being entailed, is never the product of one group or agency's activity. It is only when the social capital deposited in these places is used by working together that aims are achieved. Notions of partnership working are embedded in the thinking of government and its agents and in the life of many voluntary sector organisations. The message to come from this research is that there is scope for a greater degree of partnership and co-operation with faith communities than has been seen in the recent past. This is a challenge both ways. It is a challenge for policy makers and implementers to appreciate the resources potentially available and for faith institutions and their members to relate to potential partners, openly, critically and following better training.

A second overall research finding concerns the potential future effects on community vibrancy of changing age and social structures within the case study villages. Whilst there is variation between the villages under study, churchgoers are generally at the older end of the age profile. As such, their contributions to vibrant communities are often set within a context of wanting to do less but recognising that other people are either unwilling or unable to take their place. At the same time, the desirability of country living means that those who move to these villages tend to be affluent and able to afford owner occupied property, which the market has put out of reach to local, younger households.

On the one hand this situation is seen as a problem by many within the case study villages. What will it be like in ten years time? This is the pessimistic view. On the other hand, some would argue that the very ageing process will bring others into harness and that for many communities the role of the elderly, living longer with better health, is something for which to be grateful. How might volunteering amongst older people be encouraged? The *implications* of this changing social structure are of wider significance than just the contribution of people of faith to community vibrancy:

- First, decisions about housing development and the consequent provision of infrastructure and services have to be taken in the light of these structural issues. Balancing development demands with the conservation of countryside is a core dilemma of sustainability. The contemporary debate about affordable housing has a long history and the provision of such housing through the release of 'exceptions sites' or development plan allocations is again being debated. The need for subsidies for rented and low cost, sustainable, home ownership is reinforced by concerns about social structure and has implications for churches, people of faith and their contribution to community vibrancy, matters discussed further below.

- Second, these issues of social structure, the housing market and new development are a concern to all stakeholders in central as well as local government and for voluntary agencies committed to rural development. Faith communities too face challenges at a number of levels. With general reductions in church membership and a relative lack of younger people in many rural communities, questions are raised not just about the maintenance of church buildings but also the changing role of ordained ministers. These matters are already of considerable concern. This research suggests that both ministers and church buildings are significant resources in these villages and add a considerable amount to community vibrancy. How might support be given without threatening independence and the ability to take the initiative within civil society?

The following sections outline conclusions in relation to bonding, bridging and linking social capital and introduce discussion on their implications for rural community vibrancy.

3.3 Bonding social capital

Bonding social capital has been characterised as close mutual support and trust between similar types of people, united by family, friendship and, sometimes, faith commitments. Two main conclusions can be drawn from the preceding analysis.

First, data from focus groups, focus group questionnaires and triangulation interviews suggest that in each of the study villages there are high levels of mutual care and support. People look out for one another. In the smaller villages this is a phenomenon that is not restricted to those within a circle of faith

commitment; it extends across all community networks. In the larger villages there is some evidence that such bonding is stronger within the worshipping communities and does not extend so fully to the village as a whole. Nevertheless, this informal mutuality is central to understanding the contribution of people of faith to community vibrancy. It has a number of *implications*:

- If faith contributions to bonding social capital are significant to the quality of life in these villages, what might be learnt from this? Quality of life indicators have become important analytical tools in government policy formation over recent years. How might this informal, unstructured support be valued, encouraged and measured, without inappropriate interference and unhelpful scrutiny?

- In practical terms this bonding social capital shows itself by neighbours being willing to help one another in daily situations; fetching shopping, providing transport to the doctors or hospital, doing some gardening or simply listening to stories about life's daily events. In the context of policy about care in the community these everyday kindnesses become even more significant to achieving these policy aims and public resources being used effectively and efficiently.

- An important question for churches, for social service departments and primary health care trusts is how this activity can be supported appropriately? How can support networks be encouraged to reach out to all who need help, across whatever divides?

Second, whilst bonding social capital may develop spontaneously, it is reasonable to assume that there are structures and ways of working that support and encourage its development and sustenance. In terms of the contribution of faith communities, the legacy of buildings, leadership and willingness to collaborate are evidenced through the research. First, the symbolic significance of the parish church and the actuality of its use are indicated in the case studies. Second, leaders come in all shapes and sizes and they are not all ordained. Indeed, there are many examples of lay people providing leadership across church and community in these villages. Third, comment is made by one district councillor about the high quality of collaboration she had experienced with people of faith. The experience gained from this study is that this happens more often than some would expect. What *implications* follow?

- The first concerns the use and status of church buildings. This is not an argument that starts with issues of architectural and historic importance, as such, but with use. Many people of faith would comment that their desire and ability to care and support others has its roots in, and gains its energy from, regular worship. Neat divisions between what can be seen as worship, including prayer and study, and community service are challenged. There is arguably a need for those in public and voluntary sector agencies who administer grant support to be aware of this as they consider faith group applications that aim to bring benefit to the whole community. How might such awareness be encouraged?

- Mutual care and support happens informally as part of every day life but, in addition, is often encouraged by more formal structuring through volunteer networks, like those organised by Age Concern, and by many churches. Within churches this is often achieved by the development of small groups and the allocation of pastoral visiting responsibilities. Such approaches require leadership, accountability and appropriate training and support. This is not to suggest that public agencies have any direct role in these matters. Nevertheless, they do need to be aware of the range of developmental activity already available within faith networks and to look for opportunities to provide appropriate support and encouragement to further this activity. How might personal development in the cause of community vibrancy be encouraged?

- Third, negotiating the ups and downs of church life can be a relevant training ground for wider community involvement, including work on parish councils and as school governors. Within a strongly bonded environment, the difficulties of working together can be amplified and the dangers of dominance experienced. Faith groups and voluntary sector organisations, such as rural community councils, could initiate discussions aimed at a mutual strengthening of their current training practice.

3.4 Bridging social capital

Bridging social capital is that resource enabling people from different backgrounds, with less in common, to establish connections which make a contribution to community vibrancy. There is considerable evidence to support the contention that people of faith in the study villages provide important bridging social capital. Almost without exception this contribution is welcomed by triangulation interviewees; no hostility is detected.

If bridging is to contribute to vibrancy, space is needed for its development. This is both physical space, places to meet, and social space where people meet to follow an interest or a cause. Conclusions are drawn using seven spaces observed in the case studies. *Implications* follow.

First, the contribution of churchgoers to village events and to the celebration of church festivals needs to be noted. In the smaller places these events are both village and church events, as in annual street fairs and a sunflower festival, for example:

- Opportunities are already taken in some places for the involvement of a wide range of churches, voluntary agencies and charities in such events. In the name of community vibrancy, what scope is there for greater collaboration for the benefit of all?
- Public sector agencies, as part of their brief for economic and community development have demonstrated their capacity to both initiate and help fund such events. There is the possibility of much more of this type of activity. How might it be ensured that the potential contribution of people of faith and the potential for partnerships with faith organisations are positively promoted?

Second, good practice is observed in one case study village where the need for community meeting space, identified in a parish council initiated parish plan, is being met by the proposed adaptation of a church building. The use of church space for these purposes, whether completely separate from space for worship or with a multiple use of space, is already reasonably common, but could be used more extensively:

- In places where there is no village or church hall the possibility of using space in the worship area for community meeting should be the first opportunity to be investigated. This could have additional benefits for the maintenance and upkeep of the historic building, as well as providing for the wider community.
- As always, there are issues about funding for such modification of church property. The Community Halls for Rural People programme supported by the Big Lottery Community Building Fund is a valuable resource. It is important to ensure that churches receiving such funds

are able to retain a function as a place of worship. Should ways of making funds available be further reviewed by government and the church? Is there a need for a comprehensive review of funding for such purposes?

Third, reference is made to the important role, as observed by villagers, of primary schools. In this study each one has a faith connection and is viewed positively. It is widely acknowledged that the primary school is a vital part of village life, whether or not it has direct links to the church, but there are particular points to make about what have been called faith based schools:

- Evidence suggests that there is support for faith schools in the villages studied. This support has many dimensions including issues of ethos and child behaviour that affect a local community. This should be recognised by government at its various levels in the continuing debate about the role and contribution that such schools make to children's education and, in this case, to the levels of rural community vibrancy. How might a more complete understanding of the views of rural communities on faith schools be obtained and fed into the debate?

- In each case the contribution made by people of faith to the life of these schools is acknowledged. How should church authorities and local congregations maintain and enhance these contributions and links?

Fourth, the availability of affordable housing is a major problem in all the case study locations. In two cases it is only because of the decisions of historic landlords that rented property is available at all. In such situations a number of *implications* follow:

- Discussion about the extent of housing need, for whatever age group and income level, needs to involve the widest possible range of participants. How might this include church people with their extensive local networks and understanding of village needs? How could the church play a more positive role in enabling such analyses and provision to meet need?

- A challenge should be placed before all those who have it in their power to make a response to issues like this. The possibility of exception sites being made available can be facilitated by activity on the part of local authorities, housing associations and voluntary organisations, but in the end control of land is crucial. There are still places where the church owns land that should be investigated for such use. There are also opportunities for individual landowners to accept

a role in such provision. Some of these people are churchgoers. Whilst there is now greater recognition of these issues in some circles, how might provision be increased by the church through its land and property decisions and amongst people of faith?

In the larger villages there are some good examples of more organised approaches being implemented for both old and young.

Fifth, in all the study villages the needs of the elderly and young people are high on the agendas of those interviewed. In the smaller villages responses to these needs tend to be informal and individual. In the larger villages there are some good examples of more organised approaches being implemented for both old and young. Sometimes these are organised by the churches, sometimes they are initiatives involving church people working through other organisational structures and with people from a variety of non-church backgrounds:

- There is an argument that the role played by people of faith in responding to these needs should be acknowledged, as a first step to the encouragement of further initiative. How might this be achieved?

- The ability of some church groups to work in close partnership with public sector agencies is demonstrated clearly in the case study villages. This can be the provision of services on a contractual basis, but it can also be about activity ancillary to statutory provision. The potential for further partnership working in such cases should be investigated. Of course, not all communities will have the people and the resources for further involvement. Should research be conducted into initiatives of this kind and also into developing capacity building, where the potential is apparent?

Sixth, even in the smallest places there are different networks linked to, for example, sporting, leisure or educational interests. Normally, these networks have people of faith within them, too. This overlapping of networks is central to the creation of bridging social capital:

- The promotion of community vibrancy benefits from good communication between networks. Bridge builders between networks can be encouraged to facilitate this communication and,

as is noted by non faith observers, people of faith are often the ones who are motivated to engage in this. For example, how might church and village newsletters be used more fully to achieve this?

- Public and voluntary sector agencies constantly need to reassess their approaches to working with communities. How might these interlocking networks, involving people of faith, be better understood and used to facilitate community vibrancy? The preparation of village audits and village plans provide valuable opportunities for bridge building, for example.

Finally, how inclusive are the villages in the study? What awareness do people of faith have of those who might be excluded from the life of the community? Most interviewees start to discuss the needs of the elderly in response to such questions. Some acknowledge the existence of poverty in their communities and that some people, for one reason or other, do not fit. Generally speaking the evidence collected for this research indicates that these communities have not yet faced up to issues of diversity, whether of ethnic origin, national identity, gender, disability, sexual orientation or, indeed, faiths other than their own. The social structure of rural communities is changing with more ethnically and faith diverse populations moving to rural areas, with the recruitment of migrant workers, with people from other parts of the European Union seeking permanent work and the accommodation of refugees and asylum seekers:

- There is a challenge here to people of faith especially, to be aware of diversity and the potential for exclusion, to be welcoming of strangers and to respond appropriately to the hardship brought by poverty, especially poverty in a context of wealth. How might this challenge be communicated more powerfully and by whom?
- Enabling discussion between stakeholders, including agents of government and local people of faith on issues of inclusion should be productive. Could the preparation of parish plans be a suitable vehicle if their scope is seen to include issues of whole community vibrancy, cohesion and well-being?

3.5 Linking social capital

Linking social capital is about developing relationships outside of peer groups in order to give access to influence and resources that might bring community benefits and aid community vibrancy. Many aspects are identified in the research findings: businesses, church organisations, sport and leisure interests, voluntary organisations and local governance. Particularly striking is the level of involvement of people of faith in parish council work. Churchgoers are networked into all these areas of potential influence. *Implications* follow:

- To what extent can church people be encouraged and enabled to make more of their connections to business, leisure and voluntary activity in the pursuit of community vibrancy? This is about recognition, support and celebration.
- National churches provide support and services for their local churches in addition to accountability structures. Church of England dioceses, for example, have considerable expertise within their boards for education and social responsibility. Some participate in debates at national and regional level on policy and practice that impact on rural community vibrancy. How might local churches be better keyed into this resource so that it can be used for the benefit of the wider community?
- Local strategic partnerships and regional assemblies in England are strongly advised by government to make sure that faith community representatives are included on their governing bodies and working groups. Government is conducting research on this theme during 2006. To what extent are issues of rural community vibrancy being addressed, and to what extent are faith representatives working together with others on this agenda?
- The governing bodies of local schools often include ministers and other church people. Recruitment generally is a problem. How might recruitment to school governing bodies be strengthened and the quality of governance improved?
- The government's commitment to democratic renewal, local community empowerment and devolution to local neighbourhoods opens up the possibility of church people contributing to the debate and being part of the resulting arrangements. The significant role played by people of faith in parish councils, including the development of Quality Parish Councils, is particularly important in this context. How will they engage with this debate?
- The resulting debates are likely to be heated and achieving better quality governance will sometimes lead to conflict. People of faith will enter the arguments from all sides. Unanimity should not necessarily be expected.

- A vibrant community is one where diverse views are accepted, debated and tested. A community that has the ability to cope with this, and to make positive use of it, is to be valued. People of faith have resources to bring to this, including that of honest broker. But they also have much to learn, like everyone else. How might such roles be recognised and used? What place is there for training in rural conciliation?

- There is considerable potential for developing linking social capital as a contribution to community vibrancy through statutory development planning, usually channelled through the parish council. Consultation and the resulting debates about development proposals, including affordable housing and traffic management, are common place in these villages. The momentum to prepare and update parish plans provides even more opportunities. Consultation on the preparation of the new Local Development Frameworks prepared by local authorities is on the horizon. How might faith networks be encouraged to provide contact and involvement?

- Finally, from 2007 all local authorities will have Local Area Agreements between themselves, local stakeholders and central government. One of the themes of these agreements is working for stronger communities. This is to be measured by how much people feel that they can influence decisions that are made about their locality, how they feel people from different backgrounds get on and the level of volunteering in the community. This research suggests that people of faith are keen to see more of the first, need to be challenged about the second and provide a wealth of good examples of the third.

This final part of the report has summarised the main conclusions of the research and has indicated some *implications* and questions for debate concerning the development of rural community vibrancy. Faith communities already play a significant part, as has been demonstrated. There is potential for greater engagement, both formally and informally, through the organisations of faith but also through the everyday acceptance of citizenship responsibilities by people of faith.

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Appendix A
Research Tools

A number of tools were developed and used during the research process. These are listed below and attached for information.

1. Initial questionnaire used to search for potential case study villages. [page 56]

2. Scoping interviews were arranged in each case study using a set of objectives and areas for questioning. [page 58]

3. Focus group discussions used this format of questions. [page 60]

4. Questionnaire used to obtain information from focus group participants about them and their involvements. [page 62]

5. Diagram used to map the responses to the focus group members' questionnaire. [page 64]

6. Triangulation interviews used these topics to develop discussion. [page 65]

7. These headings were used to code the transcripts of interviews and focus groups to allow analysis using Nvivo software. [page 66]

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY	Region	Sparsity	IMD	Other faith ?	Projects?	Number

A **Faith in Rural Communities – contributions of social capital to community vibrancy**
Please complete as fully as possible information for each rural community

Rural Place Name		Contact Name	
Contact Address		**Position of Contact** (e.g. Minister, Church Steward, Churchwarden, congregation member)	
County		**Tel No.**	
		Fax No.	
Post Code		Email	

Denominations Present	✓	Population Size	✓	
Church of England		< 200		
Methodist		200-500		
Baptist		500-1000		
Roman Catholic		1000-3000		
URC		3000 +		
Congregational		Figure, if known		
Other church (state)				

Other faith group present ?	Y/N	If yes please give details

Church Name(s) and Denomination(s)

School(s) present?	Y/N	Number	

Name of school(s) and type (e.g. Primary, Middle)

What church / chapel involvement is there with the school(s) ?

Amenities:	✓	Is your countryside mainly	✓	Is the local economy ?	✓
Church Hall		Arable		Buoyant	
Village Hall		Stock farming		Not much for young people	
Community Centre		Mixed		Low wage	
Post Office		Coastal		High wage	
Pub(s)		Forested		Low unemployment	
Village Shop		Former industrial		High unemployment	
Large General Store		Upland		Growing	
Petrol Station/Garage		Hamlets		Declining	
Other business or industry ? (state)		Scattered housing		Depressed	
		Small town			
		Villages			
		Suburban settlements			

B **For each faith group (church) within the settlement that you have knowledge of please complete this form:**

Church Name		Name of larger grouping (eg Benefice or Circuit)
Diocese / District / Synod etc.		
Church leadership style:	✔	**Congregation / Membership No.** (approximate)
Clergy reliant		
Clergy/lay partnership		
Ecumenical		
Multi-faith		
Partnership with other bodies		
Lay led		**Average Sunday Attendance**
Other		

What special church projects are in existence ? (e.g. lunch club for elderly, youth club, pastoral care rota, church trail, children's work etc.)

What are the signs of informal caring for each other in the congregation ? (e.g. home visiting, lifts to hospital, etc.)

Is the church or chapel building used for purposes other than worship ? Please give examples.

Is the church or chapel involved in a wider area project ? (e.g. district, circuit or deanery projects)

Any Additional Information

FAITH IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Case Study Scoping Interviews
Schedule of themes to be explored through semi structured interviews

Aims
1. To encourage the interviewees to commit to the research project.

2. To broaden our understanding of the case study situations, the villages and the faiths present.

Process
1. Interviews in the five case study areas; one village in each of Devon, Herefordshire, Norfolk, Lancashire and Yorkshire.
2. Check the accuracy of data already collected.
3. By the end of the interview begin to develop a view about focus group practicalities, including numbers, venue and timing.
4. All interviews to be recorded with the potential for transcription.
5. Interviews to be undertaken by Jane Ricketts-Hein, David Jarvis and Richard Farnell.
6. Where appropriate take photos of the village, its setting, places of worship etc.

Interview details
1. There will be five interviews in total, one in each of the following villages:
   a. Fence, Near Burnley, Lancashire
   b. Austwick, Yorkshire Dales
   c. Acle, Norfolk
   d. Iddesleigh, North Devon
   e. Bridge Sollars, Herefordshire
2. The interviews will be with a leader of the faith group, such as the Anglican vicar or the Methodist minister, in each village.
3. Church leaders in each village have agreed to participate. They will be contacted by phone and email to arrange for a member of the research team to visit and interview them at their homes.
4. The interviews will be scheduled to last for 60-90 minutes.

Topic Guide for the Interviews
1. Summary perceptions of the history of the village and its stories of power and influence.
2. Questions about issues and concerns for people in the village.
3. Encourage story telling about recent events and their significance for local people.
4. Ask for more detail on issues that impact on people facing disadvantage and exclusion, including young people and migrants.
5. Ask for descriptions of village activities:
   a. For the village as a whole; nature and extent of voluntary organisations; multiple involvements of local people.
   b. Those activities with a church or faith dimension.
   c. Informal as well as formal.
   d. What, when, where and how funded?
   e. Who participates? Key individuals and networks.

   f. Why are people involved? What motivates them?
6. What do you think about the value of these activities?
   a. How inward or outward looking?
   b. Is this mutual support? [bonding]
   c. Is this reaching to others outside the immediate group? [bridging]
   d. Is this working with, or as part of, public, private, voluntary or community agencies? [linking]
   e. What connections are there to other denominations and faiths?
7. Perspectives on the parish, district and county councils and the rural community council; their roles and activity in the case study area.

RF/27 May 2005/17 June 2005

FAITH IN RURAL COMMUNITIES?
Focus groups
Themes to be explored

Aims
1. To explore the strengths and weaknesses of the contribution of faith communities to community vibrancy in the case study villages.
2. To encourage participants to talk about the contribution of faith communities by discussing their experiences, reflections and motivations.

Process
1. Focus groups in the five case study areas, to be undertaken in September and October 2005.
2. Focus group membership selected by local contacts and research team from those involved in village faith groups.
3. Focus group discussion is scheduled to last for 60-90 minutes.
4. All focus groups to be recorded and transcribed.
5. Groups to be led by the research team, Richard Farnell, Jane Ricketts Hein and David Jarvis.

Focus Group locations
There will be six groups in total in the following villages:
   i.   Fence, Near Burnley, Lancashire
   ii.   Austwick and Clapham, Yorkshire Dales [adjacent villages]
   iii.   Acle, Norfolk
   iv.   Iddesleigh, North Devon
   v.   Bridge Sollars, Herefordshire

Focus Group Agenda
1. Welcome: the research summarised.
2. Introductions
3. The purpose of the focus group.
4. The focus group process aims to encourage participants to share experience, reflection and motivation, confidentiality will be respected and discussion between participants encouraged.
5. Questions to start discussion:
   a. Describe the levels of trust and mutual support in the village and in the church or other faith communities? What are the barriers to its future growth and development? [Bonding social capital]
   b. Which people are more on the margins of the village community and why? Are they supported? How? [Bridging social capital]
   c. What contacts and connections do people have outside the life of the village? Are they useful in supporting the local community? [Linking social capital]
   d. How significant is the church or other the faith group to the life of the village?
   e. What would improve the contribution of the faith communities to the quality of life in the village?

     f. What good quality activities in your faith community and the village, would you recommend to others? Do you do so already? How?

6. Over coffee or tea, focus group participants will then be asked to complete a simple form indicating the following:
   a. Name
   b. Length of residence in the village
   c. Faith group affiliation [if any]
   d. Informal activity in support of people in the church [for example, shopping for an elderly person]
   e. Informal activity in support of people in the village and local area
   f. Involvement in activities through the church or other faith group [indicate responsibilities]
   g. Involvement in other village activities [indicate responsibilities]
   h. Involvement in organisations outside the village: local, regional, national; private, public, voluntary [indicate responsibilities]
   i. Why are you involved? What motivates you?

RF/ 1 August 2005 / 3 August 2005

FAITH IN RURAL COMMUNITIES?

Please answer the following questions.
Confidentiality will be respected.

1. Name & address [email address where possible].

2. Length of residence in the village.

3. Faith affiliation [if any].

4. Type of employment [past or present].

5. Informal activity in support of people in your community [visiting, providing transport etc].

6. Involvement in organised activities through the church or other faith group [indicate responsibilities].
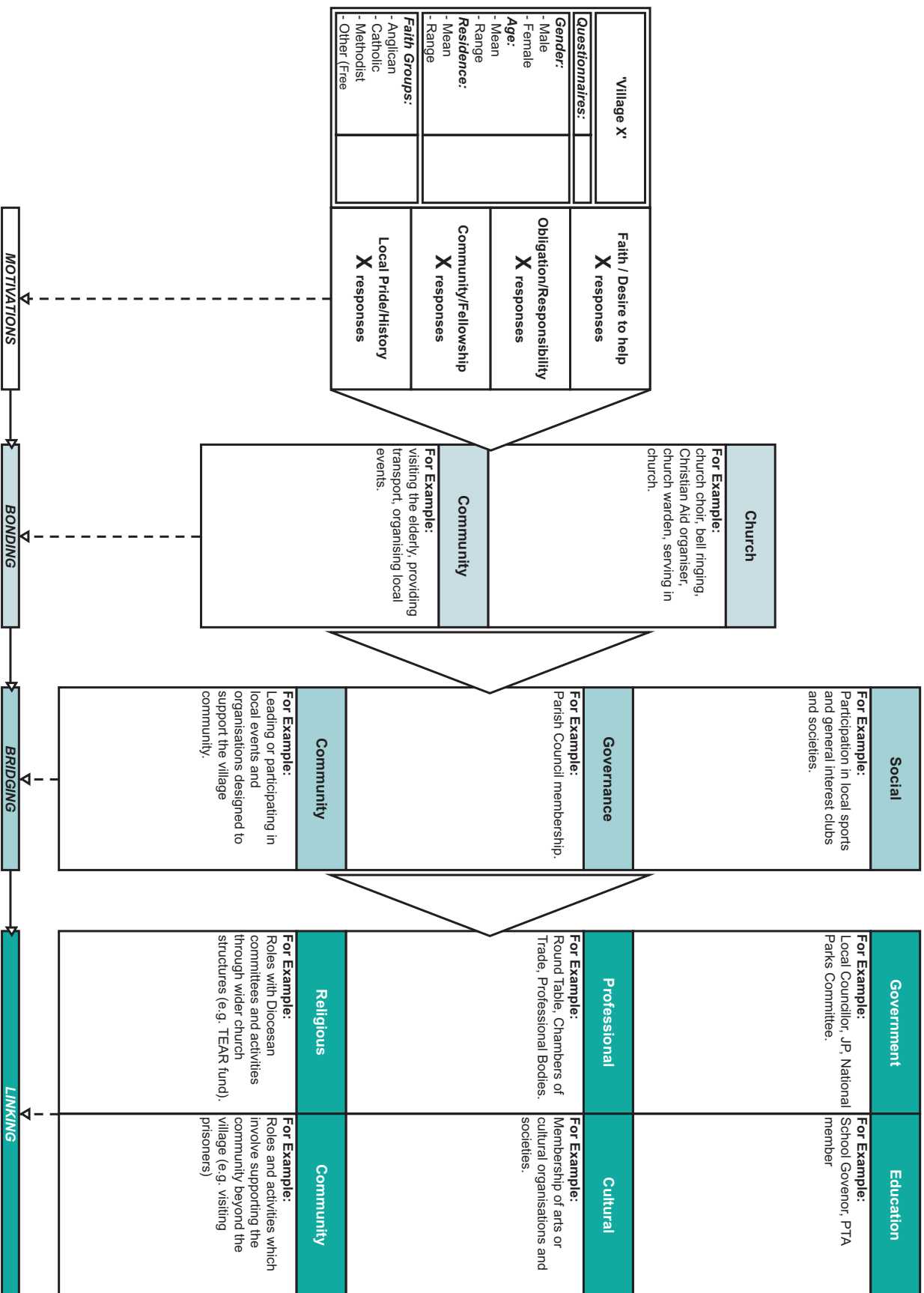
[Please turn over]

7. Involvement in other organised activities in your local community [indicate responsibilities].

8. Involvement in organisations outside the village: local, regional, national; private, public, voluntary [indicate responsibilities]

9. Why are you involved? What motivates you?

Thank you

'Village X'

Questionnaires:

Gender:
- Male
- Female

Age:
- Mean
- Range

Residence:
- Mean
- Range

Faith Groups:
- Anglican
- Catholic
- Methodist
- Other (Free

Faith / Desire to help
X responses

Obligation/Responsibility
X responses

Community/Fellowship
X responses

Local Pride/History
X responses

MOTIVATIONS

BONDING

BRIDGING

LINKING

Church

Community

For Example: church choir, bell ringing, Christian Aid organiser, church warden, serving in church.

For Example: visiting the elderly, providing transport, organising local events.

Social

For Example: Participation in local sports and general interest clubs and societies.

Governance

For Example: Parish Council membership.

Community

For Example: Leading or participating in local events and organisations designed to support the village community.

Government

For Example: Local Councillor, JP, National Parks Committee.

Education

For Example: School Govenor, PTA member

Professional

For Example: Round Table, Chambers of Trade, Professional Bodies.

Cultural

For Example: Membership of arts or cultural organisations and societies.

Religious

For Example: Roles with Diocesan committees and activities through wider church structures (e.g. TEAR fund).

Community

For Example: Roles and activities which involve supporting the community beyond the village (e.g. visiting prisoners)

FAITH IN RURAL COMMUNITIES?
Triangulation Interviews
Themes to be explored through semi-structured interviews

Topic Guide for the Interviews
1. The research summarised, the purpose of the interview explained and confidentiality ensured.
2. Identify the precise role and responsibilities of the interviewee.
3. Explore the interviewee's knowledge of the village, its issues, concerns and conflicts, and the perspective on them.
4. Explore their knowledge of local faith communities; the people and activities.
5. Question the interviewee about the contribution of people of faith to community vibrancy [including social inclusion and rural regeneration], using the following themes:
   a. The levels of trust and mutual support in the village and, within this, the role and significance of the church or other faith communities. What are the barriers to its future growth and development? [Bonding social capital]
   b. Which people are more on the margins of the village community and why? Are they supported? How? What role do people of faith play in this? [Bridging social capital]
   c. What contacts and connections outside the life of the village do people have and people of faith, specifically? Are these links useful in supporting the local community? [Linking social capital]
   d. Overall, how significant are the church or other faith groups to the life of the village?
   e. What would improve the contribution of the faith communities to the quality of life in the village?
   f. What is there to learn from the activities of the faith communities in the village?
   g. To what extent is the interviewee's organisation working in partnership with the church, other faith organisations and people of faith? [where appropriate]
   h. What would the interviewee's organisation need to do to enhance the contribution of faiths to rural community vibrancy? [where appropriate]

RF/ 27 January 2006

NVivo NODE LISTING

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Created:        07/12/2005 - 17:14:14
Modified:       07/12/2005 - 17:14:14
Number of Nodes:    47
1       JRH - Crime, policing
2       JRH - History
3       JRH - Incomers
4       JRH - level of engagement
5       JRH - self-perception
6       JRH - the individual
7       RF - Parish Council
8       (1) /Social Capital
9       (1 1) /Social Capital/Motivation
10      (1 2) /Social Capital/Bonding
11      (1 2 1) /Social Capital/Bonding/Bo Formal
12      (1 2 2) /Social Capital/Bonding/Bo Informal
13      (1 2 3) /Social Capital/Bonding/Bo Strengths
14      (1 2 4) /Social Capital/Bonding/Bo Weaknesses
15      (1 3) /Social Capital/Bridging
16      (1 3 1) /Social Capital/Bridging/Br Formal
17      (1 3 2) /Social Capital/Bridging/Br Informal
18      (1 3 3) /Social Capital/Bridging/Br Strengths
19      (1 3 4) /Social Capital/Bridging/Br Weaknesses
20      (1 4) /Social Capital/Linking
21      (1 4 1) /Social Capital/Linking/Li Formal
22      (1 4 2) /Social Capital/Linking/Li Informal
23      (1 4 3) /Social Capital/Linking/Li Strengths
24      (1 4 4) /Social Capital/Linking/Li Weaknesses
25      (1 5) /Social Capital/Outcomes
26      (1 6) /Social Capital/Barriers
27      (1 7) /Social Capital/Recommendations
28      (2) /Rural issues
29      (2 1) /Rural issues/Employment
30      (2 2) /Rural issues/Agricultural change
31      (2 3) /Rural issues/Migrant workers
32      (2 4) /Rural issues/Poverty & exclusion
33      (2 5) /Rural issues/Tourism & leisure
34      (2 6) /Rural issues/Planning control
35      (2 7) /Rural issues/Housing
36      (2 8) /Rural issues/Commuters
37      (2 9) /Rural issues/Transport
38      (2 10) /Rural issues/Education & health services
39      (2 11) /Rural issues/Shops, pubs, etc
40      (2 12) /Rural issues/Village halls
41      (2 13) /Rural issues/Young people
42      (2 14) /Rural issues/The elderly
43      (2 15) /Rural issues/Volunteering
44      (2 16) /Rural issues/Landscape & environment
45      (2 17) /Rural issues/Schools
46      (2 18) /Rural issues/Church organisation
47      (3) /Search Results
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Appendix B
Research Team

Professor Richard Farnell is Professor of Neighbourhood Regeneration at Coventry University and a member of the Applied Research Centre for Sustainable Regeneration (SURGE). He has undertaken research into the contribution of faith communities to urban regeneration and community cohesion and is an adviser to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. He is Canon Theologian of Coventry Cathedral and chairs Midland Heart Ltd. Contact details: **r.farnell@coventry.ac.uk**

Dr Jill Hopkinson originally trained as an agricultural scientist. She now works in rural church and community development and has been National Rural Officer for the Church of England since February 2004. Based at the Arthur Rank Centre in Warwickshire, the churches rural resource centre, she works with ecumenical colleagues on national rural and agricultural policy, rural church mission and strategy and the development of local rural churches. During 2005 she wrote and edited the workbook for rural churches Seeds in Holy Ground. She also edits Country Way magazine for rural churches and communities. She lives and worships in a small rural community. Contact details: **jillh@rase.org.uk**

Dr David Jarvis is a Senior Research Fellow at Coventry University and a member of the Applied Research Centre for Sustainable Regeneration (SURGE). He has carried out research and consultancy work for a variety of Local and National Government departments and agencies, and has a particular interest in rural economic change, competitiveness and regeneration. Contact details: **d.jarvis@coventry.ac.uk**

Canon Jeremy Martineau has been an Anglican priest for 40 years, and is Canon Emeritus of Coventry Cathedral. He was awarded the OBE for services to rural communities. He was chairman of ACRE and was the first National Rural Officer for the Church of England until retirement in 2003. He is Director of Studies for the Centre for Studies in Rural Ministry on behalf of the Arthur Rank Centre and the University of Wales, Bangor, where he is honorary research fellow. He has written and edited several books on the work of the Church in rural areas. Contact details: **jeremy.m@onetel.net**

Dr Jane Ricketts Hein is a Research Assistant at Coventry University, having undertaken work in association with a number of bodies and organisations, including the Countryside Agency and the Economic and Social Research Council. Her research interests lie in rural geography, and include local food and culture. She worships at one of the oldest nonconformist chapels in Wales to have been in continual use. Contact details: **j.rickettshein@coventry.ac.uk**

Richard Farnell • Jill Hopkinson • David Jarvis • Jeremy Martineau • Jane Ricketts Hein

Applied Research Centre for Sustainable Regeneration, Coventry University
The Arthur Rank Centre
The Church of England