Country Dwellers and the 'Rural Penalty'

Lots of coverage today for the Commons Rural Affairs Committee report suggesting that country dwellers pay a rural penalty in access to services.

I accept that this is true for some services (e.g. broadband). However, the same report also tells us that many rural areas have very high house prices relative to income. This tells us that the countryside must provide a lot of amenities that make people willing to accept low real wages (as measured by the difference between house prices and incomes). In short, the data tell us that overall the countryside is a pretty nice place to live. I'm not sure in what sense this constitutes a rural penalty.

Of course, this is not to deny the fact that the countryside may not be such a nice place to live if you are poor. But then that's also true of most of our cities. What this teaches us is that, once again, simple comparisons between urban and rural areas are misleading and fairly pointless. We need to focus on individuals and families and understand the implications for different groups of different levels of public service provision.

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