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Old and young are living further apart

Profound changes in where older and younger people live in England and Wales over the past 20 years mean that they are living further apart than ever before, according to new research by the Intergenerational Foundation (www.if.org.uk).

The report, “***No country for young people: The problems of accelerating rural-urban age segregation***”, compared Census data from 2001, 2011 and 2021 across England and Wales. It found that rural areas have aged more than twice as fast as urban areas. Areas where over-50s are most of the population have increased almost sevenfold. The most rural areas have aged more than four times as much as major urban areas. Meanwhile, the percentage of areas where under-25s are the majority of the population has increased by more than one-third (33%). The generations are literally living further apart than ever.

Angus Hanton, IF Co-founder comments, “The housing crisis is clearly driving this trend, with young people locked out from rural areas and older generations increasingly choosing to live more rurally.

While ‘escaping to the country’ may sound like the perfect retirement dream, the reality is that unprecedented rural ageing comes with personal and wider societal costs.

Hanton continues, “this segregation keeps young people out of the countryside with all the amenities on offer there, and makes it more expensive to provide services for older people, such as nursing, social care, gardening and retail. Furthermore, lack of mixing across the generations is damaging our society.”

The report warns that accelerating geographic divides by age also risk undermining intergenerational cohesion and understanding, increasing political polarisation and embedding ageist attitudes up as well as down the generations.

IF's 10-point policy recommendations:

1. **Build more homes to buy:** more homes for all types of people, especially affordable homes for the young and retirement homes for older people
2. **Build more homes to rent:** more affordable rental properties rurally and semi-rurally
3. **Build more homes for downsizers:** the right homes in the right location at the right price
4. **Encourage downsizing-in-situ:** encourage older generations to subdivide their homes and share neighbourhoods
5. **Combat nimbyism**
6. **Give up some greenbelt:** give up environmentally poor parts for building new homes
7. **Live together:** encourage greater intergenerational living, decrease isolation and loneliness. Promote the Rent-a-room Scheme
8. **Build to share:** create new mixed housing developments that different generations can share
9. **Increase density in urban cores:** build up with more shared outside spaces
10. **Level-up rural areas:** promote economic development outside urban areas so that young people are able to remain in their local area

Paul Brocklehurst, Chairman commented 'The LPDF is delighted to support this excellent research by the Intergenerational Foundation (IF). The Report not only highlights the continuing impact that the housing crisis is having on younger generations but also the wider costs to society of allowing these trends to continue. The UK has failed to build sufficient homes for many years impacting the economy, limiting social mobility and failing to seize the health benefits that new homes and communities can have. It is clear that the current direction of planning policy, including those measures announced by the Government on the 24 July, will do little to address these trends. Indeed, in a plan led system where 67% of local planning authorities do not have an up to date Local Plan, many of them covering rural areas, the situation is likely to get worse over the short to medium term. As a consequence, we agree with the Policy recommendations put forward by IF and call on government to take the initiative and do more to support development everywhere, not just in the major urban areas.

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Notes to Editors:

- Data collected from 2001, 2011 and 2021 Census
- England and Wales only
- Figures given are for median ages

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Angus Hanton, IF Co-Founder is available for comment

The Intergenerational Foundation is a non-party-political charitable think tank that researches fairness between generations. IF believes policy should be fair to all: the old, the young and those to come.