

Rural regions and sustainable development in England

An overview of the local authorities in
Britain's Leading Edge

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NaRReD
Nature Recovery and Regional Development



University
of Exeter



Economic
and Social
Research Council



Nature Recovery and Regional Development (NaRReD)

The Nature Recovery and Regional Development (NaRReD) project

NaRReD is based at the University of Exeter and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. It brings together an interdisciplinary team of researchers who are examining the contribution that Britain's Leading Edge areas make to the development of a sustainable national economy. The project focusses on the opportunities provided in relation to local nature recovery strategies, developing green finance markets in natural capital and biodiversity net gain, and the associated impact on local stakeholders and communities. Running between January 2024 and January 2027, the research will inform policy at the intersection of nature recovery and sustainable development in England's rural areas.

Britain's Leading Edge

Britain's Leading Edge (BLE) is a network of local authorities situated on the rural periphery of England, without the economic pull of a major city. The research and advocacy network comprises 12 local authorities covering approximately 6% of England's population, 27.5% of England's land area and 52% of England's inland water. Britain's Leading Edge aims to raise the profile of the distinct challenges faced by peripheral areas, championing the contribution such areas can make to national prosperity and environmental flourishing. At the time of writing, the authorities in Britain's Leading Edge are Cornwall Council, Cumberland Council, Dorset Council, Durham County Council, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Herefordshire Council, Council of the Isles of Scilly, Isle of Wight Council, North Yorkshire Council, Rutland County Council, Shropshire Council and Westmorland and Furness Council.

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Overview

The Nature Recovery and Regional Development (NaRReD) project started in January 2024 in collaboration with Britain's Leading Edge (BLE). Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for three years, the research is exploring the role that rural peripheral regions have in the development of a more sustainable national economy. Through engaging with policymakers within each member local authority, as well as on-the-ground nature recovery organisations and stakeholders, the research aims to understand and track local nature recovery plans and activities and their socio-economic impacts.

This research comes at an important moment given that each upper-tier local authority in England is currently developing their local nature recovery strategy (LNRS). Each LNRS will outline priority areas for nature recovery through the creation of a local habitat map, as well as a written statement of biodiversity priorities (Defra, 2023). This means that each authority will have a tailored map of their area which identifies where action could be taken for nature.

Increasingly, links are being drawn between having a rich and resilient natural environment and a well-functioning economy. As Dasgupta (2021) described in his landmark review on the economics of biodiversity, humanity faces an existential threat from the deterioration of the natural environment, and there is a strong economic imperative to invest in nature's recovery. According to data from the Office for National Statistics (2023), the value of the United Kingdom's ecosystems in 2021 was over



£1.5 trillion, with the greatest associated value coming from the cultural services that nature provides, such as tourism, recreation and health.

Nature underpins human mental and physical health through the benefits of exposure, and it further supports employment in tourism, forestry, agriculture and fishing. The NaRReD project aims to understand these connections more deeply by examining the relationships between nature recovery and regional development across the BLE areas.

Given the high levels of natural capital and low levels of urbanisation across the BLE, the relationships between recovering nature and economic opportunity are particularly stark. This report aims to build on data provided by the Office for National Statistics (2024a) to characterise the BLE authorities and is split into three parts: (1) demographics; (2) land use and agriculture; and (3) industry and economy. This helps to highlight the geographical contexts in which the project is working, as well as the intersections between nature recovery and regional development. Table 1 provides an overview of each local authority's legal status, as well as their most recently published budget (2024-5).

Table 1. Overview of each local authority's legal status, parished status and budget (2024)

Local authority	Legal status	Parished status	2024/25 budget
Cornwall Council	Unitary authority.	Yes. 218 parishes.	£771,000,000 ^a
Cumberland Council	Unitary authority.	Yes. 124 parishes.	£319,000,000 ^b
Durham County Council	Unitary authority.	Yes. 91 parishes.	£564,790,000 ^c
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	Unitary authority.	Yes. 171 parishes.	£402,900,000 ^d
Dorset Council	Unitary authority.	Yes. 269 parishes.	£376,700,000 ^e
Herefordshire Council	Unitary authority.	Yes. 137 parishes.	£205,200,000 ^f
Isle of Wight Council	Unitary authority.	Yes. 33 parishes.	£144,500,000 ^g
Council of the Isles of Scilly	Sui generis unitary authority. Smallest unitary authority by population in England.	No.	£6,920,000 ^h
North Yorkshire Council	York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority	Yes. 731 parishes.	£684,760,000 ⁱ
Rutland County Council	Unitary authority. Smallest unitary authority by population in mainland England.	Yes. 57 parishes.	£49,000,000 ^j
Shropshire Council	Unitary authority.	Yes. 230 parishes.	£709,470,000 ^k
Westmorland and Furness Council	Unitary authority.	Yes. 136 parishes.	£270,000,000 ^l
Britain's Leading Edge	£4.5 billion 3.8% of England's total service expenditure.	2,197 parishes. 21% of England's parishes.	
England^m Local authority budget (2023/2024)	£117.6 billion	10,464 parishes.	

Sources: ^aCornwall Council, 2024a, ^bCumberland Council, 2024a, ^cDurham County Council, 2024a, ^dEast Riding of Yorkshire Council, 2024a, ^eDorset Council, 2024a, ^fHerefordshire Council, 2024a, ^gIsle of Wight Council, 2024, ^hCouncil of the Isles of Scilly, 2024, ⁱNorth Yorkshire Council, 2024a, ^jRutland County Council, 2024a, ^kShropshire Council, 2024a, ^lWestmorland and Furness Council, 2023, ^mDepartment for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2023.

The total budget of the BLE is just over £4.5 billion, representing 3.8% of England’s total local authority budget. Cornwall and Shropshire councils each have the largest budgets, each with over £700 million. The average budget for the BLE authorities is over £375 million but this is slightly skewed by the relatively small budgets in Rutland and the Isles of Scilly. Table 2 further illustrates the range of budgets per capita from England’s smallest authority in the Isles of Scilly where spending is highest, to Dorset where it is lowest. It is also striking to see the extent to which BLE finances are below the English average, with only Scilly and Shropshire being exceptions to this trend. Overall, BLE areas have 31% less budget than other local authority areas in England.

Table 2. 2024/25 budget per capita for each BLE area

Local authority	2024/25 budget per capita
Cornwall Council	£1,351.92
Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council (combined)	£1,178.47
Durham County Council	£1,081.77
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	£1,177.38
Dorset Council	£992.36
Herefordshire Council	£1,097.33
Isle of Wight Council	£1,028.47
Council of the Isles of Scilly	£3,295.24
North Yorkshire County Council	£1,132.02
Rutland County Council	£1,195.12
Shropshire Council	£2,176.98
Britain’s Leading Edge	£1,427.91
England	£2,081.78

Sources: Data presented in Table 1 have been applied to the census data presented in Table 3. The census data are from 2021, so the exact figures will be slightly different, based on population changes between 2021 and 2025.



Demographics

Population

As indicated in Table 3, the combined population of the 12 BLE areas is 3,613,100 (rounded to nearest 100, for 2021). This accounts for 6.5% of England's population of 57 million. None of the BLE authorities have a major population centre and the rural nature of each authority means that the population is located in relatively small settlements and dispersed across each area. Between the 2011 and 2021 censuses, BLE authorities had a 2.3% increase in population, with England's population rising by 6.6% in the same period.

Table 3. The population and population change of Britain's Leading Edge areas

Area name	Population (2021)	% trend since 2011 census	% of England's population
Cornwall	570,300	+7.1	1.01
County Durham	522,100	+1.7	0.92
Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness (combined)	499,800	+/-0	0.89
East Riding of Yorkshire	342,200	+2.4	0.61
Dorset	379,600	+4.0	0.67
Herefordshire	187,000	+1.9	0.33
Isle of Wight	140,500	+1.6	0.25
Isles of Scilly	2,100	-6.8	0.004
North Yorkshire	604,900	+0.6	1.07
Rutland	41,000	+9.8	0.07
Shropshire	323,600	+5.7	0.57
Britain's Leading Edge	3,613,000	+2.3	6.4 (rounded)
England	56,490,000	+6.6%	

Sources: Data provided by the Office for National Statistics (2024a) for Britain's Leading Edge have been used in conjunction with population estimates from mid-2022 (Office for National Statistics, 2024b).

Table 4 demonstrates the changes due to inward and outward migration for the BLE areas. In general, higher levels of younger people are leaving BLE areas and higher levels of older people are moving into BLE areas when compared to England's national average. This is particularly pronounced in Dorset and on the Isle of Wight, where net outward migration for those aged 35-49 is around 2% above the national average. In the same areas, net inward migration for those aged between 65-74 is 1.5% (Dorset) and 2.8% (Isle of Wight) above the national average.

Table 4. Population changes from the 2011 to 2021 census in BLE areas across 5 age metrics

Area name	Population change aged 10-15	Population change aged 20-24	Population change aged 35-49	Population change aged 65-74	Population change aged 85 +
Cornwall	-0.4%	-0.3%	-2.8%	+2.0%	+0.2%
County Durham	+0.1%	-0.5%	-3.5%	+1.9%	+0.4%
East Riding of Yorkshire	-0.4%	-0.5%	-4.3%	+2.6%	+0.6%
Dorset	-0.4%	-0.8%	-3.8%	+2.7%	+0.6%
Herefordshire	-0.6%	-0.7%	-3.6%	+2.4%	+0.6%
Isle of Wight	-1.0%	-0.7%	-3.9%	+3.0%	+0.1%
Isles of Scilly	-0.3%	-1.0%	+3.2%	+1.2%	+0.6%
Rutland	-0.4%	-0.2%	-2.9%	+1.7%	+0.6%
Shropshire	-0.7%	-0.7%	-4.1%	+2.0%	+0.6%
Britain's Leading Edge (9 areas)	-0.4%	-0.5%	-2.3%	+1.8%	+0.4%
England	+0.2%	-0.8%	-1.9%	+1.2	+0.2%

Source: Data from the 2021 census (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Data were not available for Cumberland Council, North Yorkshire Council and Westmorland and Furness Council as each of these areas were not included in the 2021 census as they are new unitary councils.

Table 5 provides the age profile of each BLE area, demonstrating that the proportion of over 65s living in a BLE area is higher than the average in England. This is captured in data for those aged 65-69 (1.6% higher than the national average) and 80-84 (1% higher than the national average). The opposite is true for younger people; the proportion of people aged 20-24 living within BLE areas is 1.2% lower than the national average.

Table 5. The age profile of each BLE area (%)

Area name	Aged 20 to 24	Aged 25 to 29	Aged 30 to 34	Aged 35 to 39	Aged 40 to 44	Aged 45 to 49	Aged 50 to 54	Aged 55 to 59	Aged 60 to 64	Aged 65 to 69	Aged 70 to 74	Aged 75 to 79	Aged 80 to 84	Aged 85 +
Cornwall	5.0%	5.0%	5.5%	5.4%	5.5%	6.1%	7.1%	7.6%	7.1%	6.6%	7.1%	5.2%	3.3%	3.2%
County Durham	6.3%	5.6%	5.9%	5.9%	5.6%	6.1%	7.3%	7.6%	6.7%	5.9%	5.9%	4.2%	2.9%	2.5%
Cumberland	4.9%	5.8%	5.8%	5.8%	5.4%	6.1%	7.5%	7.9%	7.3%	6.2%	6.4%	4.4%	3.2%	2.9%
Dorset	4.0%	4.4%	4.8%	4.8%	5.0%	5.7%	7.1%	7.8%	7.6%	7.1%	8.0%	6.0%	4.1%	4.3%
East Riding of Yorkshire	4.2%	4.9%	5.3%	5.3%	5.3%	6.3%	7.5%	7.9%	7.3%	6.7%	7.4%	5.2%	3.7%	3.3%
Herefordshire	4.4%	5.2%	5.6%	5.5%	5.2%	6.0%	7.3%	7.8%	7.3%	6.7%	7.0%	5.2%	3.6%	3.5%
Isle of Wight	4.2%	4.8%	5.1%	4.9%	5.0%	5.6%	7.3%	7.9%	7.5%	7.4%	8.0%	6.2%	3.8%	3.8%
Isles of Scilly	3.9%	5.3%	5.2%	6.4%	6.8%	5.2%	7.6%	8.3%	6.0%	6.0%	7.5%	6.2%	4.7%	3.9%
North Yorkshire	4.3%	5.1%	5.5%	5.4%	5.4%	6.2%	7.6%	8.1%	7.3%	6.5%	6.9%	4.9%	3.4%	3.3%
Rutland	4.5%	5.2%	5.3%	5.4%	5.7%	6.0%	7.2%	7.1%	6.6%	6.1%	6.9%	5.2%	3.6%	3.5%
Shropshire	4.7%	5.2%	5.5%	5.3%	5.2%	6.2%	7.5%	7.9%	7.1%	6.4%	6.8%	5.3%	3.5%	3.3%
Westmorland and Furness	4.5%	5.3%	5.5%	5.4%	5.2%	6.1%	7.7%	8.2%	7.5%	6.6%	7.1%	5.2%	3.6%	3.3%
Britain's Leading Edge	4.8%	5.1%	5.5%	5.4%	5.3%	6.1%	7.4%	7.8%	7.2%	6.5%	7.0%	5.1%	3.5%	3.3%
England	6.0%	6.6%	7.0%	6.7%	6.3%	6.4%	6.9%	6.7%	5.8%	4.9%	5.0%	3.6%	2.5%	2.4%

Source: Data from Office for National Statistics BLE area profile data (Office for National Statistics, 2024a).

Table 6 provides the ethnic background of the BLE's population and documents the dispersal of ethnic groups in England alongside the BLE average and a breakdown for each BLE area. As many as 97% of residents in the BLE identify as white, compared to 81% in England. Across England, those who identify as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh account for 9.6% of the population compared to 1.2% across the BLE. Meanwhile, those who identify as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African account for 0.3% of the Britain's Leading Edge population, compared to 4.2% for the national average in England.

Table 6. Ethnic background and dispersal of each BLE area

Area name	Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	White	Other ethnic group
Cornwall	0.7%	0.2%	1.2%	96.8%	1.1%
County Durham	1.5%	0.3%	0.9%	96.8%	0.4%
Cumberland	1.0%	0.2%	0.8%	97.7%	0.4%
Dorset	1.1%	0.3%	1.2%	97.1%	0.4%
East Riding of Yorkshire	1.1%	0.3%	0.9%	97.4%	0.4%
Herefordshire	1.2%	0.3%	1.1%	96.9%	0.5%
Isle of Wight	1.2%	0.3%	1.2%	97.0%	0.3%
Isles of Scilly	0.3%	0.2%	1.1%	97.5%	0.9%
North Yorkshire	1.4%	0.4%	1.1%	96.7%	0.5%
Rutland	1.5%	1.3%	1.8%	94.8%	0.5%
Shropshire	1.3%	0.3%	1.2%	96.7%	0.4%
Westmorland and Furness	1.0%	0.3%	0.9%	97.6%	0.3%
Britain's Leading Edge	1.2%	0.3%	1.1%	97.0%	0.5%
England	9.6%	4.2%	3.0%	81.0%	2.2%

Source: Data from the 2021 census (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

The UK's health index, which evaluates health outcomes, health-related behaviours, personal circumstances and broader factors tied to where people live, shows an average score of 107.4 for the BLE in 2021. This is 6.6 points above England's national average, meaning that those living in BLE areas are generally healthier than the wider population. Among these areas, Rutland performs exceptionally well with a score of 124.6, while County Durham (95.7), Herefordshire (99.9), and the Isle of Wight (98.1) fall below the national average. Table 7 plots the UK health index score for the BLE and England from 2015-2021. Across all years, the average score for the BLE is higher than the average in England, despite the fact that the BLE population tends to be older than the national average.

Table 7. UK health index scores for the BLE and England from 2015-2021

Area name	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Cornwall	100.4	100.9	101.9	101.6	104.1	103.5	103.2
County Durham	95.9	98.2	97.5	96.7	96.7	95.7	95.7
Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness (combined)	105.5	106.4	106.9	106.3	106.9	105.2	108.1
Dorset	108.0	108.5	108.3	111.1	113.8	113.1	112.8
East Riding of Yorkshire	108.9	110.0	109.8	110.9	109.2	109.7	108.1
Herefordshire	104.5	105.7	107.7	104.7	101.3	101.5	99.9
Isle of Wight	99.9	98.7	100.0	100.3	100.2	101.8	98.1
North Yorkshire	111.2	113.0	112.7	111.7	111.4	111.8	114.8
Rutland	122.2	120.9	120.6	122.4	119.8	122.7	124.6
Shropshire	109.1	110.9	108.6	107.4	109.9	109.1	108.8
Britain's Leading Edge	106.6	107.3	107.4	107.3	110.3	107.4	107.4
England	100.0	100.5	100.9	100.9	100.9	100.1	100.8

Source: Data from BLE area profile (Office for National Statistics, 2024a). Data not available for the Isles of Scilly.

Index of multiple deprivation

This section outlines available data from the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). In 2019, the IMD assessed 32,844 Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) and Table 8 presents the average rank for the total number of LSOAs in each BLE area. Following this, data from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019a) is utilised to present a series of maps which offer a visual geographical assessment of each BLE area, including the IMD composition of each area based on a national deprivation ranking.

Table 8. The average LSOA rank for each BLE area

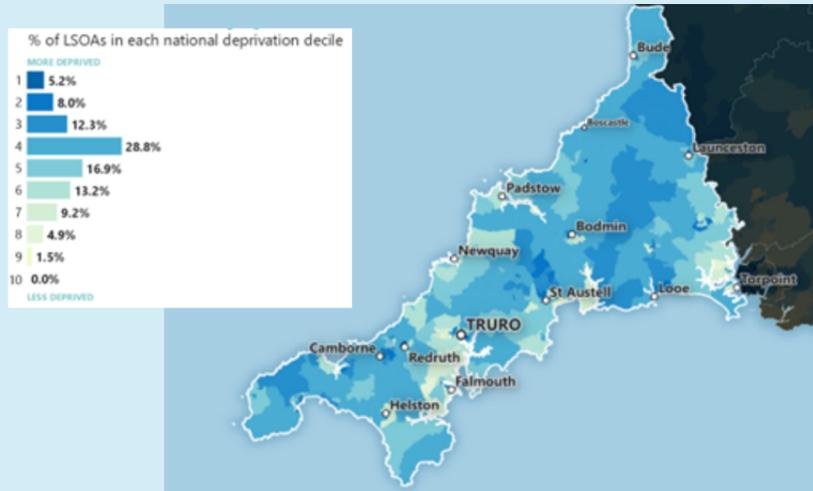
Area name	Average LSOA rank (out of 32,844 LSOAs, lower figures = less deprivation)	Rank of average rank (out of 151 local authority districts and a rank of 1 being most deprived)
Cornwall	19,382	60
County Durham	20,206	50
Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness (combined)	16,650	86
Dorset	13,227	117
East Riding of Yorkshire	12,095	124
Herefordshire	16,384	88
Isle of Wight	19,454	57
Isles of Scilly	10,680	134
North Yorkshire	11,980	127
Rutland	6,306	149
Britain's Leading Edge	13,435	91
England	17,223	76

Source: Data from the 2019 IMD dataset from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019a). In the left-hand column, the lower the LSOA figure, the lower levels of deprivation. In the right-hand column, being ranked number 1 means that the local authority district is the most deprived in England, with a ranking of 151 being the least deprived in England.

Table 8 demonstrates that, on average, the BLE areas have less deprivation than other local authority areas in England. However, Cornwall, County Durham and the Isle of Wight have higher levels of deprivation than the average in England, whilst Rutland, the Isles of Scilly and East Riding of Yorkshire are each in the top 20% of least deprived local authority districts in England.

Next, attention is placed on the national deprivation deciles within each BLE area, with each being presented using a map (retrieved from My Society, 2019). These maps illustrate wide variations in socio-economic conditions between and within BLE areas. For example, Cornwall and the Isle of Wight contain no LSOAs in the least deprived bracket. County Durham and Herefordshire have an overall weighting towards the 'most deprived' LSOAs, while Shropshire is more evenly balanced in relation to LSOAs. Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness, East Riding, Dorset and North Yorkshire are skewed towards least deprived deciles, whilst Rutland stands out by having nearly 40% of its LSOAs in the least deprived deciles, with over 52% in Deciles 9 and 10.

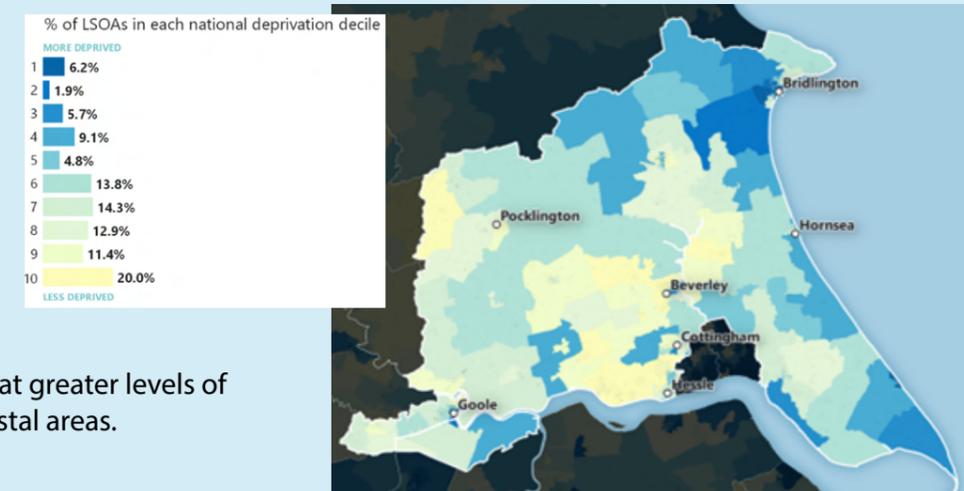
CORNWALL



Cornwall had 326 LSOAs which were measured within the 2019 IMD, with 17 of these LSOAs in the top 10% most deprived areas in England (Cornwall Council, 2019). Camborne Pengegon and Penzance Treneere both featured in the top 1,000 most deprived LSOAs nationally. The Isles of Scilly receives one overall ranking, with the islands being below the national mid-point for deprivation levels.

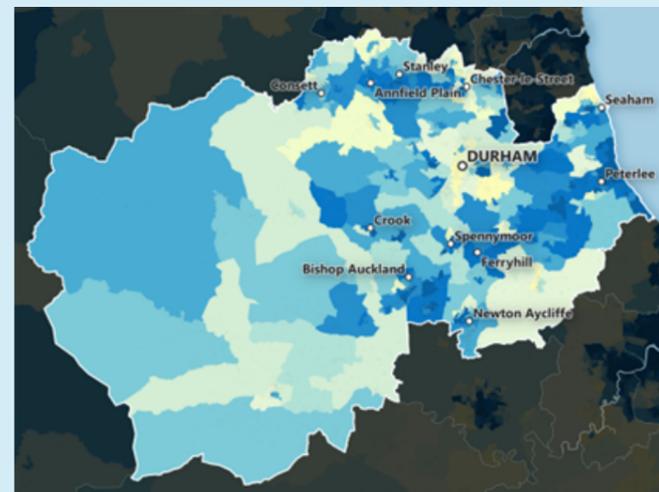
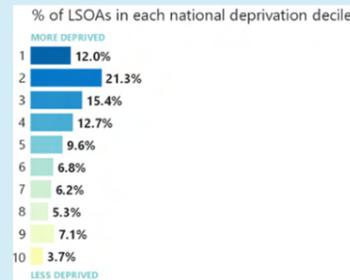
EAST RIDING

East Riding of Yorkshire had 210 LSOAs measured in the 2019 IMD (East Riding of Yorkshire Council, 2019). 20% of East Riding of Yorkshire's LSOAs were in the tenth national deprivation decile, with 72.4% of the LSOAs situated between national deprivation deciles six and ten. The map demonstrates that greater levels of deprivation are present in coastal areas.



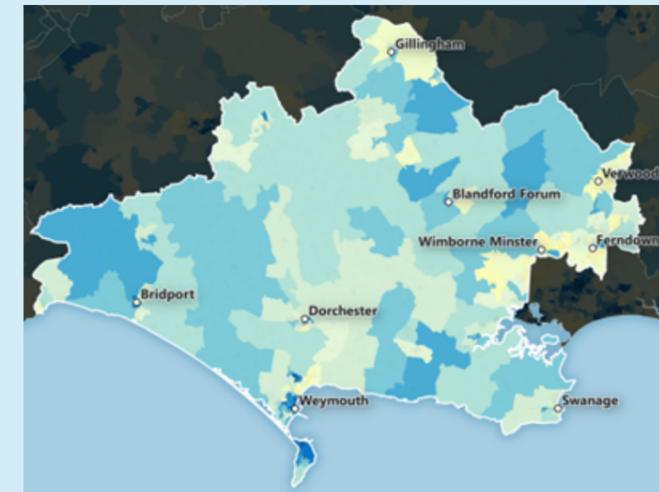
COUNTY DURHAM

County Durham had 324 LSOAs measured in the 2019 IMD (Durham County Council, 2020). 12% of County Durham's LSOAs are in the top 10% for deprivation nationally, whilst 21.3% are ranked in the second national deprivation decile, placing over 30% of County Durham's LSOAs in IMD deciles one and two.

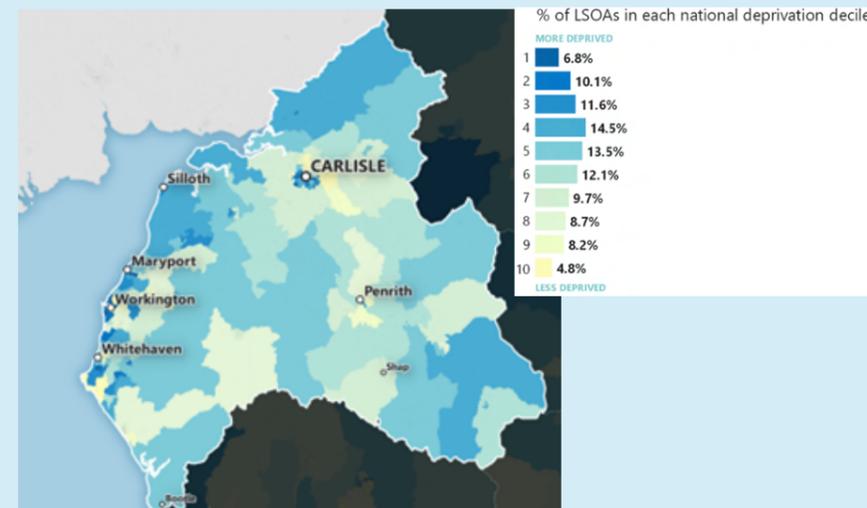


DORSET

Dorset had 219 LSOAs measured in the 2019 IMD (Dorset Council, 2019). 8.2% of Dorset's LSOAs fall within the most deprived national deciles (one to three), while 33.4% are in the least deprived deciles (eight to ten). The majority, 67.6%, are in national deprivation deciles six to ten, indicating generally lower levels of deprivation across the county.



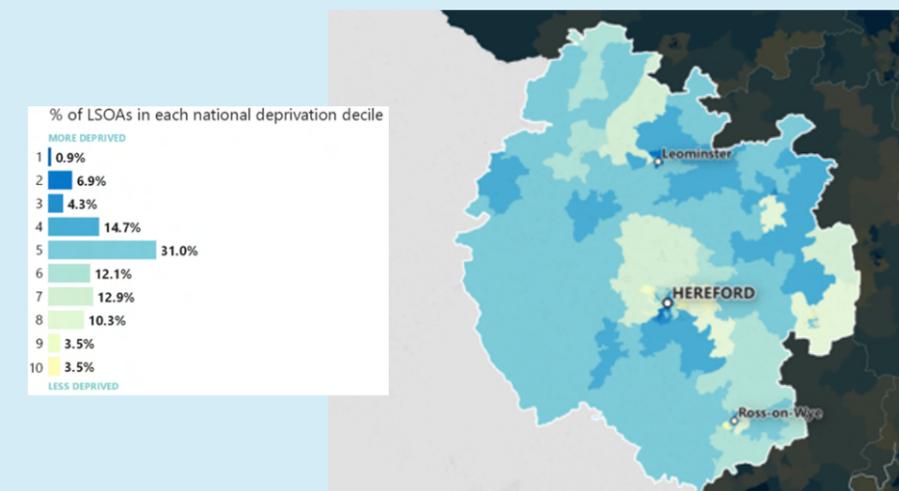
CUMBERLAND AND WESTMORLAND AND FURNESS (COMBINED)



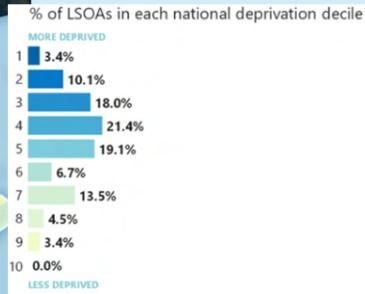
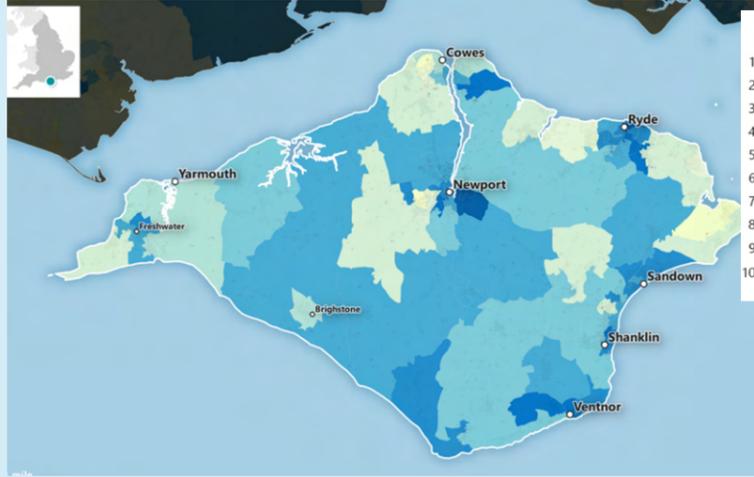
Cumbria had 321 LSOAs measured in the 2019 IMD (Cumbria Intelligence Observatory, 2019). 28.5% of Cumbria's LSOAs are in the top three national deprivation deciles. The map demonstrates that greater levels of deprivation

HEREFORDSHIRE

Herefordshire had 116 LSOAs in the 2019 IMD (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019b). 31% of Herefordshire's LSOAs are in national deprivation decile five, with 35.3% in deciles six to eight. The number of LSOAs in bottom three national deprivation deciles is relatively low at 12.1%.



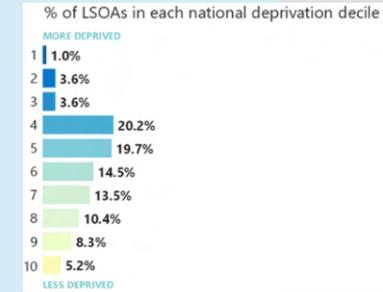
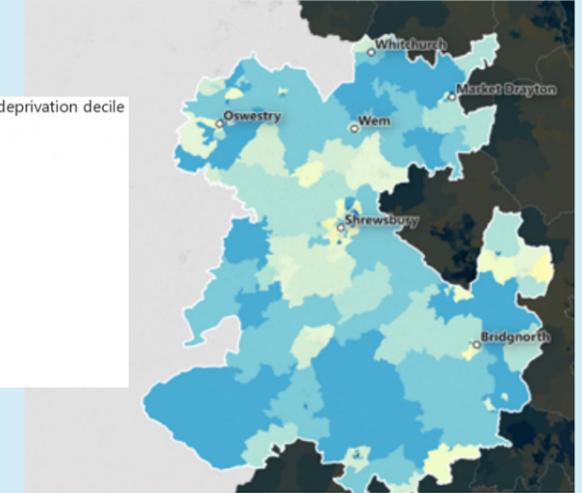
ISLE OF WIGHT



The Isle of Wight had 88 LSOAs in the 2019 IMD (Isle of Wight Council, n.d.). 72% of the Isle of Wight's LSOAs are in the top five most deprived national deprivation deciles, with 7.9% of the LSOAs in deciles eight and nine and none in decile 10. The map demonstrates greater levels of deprivation in Ryde and Newport and lower levels in Yarmouth and Brighthstone.

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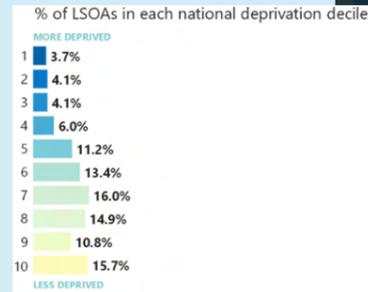
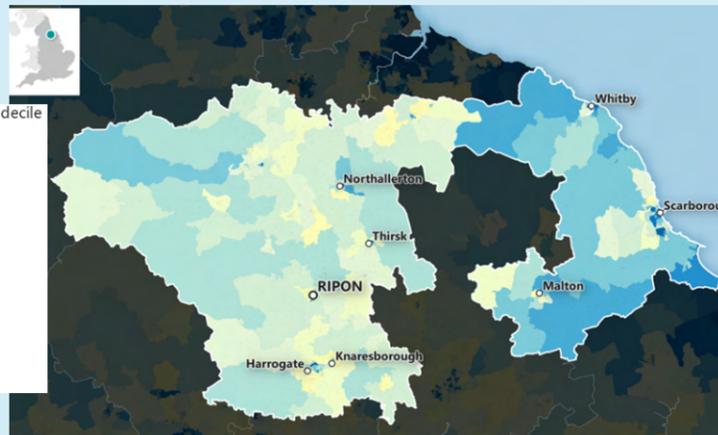
SHROPSHIRE



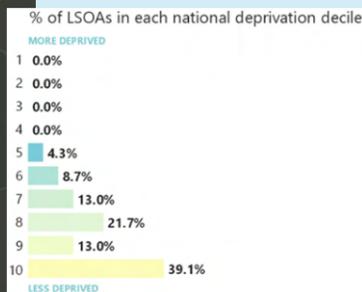
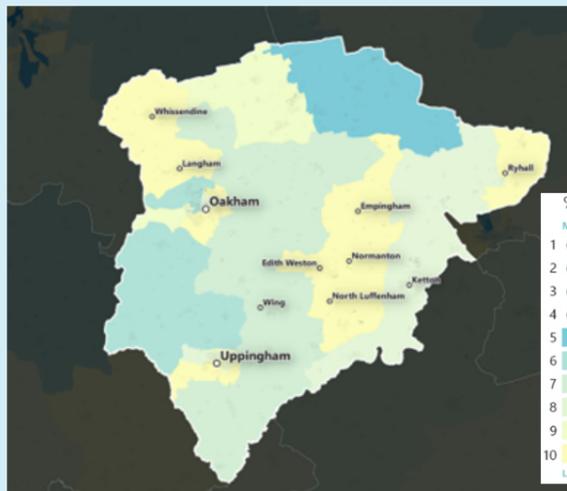
Shropshire had 193 LSOAs in the 2019 IMD (Shropshire Council, 2019). Whilst 8.2% of Shropshire's LSOAs are in the top three national deprivation deciles, a sliding scale of deprivation is then present, descending through deciles four to 10. 67.9% of LOASs in Shropshire are situated with deciles four to seven.

NORTH YORKSHIRE

North Yorkshire had 373 LSOAs in the 2019 IMD. North Yorkshire has lower levels of deprivation in the first five deciles, with 29.1% of the LSOAs falling within national deprivation deciles one to five. Meanwhile, 41.4% of North Yorkshire's LSOAs are within deciles eight to ten, demonstrating lower levels of deprivation throughout the county. However, the map indicates greater levels of deprivation in the south east of the county.



RUTLAND



Rutland had 23 LSOAs in the 2019 IMD (Rutland County Council, 2023a). None of the LSOAs featured in the top four national deprivation deciles, with one in decile five (Greetham). The rest of the county's LSOAs fall within national deprivation deciles six to ten, with 39.1% within national deprivation decile ten, representing LSOAs within the top 10% of least deprived areas in England.



Land Use and Agriculture

Area

The total land area to mean high water of the BLE authorities is 3,588,478 hectares, representing approximately 27.5% of England's total land area. The largest local authorities are North Yorkshire (901,315 hectares) and Westmorland and Furness (605,021 hectares), representing the first and third largest local authorities by land area in England. Meanwhile, the smallest are Rutland (39,108 hectares), the Isle of Wight (38,072) and the Isles of Scilly (1604 hectares). Eight of the local authorities in Britain's Leading Edge have coastline, measuring 1036 miles. Table 9 provides the total area and this area as a percentage of England's total area.

Table 9. Land areas of each BLE area and associated percentage England's total area

Area	Area (hectares)	% of England's total area (rounded)
Cornwall	357,161	2.7
County Durham	272,208	2.1
Cumberland	301,216	2.3
East Riding of Yorkshire	240,869	1.8
Dorset	265,215	2.0
Herefordshire	218,077	1.7
Isle of Wight	38,072	0.3
Isles of Scilly	1,604	<0.1
North Yorkshire	901,315	6.9
Rutland	39,108	0.3
Shropshire	348,612	2.7
Westmorland and Furness	605,021	4.6
Britain's Leading Edge	3,588,478	27.5
England	13,046,000	

Source: Data from individual councils and from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022).

Dominant land uses

Agricultural area

Approximately 70% of the BLE's total land area is agricultural land, 6.9% higher than comparative figures for the whole of England. According to farm census data, the local authorities in the BLE have just over 2,400,000 hectares of agricultural land, representing 26.8% of England's total agricultural area. Table 10 provides the total farmed hectareage of land within each BLE area, with associated figures for England. The percentage of each local authority area that is farmed land varies quite significantly across the BLE. For example, East Riding has a significantly higher proportion of farmland (83.5%) compared to Westmorland and Furness, where farmland covers 52.4% of the total authority area.

Table 10. Total farmed hectareage of land within each BLE area

Area	Total farmed area (2021) - hectares	% of total authority area
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (combined)	261,295	72.8
County Durham	146,007	53.6
Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness (combined)	475,171	52.4
East Riding	201,115	83.5
Dorset	199,534	75.2
Herefordshire	179,817	82.5
Isle of Wight	22,762	59.8
North Yorkshire	634,074	70.3
Rutland	29,719	76.0
Shropshire	257,821	74.0
Britain's Leading Edge	2,407,315	70.0
England	8,999,000	

Sources: BLE data from Defra (2024a), Rutland data from Rutland County Council (2023) and England data from Defra (2024b).

Number of farms

Agriculture is one of the dominant economic activities in the BLE, with just over 29,000 estimated farm holdings (Table 11). There are 209,000 farm holdings in the UK, meaning that the BLE authorities have 13.9% of the UK's total farm holdings.

Table 11. Estimated number of farm holdings within each BLE area

Local authority	Estimated number of farm holdings
Cornwall	4,535
County Durham	1,669
Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness (combined)	5,242
East Riding	1,847
Dorset	2,241
Herefordshire	2,812
Isle of Wight	358*
North Yorkshire	6,701
Rutland	No data available
Shropshire	3,686
Britain's Leading Edge	29,091
England	209,000

Sources: Data for each BLE area retrieved from a variety of sources, including from both the 2021 agriculture census and from the most recent agriculture evidence pack from Defra (2024c). *Data from the 2011 agriculture census.

Woodland

As a percentage of total land area, woodland coverage across the BLE areas is 1.9% lower than the total woodland cover for England. Data from the Forestry Commission's National Forestry Inventory for Great Britain in 2019 demonstrates that BLE authorities have approximately 264,000 hectares of woodland (Friends of the Earth UK, 2019). With England estimated to have 1,340,000 hectares of woodland (Forestry Commission, 2024), the BLE contains nearly 20% of England's total canopy cover. Table 12 provides a breakdown by each BLE area and includes the total woodland cover for England.

Table 12. Estimated woodland cover for each BLE area

Area	Estimated woodland cover (2019) - hectares	% of total authority area
Cornwall	32,821	9.2
County Durham	18,942.4	8.5
Cumberland	8506.7	6.8
East Riding	9058.6	3.8
Dorset	30,066.7	12.1
Herefordshire	25,224.3	11.6
Isle of Wight	5131.1	13.5
Isles of Scilly	54	3.3
North Yorkshire	68,848	8.5
Rutland	2531.9	6.4
Shropshire	29,881.6	9.3
Westmorland and Furness	33,662.6	7.5
Britain's Leading Edge	264,728.9	8.4
England	1,340,000	10.3

Sources: The Friends of the Earth (2019) dataset used to calculate the woodland cover for the BLE is 5 years older than the data from the Forestry Commission (2024).

Environmental Designations

The BLE areas contain 25% of England's designated sites. According to Natural England (2012), "designated areas and sites represent England's finest landscapes, and very best wildlife and geological sites on land and at sea" (p. 1). These designations contain the most extensive stretches of semi-natural habitat still found in England. They also play a significant role in the maintenance of natural and cultural heritage and have been highlighted for their important role in supporting ecosystem services, such as climate regulation, flood management and tourism. Table 13 provides the names and descriptions of the six land-based designations recognised by Natural England. A map view of designation dispersal in England may also be found at Defra's online Magic Map.

Table 13. List of designations and associated descriptions deployed in England

Designation type	Designation description
Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	LNRs are protected areas of land in England that are designated by a local authority for its local natural interest. Parish and Town Councils can also declare LNRS but they must have the powers to do so delegated to them by a principal local authority ^a .
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	NNRs were established to protect some of the most important habitats, species and geology, and to provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research. There are currently 221 NNRS in England with a total area of over 110,000 hectares - approximately 0.8% of the country's land surface ^b .
Ramsar site	A Ramsar site is the land listed as a Wetland of International importance under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the Ramsar Convention) 1973 ^c .
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	SSSIs are the finest sites for wildlife and natural features in England, supporting many characteristic, rare and endangered species, habitats and natural features ^d .
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)	SACs are protected sites designated under the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora directive. SACs are chosen for their ecological importance, safeguarding habitats and species that are rare, vulnerable or endangered ^e .
Special Protection Areas (SPA)	SPAs are strictly protected sites classified in accordance with Article 4 of the European Commission's Birds Directive, which came into force in April 1979. They are classified for rare and vulnerable birds, and for regularly occurring migratory species ^f .

Sources: ^a(Natural England, 2024a), ^b(Natural England, 2024b), ^c(Natural England, 2024c), ^d(Natural England, 2024d), ^e(Natural England, 2024e), ^f(Natural England, 2024f).

Data from Natural England's designated sites view portal (2025) demonstrate that there are 6,473 designated sites which fall under these six designation types in England. Of these, 1,630 are within a BLE area, representing 25% of all designated sites. Table 14 shows the number of designated areas in each BLE area.

Table 14. The number of designated areas in each BLE area

Area	LNR	NNR	Ramsar	SSSI	SAC	SPA	Total number of designations
Cornwall	14	3	0	136	18	3	174
County Durham	49	5	0	88	6	3	151
Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness (combined)	10	25	0	278	31	3	347
East Riding of Yorkshire	15	2	2	50	5	7	81
Dorset	51	11	4	141	17	4	228
Herefordshire	7	4	0	77	4	0	92
Isle of Wight	8	1	0	41	5	1	56
Isles of Scilly	0	0	1	26	1	1	29
North Yorkshire	18	8	2	244	17	5	294
Rutland	0	0	1	19	0	1	21
Shropshire	36	4	1	111	5	0	159
Britain's Leading Edge	208	63	11	1211	109	28	1630
England	1702	221	73	4129	260	88	6473

Sources: Data from Natural England's (2025) designated sites view portal.

Alongside the designations listed above, the BLE areas also include a range of National Parks, of which there are a total of 10 in England. According to National Parks UK (2025), these areas have over 330 nature recovery projects and have “stunning natural beauty, beautiful wildlife and fascinating cultural heritage” (para. 2). There are also 46 National Landscapes in the UK: “places with national importance, protected for the nation’s benefit: cherished by their communities and celebrated by the nation” (National Landscapes, 2025, para. 1). Table 15 outlines the National Parks (3) and National Landscapes (11) which fall within the BLE areas.

Table 15. The number of national parks and national landscapes with the BLE

Area	National Parks	National Landscapes
Cornwall	N/A	Cornwall National Landscape
County Durham	Yorkshire Dales National Park	North Pennines National Landscape
Cumberland	Lake District National Park	Solway Coast National Landscape
East Riding	N/A	N/A
Dorset	New Forest	Dorset National Landscape
Herefordshire	N/A	Malvern Hills National Landscape Wye Valley National Landscape
Isle of Wight	N/A	Isle of Wight National Landscape
Isles of Scilly	N/A	Isles of Scilly National Landscape
North Yorkshire	North York Moors National Park Yorkshire Dales National Park	Nidderdale National Landscape Howardian Hills National Landscape North Pennines National Landscape
Rutland	N/A	N/A
Shropshire	N/A	Shropshire Hills National Landscape
Westmorland and Furness	Lake District National Park Yorkshire Dales National Park	North Pennines National Landscape
Britain's Leading Edge	3	11
England	10	46

Sources: Data from National Parks UK (2024) and National Landscapes (2024).

Marine and waterways

The BLE areas play a significant role in England's water management. Data from the Office for National Statistics (2024) shows that BLE authorities hold 53% of England's inland water. Alongside this, analysis of data from Durant and Counsell (2018) on the 274 reservoirs amounting to 90% of the UK's water storage, reveals that BLE areas have capacity to hold over 602 million cubic meters of water, comprising 32.1% of the total reservoir capacity in England. Of the 12 local authorities, seven contribute to this capacity (Cornwall, Shropshire, Rutland, North Yorkshire, County Durham, Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness), meaning

Table 16. Reservoir capacity of the BLE, with associated data for England

Area	Maximum reservoir capacity (m ³)	% of national capacity (England)
Cornwall	37,884,000	2
County Durham	148,826,682	7.8
Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness (combined)	142,872,210	7.6
North Yorkshire	145,822,539	7.7
Rutland	124,000,000	6.5
Shropshire	3,063,320	0.2
Britain's Leading Edge	604,468,751	31.8 (rounded)
England	1,898,845,122	

Sources: Data based on analysis of Durant and Counsell (2018) on the 274 reservoirs amounting to 90% of the United Kingdom's water storage.

Meanwhile Table 17 provides river catchment data from the Environment Agency (accessed through Defra, 2023b). The table outlines the significant catchments in each BLE area and the estimated annual outflow of these catchments in meters³. The approximate annual outflow for the BLE is over 27 billion meters³, providing significant ecosystem services both with and beyond each area. For example, the catchments in Shropshire play an important role in providing drinking water for the wider West Midlands region.

Table 17. Available river catchment data from the Environment Agency for the BLE areas

Area	Significant catchments	Estimated annual outflow (m ³)
Cornwall	<p>River Tamar Catchment Tributaries: River Ottery, River Inny, River Kensey, River Lyd.</p> <p>River Camel Catchment Tributaries: De Lank River, River Allen, Polmorla Brook.</p> <p>River Fowey Catchment Tributaries: St Neot River, Warleggan River, Cardinham Water.</p> <p>River Fal Catchment Tributaries: Tresillian River, Carnon River, River Kennall.</p> <p>River Gannel Catchment Tributaries: Small unnamed streams feeding the Gannel estuary.</p> <p>River Looe Catchment Tributaries: Streams and brooks feeding the Looe estuary.</p> <p>River Seaton Catchment Tributaries: Smaller streams feeding into the River Seaton.</p> <p>River Hayle Catchment Tributaries: Smaller streams leading to Hayle Estuary.</p> <p>River Cober Catchment Tributaries: Streams draining into Loe Pool.</p> <p>Other Coastal Streams Cornwall also has numerous small, independent catchments: Bude Catchment: River Neet (or Strat). Polperro Streams: Small streams around Polperro. North Coast Streams: Including the Valency River.</p>	1,229,904,000
County Durham	<p>River Tees Catchment Tributaries: River Greta, River Lune, River Skerne, Bedburn Beck, Gaunless River.</p> <p>River Wear Catchment Tributaries: River Browney, River Deerness, Croxdale Beck, Lumley Park Burn, River Gaunless (upper reaches overlap with Tees catchment).</p> <p>River Tyne Catchment (partly in County Durham) Tributaries: Derwent River (the lower Derwent forms part of the Durham-Northumberland border), small streams and becks draining to the Tyne.</p> <p>River Skerne Catchment Often considered a sub-catchment of the River Tees but has distinct hydrological importance. Tributaries: Small streams draining east Durham into the Skerne.</p> <p>Coastal Streams Catchments County Durham has several small catchments of streams and becks that drain directly into the North Sea: Castle Eden Burn, Crimdon Beck, Horden Dene Beck, Seaham Streams.</p>	3,626,640,000
Cumberland	<p>River Eden Catchment Tributaries: River Caldew, River Petteril, River Irthing, River Eamont (flows from Ullswater). Notable Features: The Eden flows through Carlisle and out to the Solway Firth. It drains much of eastern Cumberland.</p> <p>River Derwent Catchment Tributaries: River Cocker, Newlands Beck, Glenderamackin River, River Greta.</p> <p>River Esk Catchment Tributaries: Black Lyne, White Lyne.</p> <p>River Ehen Catchment Tributaries: Croasdale Beck, Ben Gill, River Liza.</p> <p>River Calder Catchment Tributaries: Several small streams draining into the Calder.</p> <p>River Irt Catchment Tributaries: Streams from Wastwater (the deepest lake in England).</p> <p>River Annas Catchment Tributaries: Small streams from Black Combe and surrounding hills.</p> <p>Solway Coast Streams Notable Streams: Waver, Wampool, Pow Beck.</p>	2,838,240,000

Table 17. Available river catchment data from the Environment Agency for the BLE areas (cont.)

<p>East Riding</p>	<p>River Humber Catchment The Humber Estuary is the dominant hydrological feature, receiving water from numerous tributary catchments. Main Rivers: River Hull, River Ouse, River Derwent (lower reaches), River Aire (lower reaches). River Hull Catchment Tributaries: Beverley Beck, Frodingham Beck, West Beck, Driffield Beck, Keldholme Beck. River Derwent Catchment Tributaries: River Hertford, Gypsey Race, Settrington Beck. River Ouse Catchment Tributaries: Rivers from upstream catchments (e.g., Ure, Swale, Nidd) flow into the Ouse. Coastal Streams Catchments Notable Streams: Skipsea Drain, Barmston Drain, Hornsea Beck. Humber Tributaries Smaller rivers and a canal flow into the Humber Estuary within East Riding: Market Weighton Canal, River Foulness, River Ancholme (partly within East Riding).</p>	<p>4,099,680,000</p>
<p>Dorset</p>	<p>Dorset's river systems are integral to the Poole Harbour catchment (one of the largest estuaries in southern England) and the Jurassic Coast, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. River Stour Catchment Tributaries: River Tarrant, River Allen, River Divelish, North Winterborne Stream, South Winterborne Stream, Lydden Brook. River Frome Catchment Tributaries: South Winterborne, River Cerne, Hooke Stream, Piddletrenthide Stream. River Piddle Catchment (sometimes referred to as the Trent) Tributaries: Affpuddle Stream, Turners Puddle Stream. River Avon Catchment (East Dorset) Tributaries: Crane Brook, Moors River, Ebblake Stream. River Wey Catchment Tributaries: Small springs and streams in the Weymouth area. River Lim Catchment Tributaries: Small streams in the Lyme Regis area. River Axe Catchment (partly in Dorset) Tributaries: Streams from Dorset's western border. Coastal Streams Catchments Dorset has several independent streams flowing directly into the English Channel: River Char, River Winniford, River Bride, River Jordan. River Hooke Catchment Tributaries: Small chalk streams. Marshwood Vale Streams Main Streams: Small watercourses draining the Marshwood Vale in west Dorset.</p>	<p>1,419,120,000</p>
<p>Herefordshire</p>	<p>All rivers in Herefordshire eventually contribute to the Severn Estuary. River Wye Catchment Tributaries: River Lugg, River Arrow, River Monnow, River Dore, River Trothy, River Teme. River Lugg Catchment Tributaries: River Arrow, River Frome, Wellington Brook, Humber Brook. River Arrow Catchment Tributaries: Gilwern Brook, Back Brook, Curl Brook. River Frome Catchment Tributaries: Little Lugg, Withington Marsh Brook, Lodon Brook. River Monnow Catchment Tributaries: Escley Brook, Olchon Brook, Dulas Brook. River Dore Catchment Tributaries: Dulas Brook (Golden Valley). River Teme Catchment (partly in Herefordshire) Tributaries: River Clun, Ledwyche Brook, Kyre Brook. Smaller Streams and Catchments Notable Streams: Rudhall Brook, Garron Brook, Yazor Brook, Sapey Brook.</p>	<p>1,545,264,000</p>

Table 17. Available river catchment data from the Environment Agency for the BLE areas (cont.)

<p>Isle of Wight</p>	<p>River Medina Catchment Tributaries: Blackwater Stream, Gurnard Stream, Cowes Creek. River Yar Catchment Tributaries: Small tributaries from Freshwater and Yarmouth. River Eastern Yar Catchment Tributaries: Small brooks from the surrounding area. River Adgestone Catchment Tributaries: Smaller streams and brooks in the surrounding area. River Corf Catchment Tributaries: Small streams draining the southern hills near Ventnor. Small Coastal Streams and Catchments Notable Streams: Seaview Stream (near Seaview), Gurnard Creek (flows into the Solent), Freshwater Bay Streams.</p>	<p>630,720,000</p>
<p>Isles of Scilly</p>	<p>There are no major rivers, but the islands do have a number of small streams and watercourses that contribute to local drainage. St. Mary's Catchment Main Watercourse: There are several small streams and springs on St. Mary's (the largest island), but no significant rivers. Tresco Catchment Main Watercourse: Small streams and runoff from higher ground. St. Martin's Catchment Main Watercourse: Small streams flowing off the island's higher ground. Bryher Catchment Main Watercourse: Small streams and natural drainage.</p>	<p>31,536,000</p>
<p>North Yorkshire</p>	<p>River Swale Catchment Tributaries: River Bain, River Cod, River Ure (upper reaches). River Ouse Catchment Tributaries: River Swale, River Nidd, River Ure, River Wharfe (in part). River Nidd Catchment Tributaries: River Gouthwaite, Several smaller becks from the Nidderdale area. River Wharfe Catchment Tributaries: River Washburn, River Skirfare, various becks in the Yorkshire Dales. River Esk Catchment Tributaries: River Murk Esk, various becks from the North York Moors. River Derwent Catchment Tributaries: River Rye, various becks and streams in the North York Moors. River Ure Catchment Tributaries: River Skell, various becks from the Yorkshire Dales. River Rye Catchment Tributaries: Several smaller becks in the North York Moors. Coastal Streams and Catchments North Yorkshire's coastline, stretching along the North Sea, has several smaller river catchments and streams that drain into the sea: Filey Beck (drains into Filey Bay), Scarborough Beck (flows into Scarborough Harbour), River Hertford (near Whitby), River Forge (drains into Flamborough Head). River Tees Catchment (Partly in North Yorkshire) Several small streams from the North Pennines.</p>	<p>4,572,720,000</p>
<p>Rutland</p>	<p>River Welland Catchment Tributaries: River Gwash, River Chater. Rutland Water, one of the largest human-made reservoirs in Europe, is part of the Welland catchment. River Gwash Catchment Tributaries: Several smaller streams around Oakham and Langham. River Chater Catchment Tributaries: Small streams from the surrounding area. River Nene Catchment (southern part of Rutland) Tributaries: Several smaller streams in the southern part of the county, including watercourses from Rockingham Forest in Northamptonshire.</p>	<p>473,040,000</p>

Table 17. Available river catchment data from the Environment Agency for the BLE areas (cont.)

<p>Shropshire</p>	<p>River Severn Catchment Tributaries: River Tern, River Perry, River Rea, River Worfe, River Count.</p> <p>River Tern Catchment Tributaries: River Meese, various smaller becks.</p> <p>River Clun Catchment Tributaries: River Onny, River Kemp, River Dulas.</p> <p>River Teme Catchment Tributaries: River Clun, River Onny, River Downton, several smaller becks and streams.</p> <p>River Worfe Catchment Tributaries: Various smaller streams from the Worfield and Bridgnorth areas.</p> <p>River Rea Catchment Tributaries: Several small becks around the Wem area.</p> <p>River Dee Catchment (Partially in Shropshire) Tributaries: Various smaller streams and becks from the Welsh hills. The Dee rises in the Welsh hills but has part of its catchment in the northwest of Shropshire.</p> <p>River Vyrnwy Catchment (Partially in Shropshire) Tributaries: Several small streams draining from the Welsh Marches. The Vyrnwy flows through the southwestern part of Shropshire, originating in Wales before flowing into the Severn. It is particularly important for water supply to the West Midlands.</p> <p>Smaller Streams and Catchments Notable Streams: Hampton Loade Brook, Clee Brook, Tiddlywink Brook, Bache Brook.</p>	<p>3,942,000,000</p>
<p>Westmorland and Furness</p>	<p>River Kent Catchment Tributaries: River Sprint, River Mint. The Kent is one of the major rivers draining central and southern Westmorland and Furness. Lake Windermere, the largest lake in England, is a major feature of the River Kent catchment, as it feeds into the river at its southern end.</p> <p>River Leven Catchment Tributaries: River Crake, various small streams from the Furness Peninsula.</p> <p>River Duddon Catchment Tributaries: River Crake (in part), various smaller becks from the Furness Peninsula and Lake District.</p> <p>River Eden Catchment Tributaries: River Caldew, River Petteril.</p> <p>River Derwent Catchment (Cumbrian) Tributaries: River Cocker, River Waver, various becks draining from Lake District.</p> <p>River Irthing Catchment (Cumbrian) Tributaries: Various smaller streams from the Lake District. The Irthing rises in the Pennines, flows through Carlisle, and eventually joins the River Eden. Its catchment includes part of the northern section of Westmorland and Furness.</p> <p>Lakes Westmorland and Furness is also home to many lakes and associated watercourses. While not all lakes have significant river catchments, many contribute to local drainage: Ullswater (feeds into the River Eamont), Coniston Water (feeds into the River Crake), Bassenthwaite Lake (feeds into the River Derwent), Grasmere and Rydal Water (drain into River Rothay).</p>	<p>2,995,920,000</p>
<p>Britain's Leading Edge</p>	<p>Britain's Leading Edge areas have an estimated annual outflow of 27,404,784,000 m³.</p>	

Sources: River catchment data from the Environment Agency for the BLE areas (accessed through Defra, 2023b). For the estimated annual outflow, the largest river catchments were assessed for average m³ output per second at a location within each BLE area. For example, the Severn catchment in Shropshire was assessed for average m³ output per second at a measuring station in Shrewsbury. This average was multiplied by 31,536,000 (seconds in a year). This means that the estimated annual output is imperfect and should be used for indicative purposes only.

Nine of the BLE areas have coastline, totalling over 899 miles, representing 11.6% of the United Kingdom's coastline. Cornwall has the longest coastline within the BLE at 422 miles, meanwhile County Durham has the lowest with 10.6 miles. Table 18 provides the length of coastline for all BLE areas with the associated percentage that each area's coastline contributes to the total for the UK.

Table 18. The length of coastline for all BLE areas

Area	Length of coastline (Miles)	% of United Kingdom's coastline
Cornwall	422 ^a	5.5
County Durham	10.6 ^b	0.1
Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness (combined)	120 ^c	1.6
East Riding	53 ^d	0.7
Dorset	87 ^e	1.1
Herefordshire	N/A	N/A
Isle of Wight	57 ^f	0.7
Isles of Scilly	39.8 ^g	0.5
North Yorkshire	100 ^h	1.3
Rutland	N/A	N/A
Shropshire	N/A	N/A
Britain's Leading Edge	899.4	11.6
England	7723 ⁱ	

Sources: ^a(Cornwall Council, 2025), ^b(Turning the Tide, n.d.), ^c(Great British Coast, 2021), ^d(East Riding of Yorkshire Council, 2025), ^e(Dorset Council, 2025), ^f(Isle of Wight Council, 2012), ^g(Council of the Isles of Scilly, n.d.), ^h(Visit North Yorkshire, 2023), ⁱ(Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.).

INDUSTRY AND ECONOMY

Visitor economy and gross domestic product

Table 19 provides data for each BLE area capturing the size of their visitor economy, the total number of visitors to each area and the number of jobs supported by tourism. The data demonstrate that the visitor economy of the BLE is worth a little over £14 billion and makes up approximately 13.5% of the total visitor economy for England. BLE areas receive just over 176 million day visitors every year, but no comparable data for England could be found. And finally, over 222,000 jobs are supported by tourism in the BLE, approximately 8.6% of the total number of jobs supported by tourism in England. The data presented in Table 19 are from a variety of sources, often from data provided by the local authority or by organisations involved in economy and business development (e.g. Local Enterprise Partnership). As indicated in the Table, the size and significance of the visitor economy varies across the BLE authorities. It is particularly significant in Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness, Cornwall and North Yorkshire. Except for County Durham, Herefordshire and Shropshire, those employed by tourism, as a percentage of the total workforce, is greater than in England. Those in a job directly related to tourism is 5.2 percentage points higher in the BLE than it in England.

Table 19. Data for the BLE areas on their visitor economy

Area	Visitor economy	Total number of visitors	Number of jobs supported by tourism	% of total jobs in tourism
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (combined) ^a	£2,000,000,000	19,300,000	53,000	19.5
County Durham ^b	£1,230,000,000	20,150,000	13,178	5.4
Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness (combined) ^c	£3,000,000,000	47,000,000	45,000	37.0
East Riding ^d	£963,000,000	18,300,000	21,905	14.0
Dorset ^e	£1,000,000,000	17,000,000	24,000	14.0
Herefordshire ^f	£637,000,000	5,560,000	7,489	7.7
Isle of Wight ^g	£300,000,000	2,340,000	8,000	24.0
North Yorkshire ^h	£4,006,000,000	31,110,000	38,478	12.9
Rutland ⁱ	£135,600,000	1,890,000	1,750	11.5
Shropshire ^j	£1,000,000,000	13,370,000	10,000	6.4
Britain's Leading Edge	£14,271,600,000	176,020,000	222,800	14.2
England	£106,000,000,000	N/A	2,600,000	9

Sources: ^a(Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership. n.d.; Roscoe Communications, 2024), ^b(Visit County Durham, 2023; Association of Group Travel Organisers, 2024), ^c(Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership, 2024; Cumbria Tourism, 2024), ^d(Invest East Yorkshire, 2024), ^e(Dorset Chamber of Commerce, 2025; Dorset Council, 2023), ^f(Global Tourism Solutions, 2022), ^g(Isle of Wight Council, 2020), ^h(Visit North Yorkshire, 2024), ⁱ(Rutland County Council, 2020), ^j(Shropshire Council, 2024b), ^k(Visit Britain, 2025), ^l(Office for National Statistics, 2024d).

Data from the Office for National Statistics are presented in Table 20 to show the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) generated in each of the BLE local authority areas. The data demonstrate that the GDP of the BLE was over £92 billion, representing approximately 4.3% of the total GDP in England. The ONS dataset also includes GDP data from 1998 to 2022, so it is possible to assess growth in GDP over the course of 24 years. These data demonstrate that BLE GDP has grown by 135.7% in this time, 19 percentage points lower than the national average. Table 20 provides data for each of the BLE areas, as well as the national totals and changes over time.

Table 20. The gross domestic product of the BLE in 2022

Area	Gross domestic product (2022)	GDP % change 1998-2022
Cornwall	£15,767,000,000	+184.2
County Durham	£12,236,000,000	+127.4
Cumberland	£7,520,000,000	+82.0
East Riding	£10,163,000,000	+143.7
Dorset	£10,900,000,000	+132.9
Herefordshire	£5,148,000,000	+114.5
Isle of Wight	£3,622,000,000	+163.8
Isles of Scilly	£86,000,000	+145.7
North Yorkshire	£20,505,000,000	+144.1
Rutland	£1,170,000,000	+123.3
Shropshire	£8,985,000,000	+137.6
Westmorland and Furness	£7,567,000,000	+129.1
Britain's Leading Edge	£92,769,000,000	+135.7
England	£2,160,457,000,000	+154.6

Source: Data from the Office for National Statistics (2024c) regional gross domestic product dataset.

The same dataset also provides data for GDP per head in each local authority. The average GDP per head in 2022 for the BLE was £26,268.75, representing a 99.2% increase in GDP per head since 1998. In England, the GDP per head was £66,445.57 (£40,176.82 higher than the BLE), meaning that the BLEs GDP per head is 40% of the English level. The data also show that GDP per head in England has grown 12% more than it has in the BLE between 1998 and 2022. Table 21 provides a breakdown for each BLE area, as well as total figures for the BLE and for England.



Table 21. GDP per head for each BLE area

Area	GDP per head (2022)	GDP per head % change 1998-2022
Cornwall	£27,400	+140.1
County Durham	£23,169	+113.9
Cumberland	£27,305	+72.2
East Riding	£29,347	+115.9
Dorset	£28,439	+106.6
Herefordshire	£27,278	+94.4
Isle of Wight	£25,727	+140.9
Isles of Scilly	£37,776	+109.5
North Yorkshire	£32,886	+118.5
Rutland	£28,434	+76.8
Shropshire	£27,464	+101.5
Britain's Leading Edge	£26,268.75	+99.2
England	£66,445.57	+111.3

Source: Data from the Office for National Statistics (2024c) regional gross domestic product dataset.

Economic activity and occupations

The 2021 census asked everyone over the age of 16 about their economic status. This data shows that 54.9% of over 16s in England were economically active and employed, 2.2% were economically active and unemployed, with 42.9% being economically inactive. Table 22 presents the available data for each BLE authority and demonstrates that BLE areas have lower rates of unemployment but higher levels of economic inactivity compared with England. This may be related to having greater numbers of retired people in BLE areas, but may also be due to disability rates.

Table 22. Economic activity levels for each BLE area

Local authority	Economically active and employed	Economically active and unemployed	Economically inactive
Cornwall	53.3%	2.6%	44.2%
County Durham	51.2%	3.1%	45.7%
Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness (combined)	56.3%	2.2%	41.5%
East Riding of Yorkshire	54.2%	2.3%	43.5%
Dorset	52.1%	2.1%	45.7%
Herefordshire	56.3%	2.3%	41.3%
Isle of Wight	48.4%	2.9%	48.7%
Isles of Scilly	64.4%	0.9%	34.8%
North Yorkshire	56.9%	2.0%	41.1%
Rutland	54.8%	1.9%	43.4%
Shropshire	56.0%	2.4%	41.6%
Britain's Leading Edge	54.9%	2.2%	42.9%
England	57.4%	3.4%	39.1%

Source: Data from the 2021 census for population over 16 years of age (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Economically active and employed = an employee or self-employed person. Economically active and unemployed = those who were looking for work and could start within two weeks, or waiting to start a job that had been offered and accepted. Economically inactive = those who did not have a job between 15 March and 21 March 2021 and had not looked for work between 22 February and 21 March 2021 or could not start work within two weeks.

The same Office for National Statistics (2021) census data include measures for occupation, including those working in managerial and senior official roles, professional occupations and skilled trades. Table 23 outlines the percentage of people working in these occupations across the BLE, as well as the related statistics for England.

Table 23. The percentage of people working in managerial and senior official, professional and skilled trade occupations across the BLE

Local authority	Managerial and senior official	Professional occupations	Skilled trade occupations
Cornwall	12.7%	15.4%	15.6%
County Durham	10.1%	16.7%	11.7%
Cumberland	10.2%	15.7%	14.3%
East Riding of Yorkshire	13.7%	18.1%	12.5%
Dorset	14.4%	17.3%	13.8%
Herefordshire	13.5%	16.0%	14.6%
Isle of Wight	12.5%	15.5%	14.0%
Isles of Scilly	17.2%	12.5%	17.2%
North Yorkshire	15.2%	17.8%	13.1%
Rutland	18.2%	19.0%	10.1%
Shropshire	13.9%	17.6%	13.8%
Westmorland and Furness	12.6%	17.1%	16.1%
Britain's Leading Edge	13.7%	16.6%	13.9%
England	12.9%	20.3%	10.2%

Source: Data from the 2021 census (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

These data demonstrate that there are more people in the BLE working with a skilled trade than England (almost 4 percentage points higher than the English average) and there are fewer people in professional occupations (almost 4 percentage points lower than the English average). Although the data indicate that the incidence of those holding managerial and senior official roles is almost 1 percentage point higher in Britain's Leading Edge, there are some significant geographical differences, with smaller authorities such as Rutland and the Isles of Scilly being 5.3 and 4.3 percentage points above the national average respectively. Based on data included in Rutland's economic growth strategy, this is partly due to out-commuters travelling to urban centres such as Peterborough, Leicester and London (Rutland County Council, 2014).

Summary

This report highlights the important role that the BLE areas already play in providing space for nature, with strong implications for the economy. In particular, the BLE areas are nationally important for water security and conservation activity. They also have high levels of agricultural activity and tourism. However, these authorities are relatively underfunded in relation to public spending when compared to the English average. Our research found that BLE authorities have 31% less budget than the English average.

BLE areas have just over 2,400,000 hectares of agricultural land, representing 26.8% of England's total agricultural area, making them especially important for national food security. Alongside this, seven of the BLE areas have nearly 32% of England's reservoir capacity, meaning that these areas are also nationally important for water security. In addition, the BLE has nearly 20% of England's total canopy cover and almost 900 miles of coastline. Taken collectively, the BLE areas must be recognised as fundamentally important for the health and wellbeing of the nation, especially for access to food, fresh water and the sea.

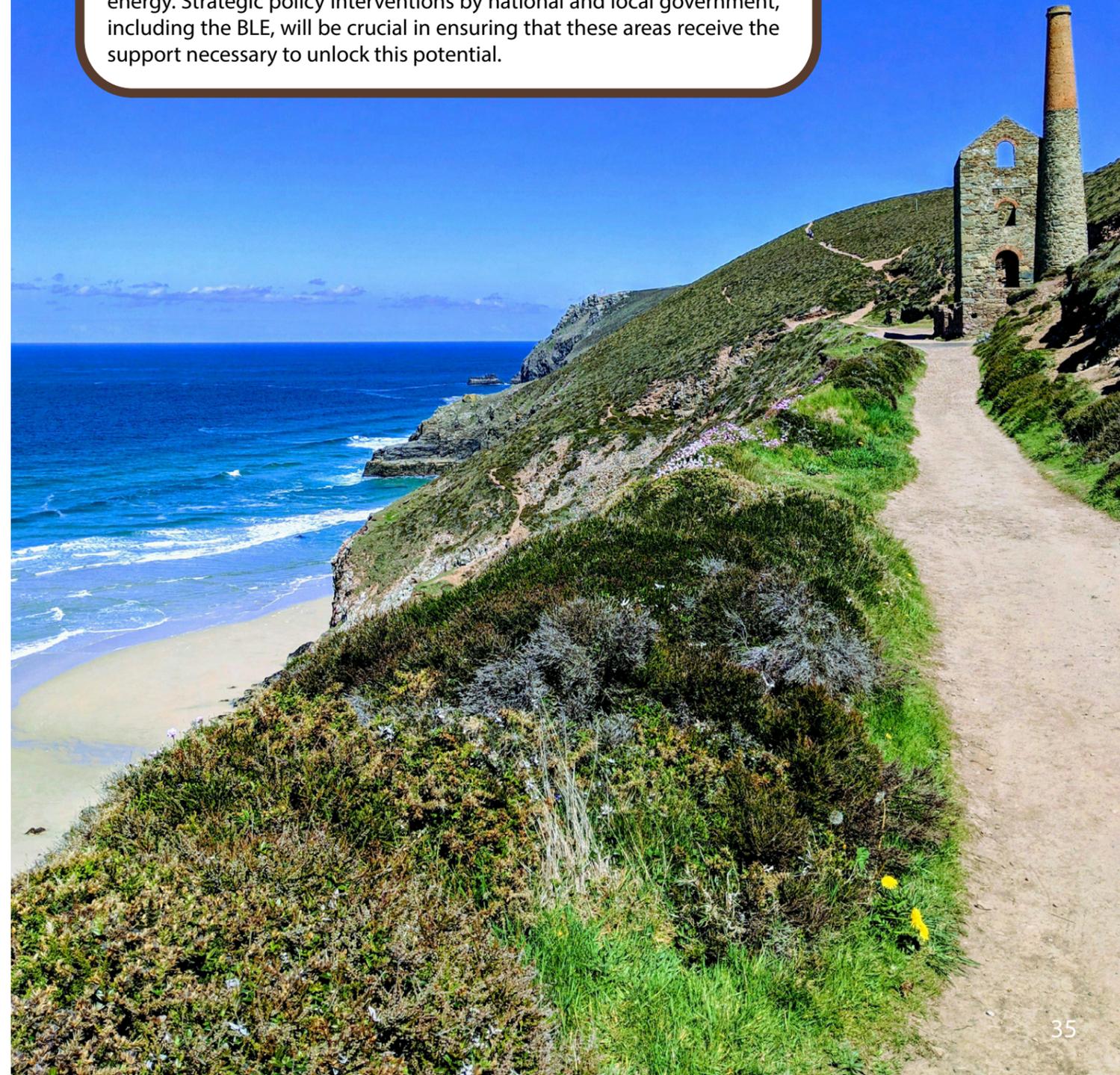


The BLE areas account for only 4.3% of England's total GDP, despite being home to 6.4% of the national population. Our research also found that levels of GDP per capita, and the rate of change over time, are much lower than the national average. This reflects significant pockets of socio-economic deprivation and is likely stimulating relatively high rates of out-migration by younger people, as well as having a population that is more likely to be retired. The data highlight the importance of finding new ways to promote economic development. In this regard, the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and associated activity represents a significant opportunity to enhance the core industries of farming, forestry, fisheries and tourism. Each can be bolstered by new investment in nature recovery as witnessed in the ongoing development of regenerative agriculture, sustainable forestry and fishing, and ecotourism. There are also opportunities to use new funding raised from biodiversity net gain in relation to development to deliver high-impact nature recovery for the region, aiming to maximise benefits for nature and the economy.



From a demographic standpoint, BLE areas generally exhibit healthier populations relative to the national average. However, these areas are undergoing notable demographic transformation, characterised by the out-migration of younger cohorts and a concurrent influx of older populations. These are trends that pose challenges related to workforce sustainability, with risks for future economic output and growth, as well as increasing strain on health and local authority services. There are further challenges associated with localised areas of severe deprivation identified across the BLE but with particular concentrations in parts of County Durham, Cornwall and the Isle of Wight.

BLE authorities are on the frontline of experimentation to find ways to embed nature recovery into economic development, house building and industrial innovation to foster more resilient, future-ready communities at the forefront of the transition to green jobs, finance and renewable energy. Strategic policy interventions by national and local government, including the BLE, will be crucial in ensuring that these areas receive the support necessary to unlock this potential.



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