

Assessment of 2015 General Election Party Manifestos against the (RSN) Rural Services Manifesto

In November 2014 the RSN published a Rural Services Manifesto, setting out its 'asks' of an incoming Government for the 2015 to 2020 Parliamentary term. These spanned eleven policy topics, being: land use planning; affordable housing; local government finance; public transport; access to health facilities; older people's services; tackling fuel poverty; viable village services; broadband and mobile connectivity; the rural economy; and rural proofing. A copy can be downloaded at: <http://www.rsnonline.org.uk/the-rural-services-manifesto>

This paper considers how far those 'asks' are reflected in the Party Manifestos for the 2015 General Election. Indeed, how well they address rural issues. In doing so, it builds upon a discussion at the RSN Rural Assembly meeting on 13th April 2015.

To keep the task manageable this has been done for the three Parties with the most English MPs during the 2010 to 2015 Parliament – Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats. It is noted that other Parties, such as UKIP and the Greens, may receive a sizeable share of the General Election vote this time round.

The appended tables summarise, for each of the eleven topics in the Rural Services Manifesto, the main RSN 'asks' (column two) and the political Parties' main policies (column three). They do not cover topics that were not addressed by the RSN document e.g. personal taxation, policing, immigration, education, defence.

Conservative Party

The Conservative Party Manifesto, called 'Strong Leadership, A Clear Economic Plan, A Brighter More Secure Future', was published on 14th April.

Rural references: this Manifesto contains (page 21) a 'Rural economy and local communities' sub-heading. The text that sits under it refers to rural economic potential, the roll out of "near-universal" broadband, securing the local Post Office network, strengthening the Community Right to Bid and creating a Pub Loan Fund for community groups. Other passing references to rural can be found in Manifesto sections on broadband, farming, hunting/shooting/fishing and the natural environment.

Match with RSN asks: Conservative Party policies which match or nearly match asks in the RSN Manifesto include:

- [Recruiting more GPs (assuming that some go to rural areas);
- [Securing the network of 3,000 Post Offices;
- [Maintaining Winter Fuel Payments for pensioners;
- [Strengthening the Community Right to Bid;
- [Establishing a Pub Loan Fund, offering community groups seed corn funding;
- [Confirming broadband initiatives and targets (although this could be stronger). It is notable, however, that an idea floated earlier by the Conservatives for a broadband USO is not mentioned in their Manifesto.

Other potentially useful policies: the Manifesto has quite a lot to say about helping people gain access to the housing market, improving access to health services, and supporting business growth and local economies. If rural proofed, some of this should prove beneficial to rural communities.

Key gaps or issues: extending the Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants is likely to prove unpopular with many RSN members, who may wish to argue for an opt out in rural areas with a shortage of social housing. The policy for devolution within-England only mentions passing down powers and funding for economic development and transport to cities, as well as further powers for the Mayor of London.

More detailed information can be found in the table at page 5 of this document.

Labour Party

The Labour Party Manifesto, called 'Britain Can Be Better', was published on 13th April.

Rural references: there is only one mention of "rural" in this document, which occurs in a sentence about supporting the food, farming and fisheries sector to create better paid jobs and apprenticeships in the rural economy. This can be contrasted with the Labour Party's pre-manifesto document, which contained a specific rural section focusing on fuel poverty, rural transport and devolution to counties. Moreover, one useful policy in the pre-manifesto is absent from the Manifesto proper – making early Winter Fuel Payments to pensioners off the mains gas grid. Nonetheless, a few policies could be considered rural in all but name e.g. bringing off (gas) grid energy suppliers under Ofgem regulation and extending broadband provision to all areas.

Match with RSN asks: Labour Party policies which match or nearly match asks in the RSN Manifesto include:

- [Devolving powers and funding to county regions (and not just to city regions);
- [Abolishing the spare room subsidy or bedroom tax;
- [Funding to recruit more GPs (assuming that some go to rural locations);
- [Protecting the Universal Service Obligation for Royal Mail services;
- [Maintaining pensioner Winter Fuel Payments (except for higher rate taxpayers);
- [Rolling out fast broadband provision to all areas.

Other potentially useful policies: the Manifesto has quite a lot to say, in particular, about tackling fuel poverty, access to healthcare and housing affordability (including private renting). If rural proofed, some of this should prove beneficial to rural communities. The Labour Party Manifesto also says much about young people and education which, though not topics in their own right in the RSN Manifesto, could obviously be of rural interest.

Key gaps or issues: referring to local authorities, the Manifesto talks about "restoring fair funding across England". While this phrase is not defined, it could indicate a desire to allocate more of the funding pot to northern cities, which some commentators have claimed are the biggest losers from austerity.

More detailed information can be found in the table at page 8 of this document.

Liberal Democrat Party

The Liberal Democrat Party Manifesto, called 'Stronger Economy, Fairer Society, Opportunity for Everyone', was published on 15th April.

Rural references: the Manifesto contains (page 88) a 'Sustainable rural communities' sub-heading. The text sitting under it cites the need to retain local services, deliver affordable homes and provide affordable public transport. It lists six policies, namely: committing to no Post Office closure programme; protecting the USO for Royal Mail services; introducing retained police officers; developing Community Budgets to enable joined-up service provision; seeking to extend the pump price discount for fuel in remote areas; and helping local authorities to integrate transport networks. There are various other rural references in the Manifesto, namely: completing broadband roll out (to 99.9% coverage); helping students and apprentices access transport; the importance of bus services in remote areas; encouraging rural local authorities to apply Garden City principles on a small scale; developing a strategy for off (gas) grid areas; and being proud to represent rural constituencies.

Match with RSN asks: Liberal Democrat Party policies which match or nearly match asks in the RSN Manifesto include:

- [Reversing the exemption of small development sites from an obligation to include affordable housing;
- [Fully devolving the operation of the Right to Buy policy to local authorities;
- [Seeking to fund a two-thirds bus fare discount for all 16 to 21 year olds;
- [Extending funding for local sustainable transport infrastructure;
- [Committing to no Post Office closure programme during the next Parliament;
- [Protecting the Universal Service Obligation for Royal Mail services;
- [A seed corn fund (Innovation Fund) to help communities retain local services;
- [Requiring planning consent to convert a pub into a residential development;
- [Maintaining pensioner Winter Fuel Payments (except for higher rate taxpayers);
- [Helping communities to form energy buying co-operatives to achieve discounts;
- [Setting a more ambitious target for broadband roll out to nearly all premises;
- ['Devolution on demand' to those local authority areas with an appetite for it.

Other potentially useful policies: this Manifesto has a lot to say about topics such as improving local transport networks, tackling fuel poverty, and supporting business growth and local economies. If rural proofed, some of this should prove beneficial to rural communities. Another notable policy is to allow up to 200% Council Tax to be charged on second homes where this is a local issue.

Key gaps or issues: the Manifesto (like this Party's pre-manifesto document) still expects Local Plans to plan to meet the next 15 years of housing needs. However, it has helpfully dropped the pre-manifesto reference to allocating land for 15 years supply of housing. It is not known whether this is a deliberate watering down.

More detailed information can be found in the table at page 11 of this document.

Concluding comments

The information presented in this paper recognises that policies can be viewed as helpful for different reasons. They may appear under a rural sub-heading or they may be a close match to asks in the RSN manifesto or they may simply look likely to benefit rural areas. In many cases the extent to which policies would actually benefit rural communities or businesses is going to be dependent on rural proofing and, hence, their subsequent design and delivery.

There is certainly some evidence that the asks in the RSN manifesto have influenced policy thinking, though of course we would have liked to see more. In a few cases RSN asks are proposed almost word for word as Party policies.

All of these three Parties have a lot to say about house building and affordable housing. It has become a hot topic. Whilst the particular rural dimension to housing affordability is not explicitly recognised, some of the policies proposed match RSN asks or would help address rural concerns.

All of these three Parties intend to protect the Winter Fuel Payment for pensioners, which RSN saw as critical. In two cases this protection does not extend to higher rate taxpayers.

It is perhaps disappointing that local transport is not widely featured as a high priority in the Manifestos. It seems fair to say the exception to this is the Liberal Democrat Manifesto.

Only one of the three Party Manifestos refers directly to funding allocations to local authorities. That is the Labour Manifesto which is quite vague in referring to fairness, but this could be seen as implying a larger share for northern cities.

Brian Wilson
Rural Services Network
Written: 16th April 2015

Conservative Party

Topic	Summary of RSN asks	Summary of Party Manifesto policies
Planning system	<p>Allow Local Plan flexibility to suit circumstances.</p> <p>Allow longer to put Local Plans in place.</p> <p>Give greater weight to draft Local Plans.</p> <p>Revise how 5 year housing land supply is calculated.</p> <p>Rethink exemption of self-build homes from CIL.</p> <p>Confirm weight given to submitted Neighbourhood Plans.</p> <p>Continue grant funding for NP groups and their LAs.</p>	<p>Continue protecting the Green Belt and designated areas e.g. National Parks, AONBs.</p> <p>Create a Brownfield Fund to unlock sites for housing.</p> <p>Local authorities to create a brownfield site register and to give planning permission for 90% of them by 2020.</p> <p>Support new Garden Cities where local people want them.</p> <p>Give local authorities the main say on onshore wind farm applications.</p> <p>Encourage communities to take up neighbourhood planning.</p> <p>Require local authorities to allocate land where people can self-build or commission their own homes.</p>
Affordable housing	<p>Reinstate a HCA rural target for grant funding.</p> <p>Recognise rural premium in HCA grant levels.</p> <p>Reverse small site exemption from affordable housing.</p> <p>Exclude small settlements from spare room subsidy.</p> <p>Allow LAs to suspend RtBuy policy in certain areas.</p> <p>Balance need and local connection on waiting LA lists.</p> <p>Funding to help HAs to invest in energy efficiency.</p>	<p>Extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants.</p> <p>Build 200,000 new homes for first time buyers aged under 40, offered at a 20% discount.</p> <p>Make 10,000 new homes available at below market rents.</p> <p>Extend the Help to Buy Equity Loan scheme, so 120,000 families can afford a mortgage.</p> <p>Introduce a Help to Buy ISA to help saving for a deposit.</p>

<p>Local government funding</p>	<p>Implement the pre-damped 2012 proposals. Protect rural schools and that sparsity factor. Monitor rural impact of Retained Business Rates. Monitor rural impact of New Homes Bonus. Compensate LAs for loss from infrastructure projects.</p>	<p>Conduct a major review of Business Rates and implement changes in 2017. Keep Council Tax down and referenda for larger increases. Increase share of Business Rates retained locally from growth. Review ways to reduce budget ring-fencing and centrally imposed burdens.</p>
<p>Public transport</p>	<p>Incentivise local partnership working to find solutions. Funding to take full account of the rural cost premium. Extend concessionary fares scheme beyond buses. Fund LA provision of transport for 16 to 19 year olds. Protect BSOG from any further cuts. Extend the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. Remove any barriers to better transport fleet use.</p>	<p>Road and rail investment and upgrade programmes for the regions.</p>
<p>Access to health facilities</p>	<p>Review CCG resource allocation to match demand. Ensure more of NHS budget is spent locally. Address recruitment problem with rural GPs. Remove historic debt from small district hospitals.</p>	<p>Fund and implement the NHS Plan to improve healthcare. Prioritise 9,500 more doctors and 6,900 more nurses. Introduce 7 day access to GPs by 2020 and improve hospital access at weekends. Restore each patient's right to see a specific, named GP. Integrate health and social care (retaining existing Better Care Fund).</p>

	<p>Plan services taking more account of accessibility. Meet ambulance response times in rural areas. Invest in telemedicine and outreach approaches. Resolve MPIG phase-out threat to some GP practices. Put public health allocations onto a fair footing.</p>	
Older people's services	<p>LA funding to take better account of sparsity costs. Ensure care providers cannot cherry pick urban areas. Care Act implementation to account for rural issues. Offer more preventative care within GP surgeries. Promote innovative service delivery models. Support initiatives like Village Agents + First Contact. Promote housing for rural elderly to live independently</p>	<p>As above, integrate health and social care (retaining existing Better Care Fund).</p>
Fuel poverty	<p>Policy initiatives must suit rural circumstances. Maintain value of pensioner Winter Fuel Payment. Follow up NICE guidance in excess Winter deaths. Apply Green Deal HIS scheme to LPG and oil boilers. Press energy companies to</p>	<p>Implement the recommendations of the Competition & Markets Authority about energy suppliers. Set a goal to insulate one million more homes by 2020. Protect the pensioners' Winter Fuel Payment for all.</p>

	<p>meet ECO rural target. Ensure energy saving advice reaches rural areas. Promote Oil Bulk Buying schemes and similar.</p>	
<p>Viabale village services</p>	<p>Commit to there being no PO closure programme. Evaluate and review the PO Locals initiative. Invest in Community POs, extending the service offer. Public sector to see village outlets as an opportunity. Uphold Local Plan policies to retain village services. Act to save Royal Mail USO from being undermined. Review the Community Right to Bid initiative. Review pub leasehold and tenancy arrangements. Offer seed-corn (Lottery) funding to rural communities.</p>	<p>Secure the future of the network of 3,000 Post Offices. Strengthen the Community Right to Bid and set up a Pub Loan Fund for community groups using that measure.</p>
<p>Broadband and mobile connectivity</p>	<p>Recognise key need for superfast broadband access. Make basic broadband target much more ambitious. Focus public funding on truly un-commercial areas. Set out strategy for reaching the remaining 5%. Lobby to relax State Aid rules in deep rural areas.</p>	<p>Confirms existing target for 95% coverage by 2017 and subsidy to install satellite connections elsewhere. Longer term ambition to roll out ultra-fast broadband. Confirms existing agreements with mobile operators to achieve 90% landmass coverage by 2017. Provide community access to free Wi-Fi in libraries.</p>

	Improve rural mobile coverage e.g. mast sharing.	
Rural economy	<p>Acknowledge rural contribution in growth policies.</p> <p>LEPs should show how strategies will benefit rural.</p> <p>LEPs to monitor and publish their rural impacts.</p> <p>Growth Fund support should reach small businesses.</p> <p>Promote lessons from the Rural Growth Pilots.</p> <p>Fund LAs to work with Jobcentre Plus in rural areas.</p> <p>Continue funding for Wheels to Work coordination.</p> <p>Address geographic gaps in university/HE provision.</p> <p>Maintain funding support for land-based colleges.</p>	<p>Triple the number of start-up loans for 75,000 new businesses.</p> <p>Create 3 million new apprenticeships by 2020.</p> <p>Make further cuts to red tape affecting businesses.</p> <p>A Help to Grow investment scheme for business start ups and expansion.</p> <p>Deliver more bespoke Growth Deals with local authorities.</p> <p>As above, conduct a major review of Business Rates and implement changes in 2017.</p>
Rural proofing	<p>Recommit to rural proofing across Whitehall.</p> <p>Apply it to the 2015 programme for Government.</p> <p>Devolution to include shires (not just city-regions).</p> <p>Retain a rural proofing support team within Whitehall.</p> <p>Ensure Whitehall consultations include rural interests.</p> <p>Improve the Impact Assessment process.</p> <p>An annual rural proofing report</p>	<p>Devolving economic and transport powers and funds to cities (only).</p>

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Labour Party

Topic	Summary of RSN asks	Summary of Party Manifesto policies
Planning system	<p>Allow Local Plan flexibility to suit circumstances.</p> <p>Allow longer to put Local Plans in place.</p> <p>Give greater weight to draft Local Plans.</p> <p>Revise how 5 year housing land supply is calculated.</p> <p>Rethink exemption of self-build homes from CIL.</p> <p>Confirm weight given to submitted Neighbourhood Plans.</p> <p>Continue grant funding for NP groups and their LAs.</p>	<p>Build 200,000 new homes per year by 2020.</p> <p>Give local authorities 'use it or lose it powers' to end land banking by housing developers.</p> <p>Start building a new generation of Garden Cities.</p>
Affordable housing	<p>Reinstate a HCA rural target for grant funding.</p> <p>Recognise rural premium in HCA grant levels.</p> <p>Reverse small site exemption from affordable housing.</p> <p>Exclude small settlements from spare room subsidy.</p> <p>Allow LAs to suspend RtBuy policy in certain areas.</p> <p>Balance need and local connection on waiting LA lists.</p> <p>Funding to help HAs to invest in energy efficiency.</p>	<p>Prioritise capital investment to build more affordable homes.</p> <p>For private rental, make longer term (3 year) tenancies the norm, cap big rent rises and ban letting fees for tenants.</p> <p>Abolish the spare room subsidy (bedroom tax) policy.</p> <p>Give local authorities in growth areas a power to prioritise local first time buyers.</p> <p>Allow higher Council Tax on long-term empty properties.</p>

<p>Local government funding</p>	<p>Implement the pre-damped 2012 proposals. Protect rural schools and that sparsity factor. Monitor rural impact of Retained Business Rates. Monitor rural impact of New Homes Bonus. Compensate LAs for loss from infrastructure projects.</p>	<p>Devolve £30bn per year of funding to city and county regions. Cut business rates for SMEs in 2015 and freeze them in 2016. Fair funding will be restored across England (meaning?). City and county regions to retain all Business Rate income from growth.</p>
<p>Public transport</p>	<p>Incentivise local partnership working to find solutions. Funding to take full account of the rural cost premium. Extend concessionary fares scheme beyond buses. Fund LA provision of transport for 16 to 19 year olds. Protect BSOG from any further cuts. Extend the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. Remove any barriers to better transport fleet use.</p>	<p>Give city and county regions London-style powers to regulate bus services. Devolve decision making so transport networks can be better co-ordinated.</p>
<p>Access to health facilities</p>	<p>Review CCG resource allocation to match demand. Ensure more of NHS budget is spent locally. Address recruitment problem with rural GPs. Remove historic debt from small district hospitals.</p>	<p>When local hospital services are reviewed, patients and public to have a seat at the table. An extra £2.5bn per year to pay for 20,000 more NHS nurses, 8,000 more GPs and 3,000 more midwives. Repeal Health & Social Care Act to remove enforced competition for NHS services. Integration of health, social and mental care services. A guaranteed GP appointment within 48 hours.</p>

	<p>Plan services taking more account of accessibility. Meet ambulance response times in rural areas. Invest in telemedicine and outreach approaches. Resolve MPIG phase-out threat to some GP practices. Put public health allocations onto a fair footing.</p>	<p>A greater focus on mental health services, with a new right to access therapies.</p>
Older people's services	<p>LA funding to take better account of sparsity costs. Ensure care providers cannot cherry pick urban areas. Care Act implementation to account for rural issues. Offer more preventative care within GP surgeries. Promote innovative service delivery models. Support initiatives like Village Agents + First Contact. Promote housing for rural elderly to live independently</p>	<p>As above, integration of health and social care services. Recruit 5,000 new homecare workers to help people stay at home. Put an end to short (15 minutes) social care visits.</p>
Fuel poverty	<p>Policy initiatives must suit rural circumstances. Maintain value of pensioner Winter Fuel Payment. Follow up NICE guidance in excess Winter deaths. Apply Green Deal HIS scheme to LPG and oil boilers. Press energy companies to</p>	<p>Interest free loans to make one million low income homes more energy efficient by 2020. Maintain pensioners' Winter Fuel Payment, except end it for those who are higher rate taxpayers. Bring off gas grid energy supply under the remit of Ofgem. Freeze gas and electricity bill prices until 2017 and give the regulator the power to cut them in Winter 2016. Introduce a simpler tariff structure (to aid price comparison) and make it easier to switch supplier.</p>

	<p>meet ECO rural target. Ensure energy saving advice reaches rural areas. Promote Oil Bulk Buying schemes and similar.</p>	
<p>Viabale village services</p>	<p>Commit to there being no PO closure programme. Evaluate and review the PO Locals initiative. Invest in Community POs, extending the service offer. Public sector to see village outlets as an opportunity. Uphold Local Plan policies to retain village services. Act to save Royal Mail USO from being undermined. Review the Community Right to Bid initiative. Review pub leasehold and tenancy arrangements. Offer seed-corn (Lottery) funding to rural communities.</p>	<p>Protect the Royal Mail USO, retaining 30% public ownership stake and ensuring it is not undermined by competition.</p>
<p>Broadband and mobile connectivity</p>	<p>Recognise key need for superfast broadband access. Make basic broadband target much more ambitious. Focus public funding on truly un-commercial areas. Set out strategy for reaching the remaining 5%. Lobby to relax State Aid rules in deep rural areas.</p>	<p>Ensure all areas get fast broadband by 2020 (supporting community groups) and reduce mobile not spots.</p>

	Improve rural mobile coverage e.g. mast sharing.	
Rural economy	<p>Acknowledge rural contribution in growth policies.</p> <p>LEPs should show how strategies will benefit rural.</p> <p>LEPs to monitor and publish their rural impacts.</p> <p>Growth Fund support should reach small businesses.</p> <p>Promote lessons from the Rural Growth Pilots.</p> <p>Fund LAs to work with Jobcentre Plus in rural areas.</p> <p>Continue funding for Wheels to Work coordination.</p> <p>Address geographic gaps in university/HE provision.</p> <p>Maintain funding support for land-based colleges.</p>	<p>As above, cut business rates in 2015 for small businesses and freeze them in 2016.</p> <p>Create a British Investment Bank and a network of regional banks to boost lending for business start-ups/growth.</p> <p>Guarantee an apprenticeship for any school leaver who attains the grades.</p>
Rural proofing	<p>Recommit to rural proofing across Whitehall.</p> <p>Apply it to the 2015 programme for Government.</p> <p>Devolution to include shires (not just city-regions).</p> <p>Retain a rural proofing support team within Whitehall.</p> <p>Ensure Whitehall consultations include rural interests.</p> <p>Improve the Impact Assessment process.</p> <p>An annual rural proofing report</p>	<p>As above, a Devolution Act to pass powers and £30bn per year of funding to county and city regions.</p>

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Liberal Democrat Party

Topic	Summary of RSN asks	Summary of Party Manifesto policies
Planning system	<p>Allow Local Plan flexibility to suit circumstances.</p> <p>Allow longer to put Local Plans in place.</p> <p>Give greater weight to draft Local Plans.</p> <p>Revise how 5 year housing land supply is calculated.</p> <p>Rethink exemption of self-build homes from CIL.</p> <p>Confirm weight given to submitted Neighbourhood Plans.</p> <p>Continue grant funding for NP groups and their LAs.</p>	<p>Create a Plan to build 300,000 new homes per year.</p> <p>Ambitious targets to re-use public sector brownfield land.</p> <p>Government agencies to commission house building in places where the market fails.</p> <p>Set up a Government backed Housing Investment Bank.</p> <p>Set in motion plans for at least 10 new Garden Cities.</p> <p>Encourage rural local authorities to follow Garden City principles on a small scale e.g. new Garden Villages.</p> <p>Require Local Plans to plan for 15 years of housing need.</p> <p>New National Nature Parks chosen by local communities.</p> <p>A Community Right of Appeal, where development control decisions conflict with Local Plan policies.</p> <p>End developer Appeals where the decision was in line with Local Plan policies.</p> <p>Local authorities to keep a register of those wanting a self-build plot and to plan for them.</p>
Affordable housing	<p>Reinstate a HCA rural target for grant funding.</p> <p>Recognise rural premium in HCA grant levels.</p> <p>Reverse small site exemption from affordable housing.</p> <p>Exclude small settlements from spare room subsidy.</p> <p>Allow LAs to suspend RtBuy policy in certain areas.</p> <p>Balance need and local connection on waiting LA lists.</p>	<p>Reverse the exemption of small development sites from the obligation to include affordable housing.</p> <p>Allow local authorities more scope to borrow to build homes.</p> <p>Benefit cuts (under the spare room subsidy) will only apply when to existing tenants if they refuse a smaller property.</p> <p>Build Rent to Own homes, where monthly rental payments contribute towards an ownership stake.</p> <p>A new Intermediate Housing Fund to support such tenures.</p> <p>Help to Rent loans for employed 18 to 30 year olds seeking to leave the parental home.</p> <p>Devolve full control of the Right to Buy to local authorities.</p> <p>Various private rental measures e.g. encourage longer</p>

	Funding to help HAs to invest in energy efficiency.	tenancies and clamp down on fees for tenants.
Local government funding	Implement the pre-damped 2012 proposals. Protect rural schools and that sparsity factor. Monitor rural impact of Retained Business Rates. Monitor rural impact of New Homes Bonus. Compensate LAs for loss from infrastructure projects.	Council Tax increases will no longer require a referendum. Develop a process to devolve more powers and funding to local authorities. Complete the review of Business Rates and switch to a Land Value Tax over the longer term. Local budget pooling to create more joined-up services. Allow up to 200% Council Tax on second homes. Encourage the creation of more Parish, Community and Neighbourhood Councils.
Public transport	Incentivise local partnership working to find solutions. Funding to take full account of the rural cost premium. Extend concessionary fares scheme beyond buses. Fund LA provision of transport for 16 to 19 year olds. Protect BSOG from any further cuts. Extend the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. Remove any barriers to better transport fleet use.	Review access to transport in rural areas for students and apprentices. Seek to fund a two-thirds discount on bus fares for 16 to 21 year olds. Create a 5 year investment plan for investment in buses. Re-open smaller stations so more people can use the train. Boost transport link resilience to the south west peninsular. Give local authorities new powers to improve transport. Work with local authorities to better integrate rural transport networks. Continue funding for sustainable transport infrastructure through the Local Growth Fund. Seek EU agreement to extend the pump price discount for fuel in remote areas.
Access to health facilities	Review CCG resource allocation to match demand. Ensure more of NHS budget is spent locally. Address recruitment problem with rural GPs.	Expand evening and weekend opening of GP surgeries. Secure local agreements to pool health and social care budgets by 2018. Join up health and care services, moving responsibility for care to the Department for Health. £500m per year extra for mental health services by 2016/17,

	<p>Remove historic debt from small district hospitals. Plan services taking more account of accessibility. Meet ambulance response times in rural areas. Invest in telemedicine and outreach approaches. Resolve MPIG phase-out threat to some GP practices. Put public health allocations onto a fair footing.</p>	<p>extending access and waiting time standards.</p>
Older people's services	<p>LA funding to take better account of sparsity costs. Ensure care providers cannot cherry pick urban areas. Care Act implementation to account for rural issues. Offer more preventative care within GP surgeries. Promote innovative service delivery models. Support initiatives like Village Agents + First Contact. Promote housing for rural elderly to live independently</p>	<p>Introduce a carer's bonus of £250 per year by 2020. End care cramming, that results in very short home visits. As above, seek more joining-up of health and care services.</p>
Fuel poverty	<p>Policy initiatives must suit rural circumstances. Maintain value of pensioner Winter Fuel Payment. Follow up NICE guidance in excess Winter deaths. Apply Green Deal HIS scheme</p>	<p>Develop a Strategy to help off (gas) grid rural areas. A statutory target to bring all homes of the fuel poor up to energy performance band C by 2027. A target to bring all social and private rented housing up to energy performance band C by 2027. Boost energy supply competition, encouraging new market entrants and making switching quicker.</p>

	<p>to LPG and oil boilers. Press energy companies to meet ECO rural target. Ensure energy saving advice reaches rural areas. Promote Oil Bulk Buying schemes and similar.</p>	<p>Maintain pensioners' Winter Fuel Payment, except end it for those who are higher rate taxpayers. Extend support for Green Deal Communities Programme. Ban landlords from letting out very poorly insulated homes. A £100 Council Tax discount for 10 years for homes where energy efficiency is significantly improved. Help people to form energy cooperatives to seek group discounts.</p>
<p>Viable village services</p>	<p>Commit to there being no PO closure programme. Evaluate and review the PO Locals initiative. Invest in Community POs, extending the service offer. Public sector to see village outlets as an opportunity. Uphold Local Plan policies to retain village services. Act to save Royal Mail USO from being undermined. Review the Community Right to Bid initiative. Review pub leasehold and tenancy arrangements. Offer seed-corn (Lottery) funding to rural communities.</p>	<p>Commit to there being no PO closure programme. Any library under threat of closure to be offered for transfer to the local community. Strengthen community rights to run local services. Planning consent to be required to turn a pub into housing. Develop the Community Budgets model, to join-up rural services and promote their co-location. An Innovation Fund to help keep libraries, post offices and GP surgeries open. Protect the USO for Royal Mail services.</p>
<p>Broadband and mobile connectivity</p>	<p>Recognise key need for superfast broadband access. Make basic broadband target much more ambitious. Focus public funding on truly un-commercial areas. Set out strategy for reaching</p>	<p>Complete the roll out of high speed broadband to reach 99.9% of premises.</p>

	<p>the remaining 5%. Lobby to relax State Aid rules in deep rural areas. Improve rural mobile coverage e.g. mast sharing.</p>	
Rural economy	<p>Acknowledge rural contribution in growth policies. LEPs should show how strategies will benefit rural. LEPs to monitor and publish their rural impacts. Growth Fund support should reach small businesses. Promote lessons from the Rural Growth Pilots. Fund LAs to work with Jobcentre Plus in rural areas. Continue funding for Wheels to Work coordination. Address geographic gaps in university/HE provision. Maintain funding support for land-based colleges.</p>	<p>Double the number of businesses hiring apprentices. Continue the Regional Growth Fund to help businesses expand. Devolve more economic decision making to local areas. Promote a community banking sector to support SMEs and social enterprises. Devolve the Work Programme, delivering it with local authorities to suite local labour markets. As above, complete the review of Business Rates and switch to a Land Value Tax over the longer term.</p>
Rural proofing	<p>Recommit to rural proofing across Whitehall. Apply it to the 2015 programme for Government. Devolution to include shires (not just city-regions). Retain a rural proofing support team within Whitehall. Ensure Whitehall consultations include rural interests.</p>	<p>As above, develop a process to devolve more powers and funding to local authorities. 'Devolution on demand', recognising the variable appetite in different places e.g. to a Cornish Assembly.</p>

	Improve the Impact Assessment process. An annual rural proofing report should go to EFRA.	
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