

RSN DRAFT

REVITALISING RURAL – REALISING THE VISION

Decarbonising Rural Communities and Economies

Why it matters

The impacts of dangerous climate change will affect all communities. This is already clear from the rural impacts of increasingly frequent storm damage, flood events and periods of drought.

Minimising man-made climate change matters just as much to rural communities and businesses as it does to any others.

Rural areas, which host more than a sixth of England's population and which cover most of its land area, must play their full part if the UK is to rapidly reduce its carbon footprint and achieve its net zero target. An approach focussed on urban areas alone would fail.

There are opportunities as well as challenges for rural areas that arise from the decarbonisation agenda. There will, for example, be growth sectors in the green economy and new opportunities for community enterprise.

It is important that rural communities receive direct benefits where they host development such as new renewables infrastructure. There is likely to be local resistance if the countryside is perceived as being seen just as a solution to emissions from (mainly urban) consumers.

The national policy context

Key elements of national policy include:

- Net Zero target – as noted in the section on energy infrastructure and renewables, the Climate Change Act 2008 set an initial target for the UK to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 80%¹. However, in 2019 that ambition was raised, when Government set a statutory target for the UK to become net zero by 2050. That long-term target has been translated into (decreasing) carbon budgets for forthcoming four-year periods. Progress which is made against those targets is being monitored by the independent Committee on Climate Change, which also advises on further actions needed to achieve them.
- National Adaptation Programme – the NAP sets out risks and opportunities which should help steer the UK towards its Net Zero target. The Committee on Climate Change has stated that it needs further development to identify appropriate actions and to manage risks². Monitoring of emissions data shows there has been very significant progress made by the power generation sector, some progress by industry, limited progress with housing and no progress with land management, whilst the position with transport has worsened.

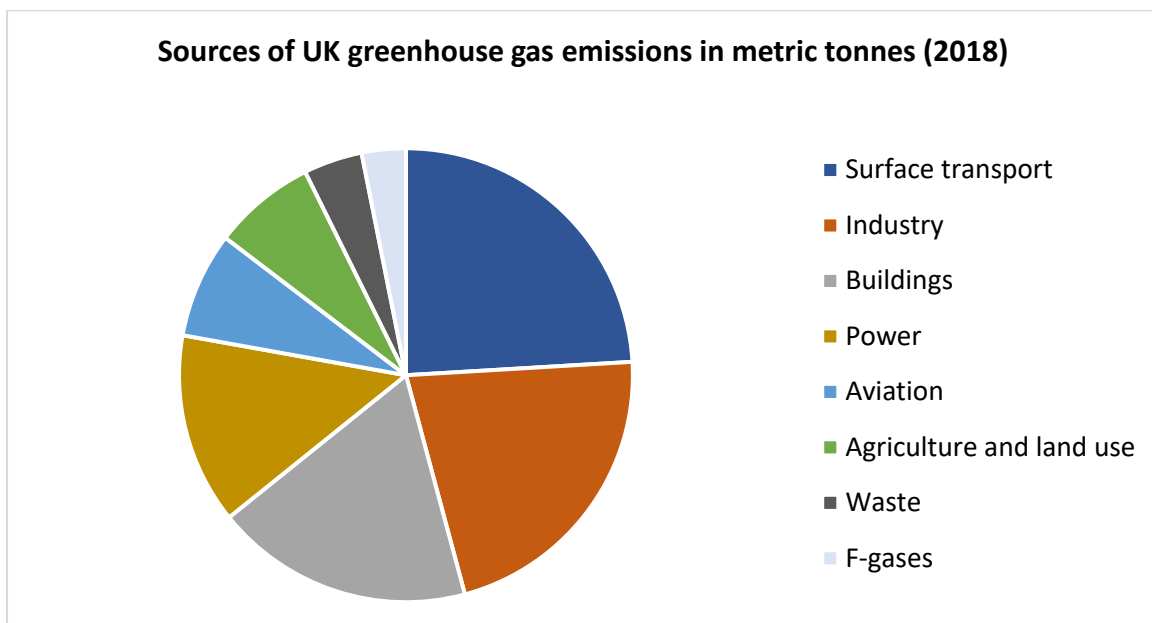
¹ Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is the most common greenhouse gas emission, but there are others such as methane.

² *Reducing UK Emissions – 2019 Progress Report to Parliament*, Committee on Climate Change (2019)

- UK Clean Growth Strategy – this document is the Government’s plan to deliver economic growth whilst cutting greenhouse gas emissions, in line with ambitions set out in the Industrial Strategy. This seeks to capitalise on the 430,000 jobs which are now said to exist in low carbon businesses and their supply chains. It cites the UK’s existing expertise in areas such as offshore wind technology, electric or low carbon vehicles and green finance.
- The Road to Zero – is the strategy specifically for reducing emissions from road transport. It seeks to incentivise the production and take-up (by consumers) of low or no emissions vehicles. There is a target for all new cars and vans to be zero emission by 2040 (and half of them so by 2030). That target is under formal review and could be brought forward.

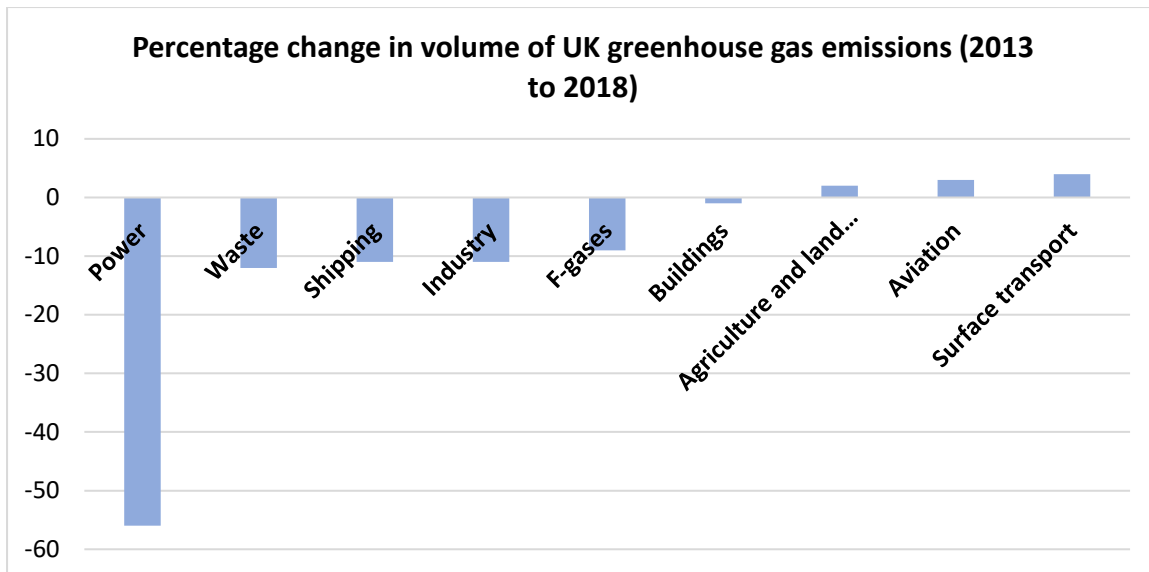
The rural dimension

Estimates for the whole of the UK – both its rural and urban areas – show that the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions are surface transport, industry, buildings (including housing) and the power sector³.



The five-year trend amongst these different sectors varies hugely. Most show a reducing output of greenhouse gas emissions (with the power sector at -56% the outstanding performer), but some are still increasing their output.

³ Reducing UK Emissions – 2019 Progress Report to Parliament, Committee on Climate Change (2019)



As the section on energy infrastructure and renewables notes⁴:

- Predominantly rural areas are the location for 60% of England’s renewable energy generating capacity, which equates to 16,555 Megawatts (MW);
- In particular, these areas are the location for 64% of capacity from onshore wind and 60% of capacity from photovoltaics – two key renewable sources;
- This is out of all proportion to their 22% share of the country’s households.

A good deal of the existing housing stock in rural areas does not easily lend itself to being made more energy efficient. Buildings tend to be older and many are off the mains gas grid. It is notable that those local authority areas with the highest level of CO2 emissions per property are all predominantly rural⁵.

Top six English local authority areas for CO2 emissions per property per year (2017-20)

Local authority district	CO2 emission per property per year
Eden (in Cumbria)	7.39 tonnes
Ryedale (in North Yorkshire)	6.53 tonnes
West Somerset	6.17 tonnes
Richmondshire (in North Yorkshire)	6.14 tonnes
West Devon	6.04 tonnes
Derbyshire Dales	5.85 tonnes

[Anything usable on transport? May be something in imminent Net Zero report from Mickledore.]

⁴ Secondary analysis of data from *Renewable electricity by local authority*, BEIS (2019)

⁵ Analysis of home Energy Performance Certificate data from 2017 onwards, BBC Shared Data Unit (2020)

Policy solutions

TO BE IDENTIFIED AND ADDED AT A LATER PROJECT STAGE: three or four practical policy ideas.

BW, v 1.2 (11th June 2020)