

RURAL CONFERENCE 2019



CREATING VIBRANT RURAL COMMUNITIES



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#ruralconference19



Summary of Rt Hon Lord Foster of Bath's speech to RSN Rural Conference

Lord Foster began his keynote speech with an insiders' nod to the political turmoil engulfing Westminster at the time, and reassured the audience that the topic of Brexit would be strictly avoided for the benefit of all in the auditorium.

His speech built around the House of Lords Select Committee Report: ***"Time for a strategy for the Rural Economy"***. He stressed that Rural England is a great place to live, and work, it is diverse, dynamic and vibrant. The report drew on knowledge from a range of expert witnesses and provided a number of recommendations. He noted that there is not one *'rural economy'*, but many types of successful rural economies across England. Moreover, there are equally many factors that build a successful rural economy, such as access to funding, the pool of workers, transport, housing, local services et cetera. Likewise, there are government obstacles to rural areas delivering desirable economies due to the disparity in funding in sectors such as policing, local government, schooling, not to mention the higher house prices and council tax. It is clear, he stated, that urgent action is necessary, and the report made over 100 recommendations.

Lord Foster's speech made it clear that *"no resident or business should be disadvantaged by their location"*. He also emphasised the concern about the need to retain young people in rural communities. They faced many challenges, which urgently needed to be addressed.

Lord Foster felt it was imperative that *'rural'* must retain its distinct character. One of the recommendations from the report, with this in mind, was for government departments to *'rural proof'* any decisions, and that they should report to Parliament each year how they have done so. Proposals that were felt to be critical to the success of a rural economy were made to Government, which, in its response, accepted that more could be done such as establishing a rural affairs board and making area costs adjustments to reflect area specific costs. However, the Government rejected a comprehensive single rural strategy as it said it would create a silo for rural ideas.

Lord Foster urged all delegates to urgently press for a rural strategy and stated that *'No future Government should have a blind spot on rural areas'* before accepting questions from the audience.

Lord Foster of Bath concluded his speech by thanking the Rural Services Network for its contribution and support for the report, ***"Time for a Strategy for the Rural Economy"***, which can be accessed [here](#).