



IT'S TIME FOR A RURAL STRATEGY

A CALL ON GOVERNMENT BY THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK 2019

Rural Services Network

The Rural Services Network is the national champion for rural services, ensuring that people in rural areas have a strong voice.

We are fighting for a fair deal for rural communities to maintain their social and economic viability for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

A Rural Strategy discussion points!

- Are there particular elements you think are missing from our template strategy? How do we address issues such as De- Carbonisation?
- If you could ask the Government for one thing for Rural Areas, what would it be?
- How can we work together to make this happen?

Why are we here today?

“Rural Communities are frequently overlooked in a policy environment dominated by urban thinking and policy concerns. This often means communities either miss out on the benefits or experience unintended consequences from policies which are poorly thought-through from a rural perspective.”

1st March – RSN call on Government to develop a Rural Strategy

What do we want?

*“If rural communities are to be sustainable, the Government must seize this opportunity to work with communities to produce **a long-term, funded rural strategy** which recognises the contribution rural areas make and have the potential to make to the wellbeing and prosperity of the nation as a whole.”*

Why do we need a Rural Strategy



What would RSN include in a Rural Strategy?

- A thriving rural economy
- A digitally connected countryside
- A place everyone can get around
- An affordable place to live
- A fair deal on health and social care
- A place to learn and grow
- A settlement to support local action
- A rural proofed policy framework

A thriving rural economy

– what would make a difference?

- A dedicated rural business support programme
- A rural proofed Industrial Strategy
- A re-purposing of Local Enterprise Partnerships
- A training offer to suit small rural businesses
- A further education system accessible to rural pupils

A digitally connected countryside – what would make a difference?

- A USO that is fit for purpose
- A focus on full fibre roll out
- A drive to connect rural business
- A review of mobile connectivity



A place everyone can get around – what would make a difference?

- A fair deal for Local Government funding
- A viable deal for transport operators
- A sustainable approach to community transport
- A realistic concessionary fares scheme
- A search for new rural solutions



An affordable place to live – what would make a difference?

- A planning policy to fit rural circumstances
- A realistic definition of affordable
- A dedicated rural affordable housing programme
- A bolstering of landowner and community support
- A replenishing of social housing

A fair deal on health and social care

-what would make a difference?

- A fair allocation of funding to rural areas
- A rural proofed model for health care delivery
- A stronger focus on filling vacancies
- A joined up approach to health and social care
- A housing policy ready for an ageing population



A place to learn and grow -what would make a difference?

- A presumption against school closures
- A fair and realistic funding basis
- A stronger focus on rural recruitment
- A workable approach to collaboration



A settlement to support local action

-what would make a difference?

- A properly resourced local authority sector
- A realistic deal for parish and town councils
- An underpinning for local action
- A support package for communities
- A local response to extreme weather

A rural proofed framework -what would make a difference?

- A proper legal basis for rural proofing
- A more transparent proofing process
- A better resources team within DEFRA
- An effective approach to local policy delivery

What are we doing?

- 1st March - Launched campaign on Government
 - Regional Roadshows with key rural organisations
 - Calling on organisations and individuals to Support our call
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- <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/time-for-a-rural-strategy>

House of Lords Select Committee on Rural Economy

- Chaired by Lord Foster of Bath
- Report published 27 April 19 with a large number of recommendations for Government
- Received evidence from number of key rural organisations – including the RSN - Parliamentarians and communities
- Government has now published its response

Lord Foster of Bath:

"Rural communities and the economies in them have been ignored and underrated for too long. We must act now to reverse this trend, but we can no longer allow the clear inequalities between the urban and rural to continue unchecked. A rural strategy would address challenges and realise potential in struggling and under-performing areas, and allow vibrant and thriving areas to develop further. **Doing nothing is not an option.**"

What was the Government's response?



Some limited positivity!

"Over the coming months, the government will expand on its strategic vision and set out how, working across departments and working with stakeholders, it is putting in place a range of measures to ensure that rural areas continue to thrive."



But.....It mentions that the 'UK Shared Prosperity Fund will allocate funding to those places with the greatest need'...will rural areas with their scattered geography fit into these categories?

- Government doesn't want to 'interfere' in other agencies or organisations responsibilities to force them to be proactive about rural areas and issues
- 'Final decisions are due to be made following the Spending Review – appears numerous times!!!

House of Lords recommendation: Government should develop a comprehensive Rural Strategy

Government response:

Over the coming months, the government will expand on its strategic vision and set out how, working across departments and working with stakeholders, it is putting in place a range of measures to ensure that rural areas continue to thrive.

The government agrees with the Committee that those living and working in rural areas can face particular challenges ...without doubt, these distinct characteristics must be recognised in policy making and the government believes that rural proofing is the best means to achieve that through embedding an appreciation of rural issues at all levels of delivery, rather than risk rural areas being placed in a silo through having a single rural strategy.

RSN commentary:

This is disappointing and shows a lack of Government ambition for rural communities, It implies the current approach to rural policy will broadly continue, with rural proofing applied in a fairly ad hoc and uncoordinated manner, instead of adopting the suggested strategic and cross-Government approach to maximise opportunities for rural communities and for the nation as a whole.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should reform the rural proofing process to address weaknesses

Government response:

The government accepts that more can be done. It wants departments to see rural proofing as an essential and indeed positive tool for making sure the intended policy outcomes can be understood and delivered successfully in a rural context. Rural proofing should be seen as an opportunity to tailor policy so it is delivered as effectively as possible in rural areas.

The government will therefore work to develop and promote a greater understanding across departments of the opportunities and challenges in rural areas through a recently established network of departmental rural proofing leads; revise rural proofing guidance and develop other supporting resources to help develop policy outcomes that work in rural areas; and encourage greater engagement with stakeholders in the rural proofing process.

RSN commentary:

The Government's response goes some way to addressing the concerns with rural proofing which have been highlighted by the RSN, including its patchy (and often late) application, a lack of rural stakeholder involvement in the process and limited transparency about the proofing work Departments carry out. The RSN welcomes the decision to produce an annual report on rural proofing, which all relevant Departments must contribute towards.

Why are we here today?

- Raise awareness of the campaign
- To add depth and texture to the Template Rural Strategy RSN has produced
- We want your input!

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Thank you for listening

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