



# A Community Centered Approach to Defining Rural and Coastal for the Elevate Study

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## INTRODUCTION

Accessing urgent and emergency care (UEC) in rural and coastal areas can be more difficult than in other parts of England. These communities often experience problems like long distances to services, fewer healthcare workers, and a high health service demand during tourist seasons. Coastal and rural populations in England face long standing health inequalities and unique challenges associated with the seasonality of their local economy which is also reflected in the pressures seen within their local health care services.

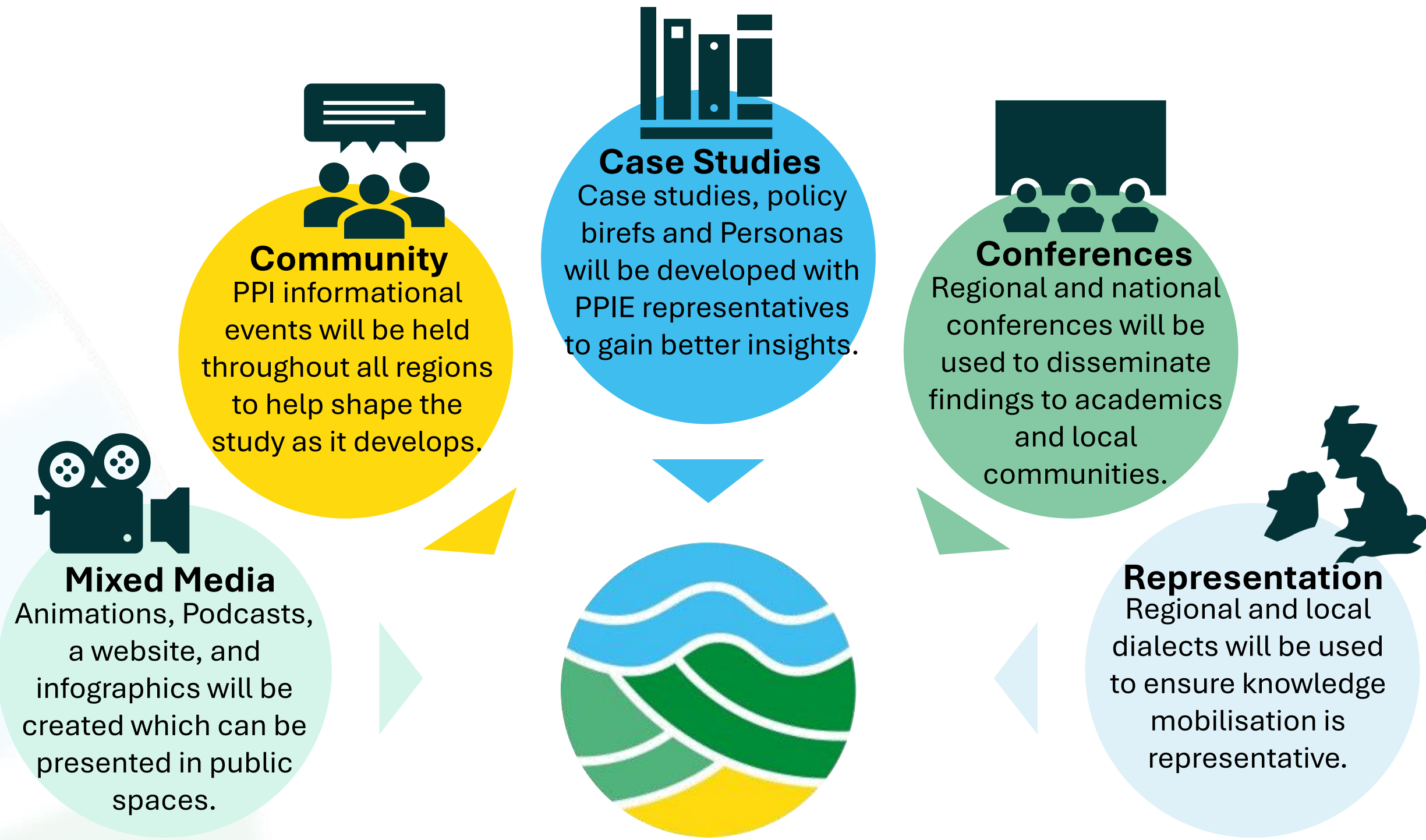
The definition of what is rural and coastal differs depending on several factors with confounding definitions often observed between academic texts, governmental documents, and the opinions of the local community. The 2021 Census redefined the classification of rurality which removed many areas where the local communities defined themselves as rural<sup>1</sup>. In addition, the Office for National Statistics define Coastal areas as places which have a boundary within 1 km of the coastline and more 50% of its surface area within 3 km of the coastline, however this makes identification of rural or coastal UEC difficult.

To account for the differences in definition between academia, government organisations and account for the lived experiences of those who inhabit rural and coastal areas, a community centered approach to developed. This ensures that when identifying sites to participate in the study a community centered perspective is taken to ensure all sites are appropriately captured based on the region they serve and not necessarily the distance from the statistical coast.



## ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

To develop the definition of rural and coastal which accounts for academic, government, and community interpretations, a community engagement strategy was developed with a Scarborough based community organisation, SeeChange in Scarborough and Scarborough Coastal Health and Care Research Collaborative (SHARC) at York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS FT. A summary of the strategy is visualized below:



## DEFINITIONS OF RURAL AND COASTAL

### Chief Medical Officer's Report 2021<sup>2</sup>

No single, formal definition of "rural coastal" areas. The report uses a functional and descriptive definition of what coastal communities are which often overlap with rural characteristics.

#### Coastal communities

- Defined as the villages, towns, and cities along England's coast, including:
  - Small coastal towns with high deprivation
  - Former industrial or fishing towns with economic decline
  - Tourism-dependent areas with seasonal employment
  - Peripheral locations with limited transport and service access

### The Office for National Statistics (ONS)<sup>3</sup> & DEFRA<sup>1</sup>

ONS doesn't use the term "rural coastal" as a standalone category but combines coastal classification with rural-urban classification.

#### Coastal communities

- Built-up areas located within 500 metres of the mean high-water mark
- Activities like tourism or ports are not required for classification.

#### Rural Areas (DEFRA)

- Settlements with populations under 10,000 people
- Includes villages, hamlets, and isolated dwellings.
- Further classified by proximity to major towns or cities (e.g., "remote rural")

### Academics

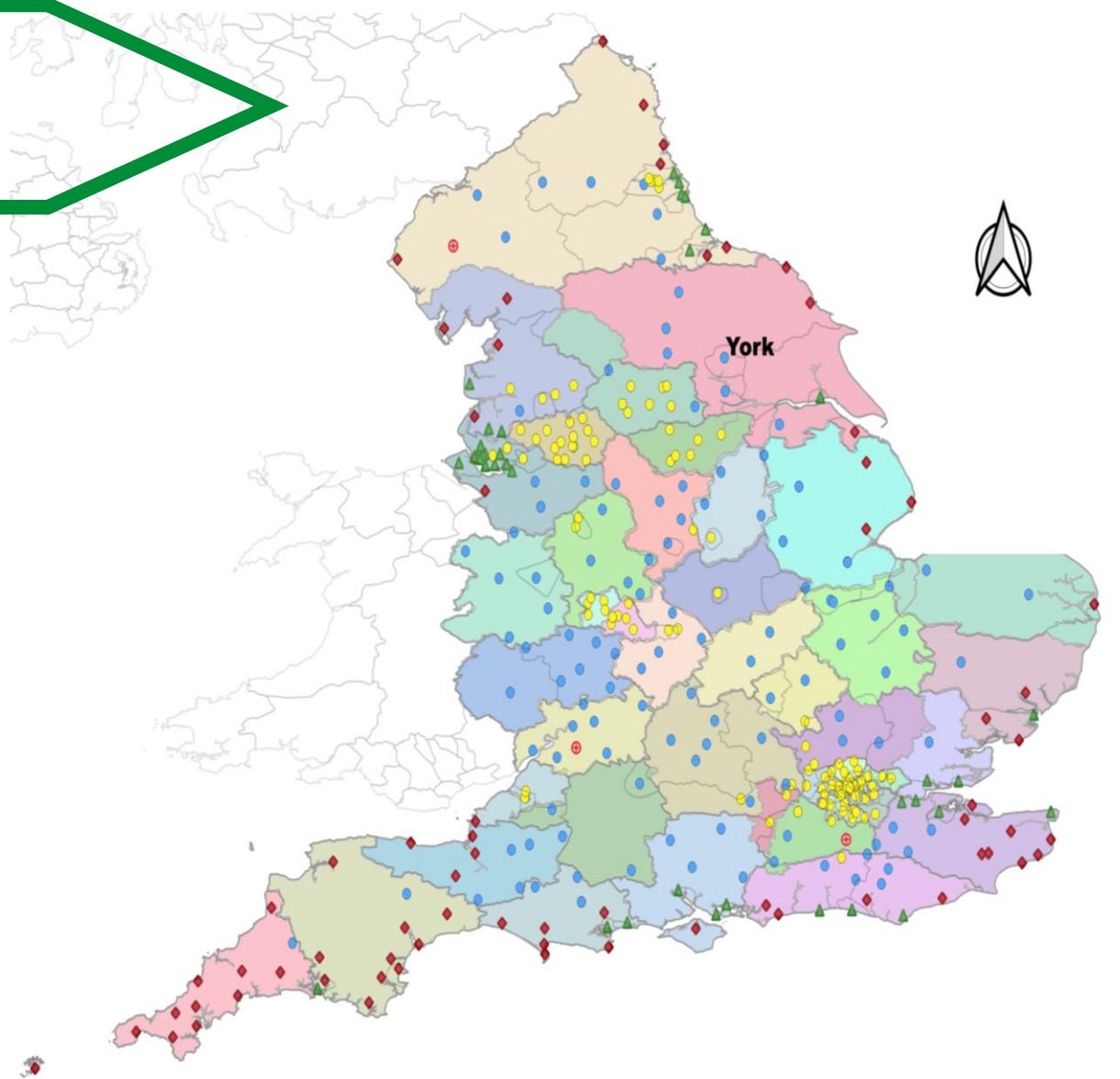
Rural and coastal communities are defined as geographically isolated populations with limited access to health and social care services<sup>4</sup>

This includes several factors such as:

- Transport and digital exclusion
- Workforce shortages
- Socioeconomic disadvantage
- Underrepresentation in research and policy

#### The ELEVATE Study Approach

The approach in Elevate is to work with the communities to ensure academic definitions align with the community definition to capture as many innovations in care as possible.



The map displays England's 42 ICB boundaries in distinct colours, with coloured dots marking sample NHS service locations, including key sites in York. The interactive version will reveal each site's unique characteristics and identifying details.



## DEFINING RURAL AND COASTAL WITH THE COMMUNITY

Coastal & Rural describes living in Scarborough really well! Within just a few miles in one direction I can sit or walk on the beach; in other directions, farmland, woodland and moorland - again just a few miles away.

To me Coastal means – Being close enough to the sea that it shapes everyday life. The sound of gulls overhead, sea frets rolling in, and industries linked to the water. Living so close that you rarely visit the beach because "it's always there."

Rural refers to places that are outside of towns & cities... sparsely populated... characterised by natural landscapes; fields, woods, moors, or farmland... reliant on agriculture, tourism... local businesses. With limited public transport and fewer services. Rural life being quieter pace... can mean challenges like digital connectivity, access to healthcare, isolation or [fewer] job opportunities...leading to... people leaving.

#### References

- 1- Rural Urban Classification Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Updated 2025)
- 2- Chief Medical Officer's annual report 2021: health in coastal communities, Department of Health and Social Care (2021)
- 3 - Coastal communities, characteristics of built-up areas, England and Wales: Census 2021 Office of National Statistics (2021)
- 4- Toolkit for Rural and Coastal Health Research Lincoln International Institute for Rural Health (2024)