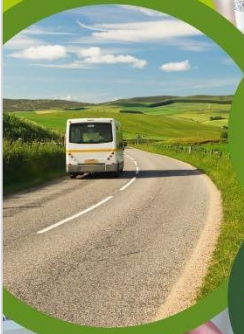


RURAL  
PLANNING



RURAL  
ECONOMIES



RURAL  
TRANSPORT



RURAL  
CONNECTIVITY

RURAL  
AFFORDABLE  
HOUSING

FAIR  
FUNDING

# WINNING THE RURAL ✓OTE

## A ROADMAP TO RURAL SUCCESS



RURAL  
NET ZERO

RURAL  
HEALTH &  
CARE



40% of  
constituencies  
are rural

Their vote can  
swing the election



# WINNING THE RURAL ✓OTE

A roadmap to rural success



“Our doctors' surgery is only open in the morning so some patients have to go to the main surgery in Torpoint BUT we only have an hourly bus service! A taxi costs £35 if you don't drive. We no longer have a direct bus service to Plymouth Hospital which is our main one. It's VERY difficult for patients who cannot drive or afford a car. A THREE HOUR round trip on two buses!”

**Margaret, Cornwall**

“In my village, a 3-bed semi is £210,000. That's 7 times my salary and completely unaffordable.

I can't use public transport to commute to work, forcing me to use a car, the costs for which have increased hugely this year.”

**Jason, 34, Lincolnshire**



# Foreword

## Kerry Booth, RSN Chief Executive



### WINNING THE RURAL VOTE

We are at a moment in time where rural public services are underfunded, and expensive to provide, houses are unaffordable for local people, public transport provision is patchy and the rural economy is not getting the support it needs to grow and prosper, as digital and mobile connectivity lags behind that of the rest of the country.

### It doesn't have to be this way.

Now is the time for the potential of rural areas to be recognised, and decisive action taken by those that lead us, to finally make a difference for rural communities.

40% of constituencies are rural. These votes will be tightly contested at the next election, and the answer for political parties to harness this vote is simple:

- Listen to the needs of rural communities
- Understand the challenges they face
- Take action to support their potential

The Rural Services Network, as the national champion for rural areas has put together a series of asks which we want to see the political parties adopt in their manifestos. The challenges rural communities face cannot be tackled in isolation, our communities need homes they can afford, with good jobs, connectivity to enable businesses to grow, and access to public services that are fairly funded.

This roadmap provides the answers for political parties and policy makers and the benefit of these policies would be felt not only by rural communities, but by the nation as a whole.

*Kerry*

### The Rural Services Network is the voice for rural services:

- We represent more than 500 public, private & third sector organisations
- We are the Secretariat for All Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services
- We scrutinise government policy from a rural perspective and respond to government consultations
- We are a trusted source for Parliamentarians, researchers and the media
- We are a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association (LGA)
- We are a member of the Rural Coalition





**Almost  
10 million  
people live in  
rural England...  
...that is MORE  
THAN the whole  
of GREATER  
LONDON**



Find out more [here](#)

**Urban voters  
receive 38%  
more per head  
in government  
funding**

**Rural voters  
pay 20%  
more in  
Council Tax  
per head**

Find out here link above links to: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/rural-fair-funding-chapter.pdf>

# Fair funding

Public services should be fairly funded with additional costs of delivering in sparsely populated areas recognised



## Why it matters:

Successive governments have underfunded rural councils, leaving rural voters at a disadvantage. Urban residents receive 38% more in Government Funded Spending Power per head compared to rural residents. Rural voters also pay, on average, 20% more per head in Council Tax because their local council gets less government grant. To make matters worse, council services cost more to deliver in rural areas; residents are spread across large geographies, yet are still in need of vital services. Rural voters deserve their fair share of the funding pot to ensure functioning and sustainable communities, especially given the cost of living crisis which disproportionately affects them.

### Calls for first 18 months in office:

- **Deliver** fairer funding by applying in full (without damping) the effects of the changes made (but not fully implemented) to the Needs Assessment component of the funding formula in 2013 and increase the exemplified benefits to rural councils to reflect inflation in the intervening years.
- **Protect** rural council taxpayers by fairly funding public services to ensure they are not asked to pay more to fund local services than their urban counterparts.
- **Ensure** funding for the Social Care Reform proposals uses a formula which recognises the whole range of costs faced by rural councils and care providers. This includes financially addressing the current backlog in assessments etc.

### Calls for first 3 years in office:

- **Address** fairer funding through the completion of the Needs and Resources Review for Local Government Funding in the first 12 months of the next Spending Review period and fully implement the changes in 2026/27. Also maintain the Rural Services Delivery Grant.
- **Develop** the mechanism for a successful Rural England Prosperity Fund and continue this dedicated fund.
- **Create** public funding formulae which ensure the unique service needs, delivery constraints and the whole range of extra costs of delivering services in rural areas (and not just travel costs) are properly reflected.



**There are over  
half a million  
rural  
businesses in  
England...**

**...that is 23% of  
all registered  
businesses**



Find out more [here](#)

**Productivity  
and GVA in  
rural areas is  
lower than  
urban**

**Rural voters  
earn £1,600  
less a year**

Find out here link above links to: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/rural-economies-chapter.pdf>

# Rural economies

The rural economy should be supported so that it can achieve its full potential



## Why it matters:

There is wide political acceptance that economic growth is fundamental to improving the wealth and prosperity of the nation. Rural Britain is home to a diverse economy and is more than just agriculture and tourism, although they do play a big part. Over 90% of rural businesses are micro and small businesses, with research showing that 'the rural economy is broadly similar to the urban one'. But, if politics only focuses on agriculture and tourism, industries outside of these sectors risk being squeezed out of the debate and their potential lost. In turn, this would lose the UK additional revenue and leave a generation in rural areas lagging behind. The proportion of the population that is working age has decreased in recent years with the growing rural elderly population, we must focus on encouraging young people and families to live and thrive in rural areas.

### Calls for first 18 months in office:

- **Deliver** a support programme for SMEs and community entrepreneurs in rural areas, especially start-ups and those seeking to grow.
- **Protect** rural communities by ensuring that the metrics used to devise strategies or programmes for growth (including skills) are not based on 'one-size-fits-all' thinking but reflect the disadvantage in rural economies within regions.
- **Ensure** policy and strategy is Rural Proofed in a way that is meaningful and demonstrable and also includes outcome monitoring. There is now a real case for placing Rural Proofing on a stronger legal footing, in the way that it has been in Northern Ireland.

### Calls for first 3 years in office:

- **Address** the recommendations of the APPG for Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse 2022 Report.
- **Develop** diversification programmes to tackle the structural weaknesses of some rural economies which are over reliant on certain sectors such as the visitor economy. Provide opportunities for the growth of the green economy and supporting infrastructure, namely the national grid and digital and mobile connectivity.
- **Create** a system where decision making and resources are devolved to local areas as far as possible, creating the flexibility for tailored solutions to prioritise and meet local needs and opportunities.



Rural Access to  
Health and Care  
Services

**74% of 65+  
year olds voted  
in the last  
General  
Election (2019)**

**Over 25% of  
rural voters are  
65+**



Find out more [here](#)

**Urban Councils  
receive 57%  
more per head to  
spend on public  
health**

**Rural voters can  
wait 3 times  
longer for an  
ambulance**

Find out here link above links to: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/rural-access-to-health-and-care-chapter.pdf>



# Rural health & care

Health and care services should be designed to meet the needs of their communities ensuring access for all



## Why it matters:

A core NHS principle is to provide services to all. Yet rural voters are disadvantaged due to poor access to transport, greater distance to receive timely care, a higher density of older people, the availability of affordable and appropriate housing stock and difficulties recruiting a healthcare workforce - all impacting on the health and care of rural voters. A recent EFRA report on mental health concluded that 'rural communities needs are not fully reflected in mental health policy and services and NHS planning.' Rural councils are struggling to deliver social services due to rising costs and increased demand. Rural voters deserve healthcare that is truly accessible and effective to all.

### Calls for first 18 months in office:

- **Deliver** a rural work force strategy to aid training and recruitment across all health and care services including dentistry.
- **Protect** rural communities now by accepting the recommendations of the May 2023 EFRA Committee report into rural mental health. Immediately action the recommendation to establish a "new joint rural health policy and delivery team to lead and improve on current "rural proofing" of health policy; and work with NHS England to set targets to measure and improve outcomes for rural mental health services and support rural health providers".
- **Ensure** strategy is Rural Proofed, especially proposals designed to tackle the core drivers of disparities in health outcomes including quality of housing, and access to good quality jobs and training. This must also take into account the whole range of extra costs of delivering services in rural areas and ensure that they are accurately reflected in funding formulae.

### Calls for first 3 years in office:

- **Address** the lack of understanding of the distinctive health and care needs of rural areas to deliver services that are suited to the specific needs of rural places.
- **Develop** integrated services that provide holistic person-centered care.
- **Create** a culture which ensures the Third Sector is included as a partner in the integrated planning system and resourced accordingly, where it is cost effective to do so and in the community's interests. The contribution of community and voluntary organisations must not be underestimated, not least with respect to prevention and wellbeing.



**Ten new  
affordable rural  
homes create  
an economic  
boost of £1.4m  
GVA...  
...and yet they  
only cost £1.1m  
to build**



Find out more [here](#)

**The rural fuel  
poverty gap is  
double the  
national  
average**

**Houses in rural  
areas are less  
affordable to  
purchase for those  
in the bottom 25%  
of earners  
compared to urban**

Find out here link above links to: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/rural-affordable-housing-chapter.pdf>

# Rural affordable housing

Rural communities should be places where people can access the housing they need to be vibrant and sustainable



## Why it matters:

Voters need access to a home they can afford if they are to be able to live and work in rural areas. House prices are higher in rural areas compared to urban and, with lower than average wages earned in the rural economy, it makes accessing housing unaffordable. Rural areas also suffer from a lack of affordable rental accommodation, as more properties are changed into more lucrative short term holiday lets. Access to genuinely affordable homes must be addressed if rural economic growth and sustainable rural communities are to be achieved. Rural voters deserve the right to an affordable home.

### Calls for first 18 months in office:

- **Deliver** a rural housing strategy stating how new housing will be delivered to meet rural communities needs. Introduce and fund an ambitious annual target for genuinely affordable quality rural homes and deliver this through a dedicated rural affordable housing funding programme to reflect local needs and policies.
- **Protect** rural tenants by ensuring that local authorities can register and manage the short and long term rental market to meet local need, thus avoiding oversupply of holiday lets. In addition, Government should ensure that policies on Energy Performance Certificates do not result in a reduction of long term rental properties.
- **Ensure** that a national homelessness strategy includes investing in solutions in rural areas, taking into account the distinct challenges of rural communities.

### Calls for first 3 years in office:

- **Address** the lack of affordable homes in the countryside by Rural Proofing any planning policy changes which may be introduced. This will ensure that all planning policies have an aim of increasing the proportion of affordable quality homes built and that no policies have an unintended consequence negatively impacting on opportunities for affordable housing in rural areas.
- **Develop** a policy to exclude rural areas from any proposals to extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association properties.
- **Create** a programme of at least 5 years of support for a national network of Rural Housing Enablers covering each rural housing authority.



**Improved public transport is better for the environment...**

**...reduces issues of social isolation**

**...provides access to training, skills and employment**



Find out more [here](#)

**Urban councils budget to spend 3.5 times more than rural on public transport**

**Rural voters have fewer transport options and are reliant on private vehicles which can be expensive to run**

Find out here link above links to: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/rural-transport-chapter.pdf>

# Rural transport

Rural communities need a mix of transport solutions to enable them to access services, employment and reduce isolation



## Why it matters:

Many rural public bus services are infrequent, finish early in the evening and do not run at weekends, making costly car ownership for many rural voters a necessity. Urban councils receive more government funding than rural and spend 3.5 times more on public transport. Competitive bidding for Government Transport Funds has unjustly left some areas with no additional funding. Investing in transport reduces social isolation, is better for the environment, opens up employment and training opportunities, healthcare and public services, thereby reducing the burden on other government budgets. Rural voters deserve fit for purpose, affordable public transport.

### Calls for first 18 months in office:

- **Deliver** an evidence-based Future of Rural Mobility Strategy that acknowledges that buses are essential infrastructure and places a duty on (and allocates funding to) Local Authorities to determine their local need for socially necessary rural buses.
- **Protect** Community transport by creating a larger funding pot which is sustained over a longer period. It should promote the use of community transport schemes which serve outlying settlements and feed into bus or rail routes.
- **Ensure** funding for the Rural Fuel Duty Relief Scheme and the Rural Mobility Fund (without a bidding process) to deliver equality of access. Ensure local authorities are fairly funded to maintain vital rural road infrastructure.

### Calls for first 3 years in office:

- **Address** the gaps in the National Bus Strategy by producing a Rural Bus Strategy, objectives for rural provision, with funded actions to better serve rural communities and their economic needs on a sustainable basis.
- **Develop** and strengthen the power of Local Authorities to deliver these services by ensuring predominantly rural Local Authorities regain and sustain their ability to offer necessary revenue support.
- **Create** a greener future by undertaking a comprehensive review of the electric grid and, where appropriate, hydrogen supply, to address the risk that the high costs of introducing electric or hydrogen buses and their fuelling facilities could prove problematic in rural areas.



**Rural households emissions are 19% higher than urban...**

**...yet rural areas have the resources to contribute to Net Zero**



Find out more [here](#)

**25% of rural homes are not connected to the gas network**

**Rural voters are more reliant on costly fossil fuels**

Find out here link above links to: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/rural-net-zero-chapter.pdf>

# Rural Net Zero

Rural communities want to embrace Net Zero but government policy needs to address the challenges they face



## Why it matters:

Rural areas with their abundance of natural assets are well placed to embrace the country's transition to Net Zero and tackle biodiversity loss, and with government investment can deliver jobs in green growth sectors. Rural communities must benefit from schemes that are based within their area and not just be a location for urban solutions. Many government actions proposed cannot be implemented until rural electricity supply networks are improved and reasonably priced sustainable energy alternatives are available. From energy production to unlocking digital potential to increase jobs, rural areas offer a range of opportunities that could benefit all.

### Calls for first 18 months in office:

- **Deliver** a 'fabric first' Energy Strategy which address rural needs. This means, ensuring rural is ready to embrace the move to a technology neutral approach to Net Zero so that individuals can choose the most appropriate solutions. Government should focus on funding and capability support to achieve low carbon homes including an emphasis on skills to support the roll out of schemes in rural areas.
- **Protect** rural communities and businesses by not increasing duty or taxes on vehicle fuel cost. Such duties/taxes disproportionately hit rural residents, business, and service providers until comprehensive electric roll out is implemented.
- **Ensure** that all economic growth programmes include explicit objectives to support low carbon and Net Zero growth. Specialist advice and related grant funding should be made available for existing rural businesses to help them reduce their carbon footprint and the UK meet its 2050 targets.

### Calls for first 3 years in office:

- **Address** the gaps in the network of public charging points across rural Britain. As many rural areas are tourist hotspots, increasing this network will boost the economy in rural areas.
- **Develop** rural communities which are self-sufficient by decentralising energy networks in rural areas. By building networks that are based on local renewable production, rural communities could retain money within their local economies and support local jobs.
- **Create** a Net Zero Rural Britain by working with the energy industry to ensure that the electricity distribution network is resilient, reliable and fit-for-purpose across all rural Britain before additional demands are put upon it.



**Unlocking the digital potential of rural areas could add up to £26bn annually to the UK economy...**

**...growing turnover for rural businesses by £15bn each year**



Find out more [here](#)

**Only 44% of rural voters have Gigabit capability**

**4% of rural voters do not get mobile coverage indoors**

Find out here link above links to: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/rural-digital-connectivity-chapter.pdf>



# Rural connectivity

Rural connectivity should be prioritised so that rural communities are not left behind



## Why it matters:

We live in a digital world, many services are digital by default leaving hard to reach areas without access to Gigabit broadband, or mobile connectivity isolated and devoid of public services. Lack of rural digital provision poses a huge constraint not only for economic growth but also for voters unable to access training, education, employment and public services. Poor public transport poses another barrier in that rural voters find accessing in person services, even more difficult. It is vital plans are made to support connectivity in all rural areas. Rural voters deserve access to digital services at the same pace as urban areas.

### Calls for first 18 months in office:

- **Deliver** improved rural connectivity through: the effective delivery of Project Gigabit; and creating a clear road map and government funding for connecting very hard to reach premises as soon as possible. As part of this, the broadband Universal Service Obligation model should be comprehensively reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose, including raising the 10Mbps minimum which is out of date and inadequate for rural needs. Consideration should be given to how alternative technologies such as fixed wireless access or low earth orbit satellites can provide solutions.
- **Protect** rural residents from digital exclusion by delivering the Shared Rural Network; ensuring 5G regional innovation funding is focussed on rural areas and use cases.
- **Ensure** high quality coverage and delivery of TV and radio, supporting the viewing requirements of rural consumers.

### Calls for first 3 years in office:

- **Address** the growing digital divide through a fully funded Digital Inclusion Programme, so no one is left behind due to their lack of online skills or their inability to pay for basic equipment and connection charges. This should be a national approach with a local delivery programme involving statutory, private, and voluntary sector organisations working in partnership.
- **Develop** new systems and methods of recycling of IT which benefits both communities and the environment.
- **Create** a digitally savvy, innovative rural workforce by providing accessible training, appropriately funded for rural communities.



**Over 600  
Neighbourhood  
Plans have been  
made in rural  
communities  
showing how  
voters want to  
influence how  
their local area is  
developed**



Find out more [here](https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/rural-planning-chapter.pdf)

**There are  
almost  
100,000  
second homes  
in rural areas**

**Most rural  
developments  
are too small  
to include  
affordable  
homes**

Find out here link above links to: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/rural-planning-chapter.pdf>

# Rural planning

Rural communities need planning policies to consider their needs and enable them to be vibrant sustainable communities for the future



## Why it matters:

We need to think long term in our vision for rural communities, with the right houses, in the right places, to ensure that our communities are thriving places now and in the future. It is vital to ensure that our villages and towns have the right infrastructure to enable sustainable living and local businesses to thrive by providing access to key services for rural voters. Planning policies must be rural proofed to ensure that there are no unintended dis-benefits for rural areas and that solutions meet the needs of rural communities. Rural voters deserve to live in well planned and sustainable communities with access to the local services they need.

### Calls for first 18 months in office:

- **Deliver** an effective approach to Neighbourhood Plans into which rural communities have spent a huge amount of time and effort.
- **Protect** rural voices in community engagement around planning. Whilst digital might always be the preferred choice, poor connectivity in rural areas means many voices are being lost.
- **Ensure** vacant and underused buildings in rural town centres find productive use as housing in appropriate locations and where little prospect exists of continuing retail use.

### Calls for first 3 years in office:

- **Address** the issues cause by combining Section 106 and CIL into a single Infrastructure Levy. There is a danger that the legal basis for enforcing a local connection with a development through S106 will be lost if the rules are softened.
- **Develop** Rural Proofed planning policy which gives autonomy to Local Authorities and the communities they serve and ensure that the needs of rural communities are not overlooked in future changes to national planning policy guidance.
- **Create** thriving rural areas by building the right homes, in the right places offering a range of tenures for all stages of life from the working young to retirees.

Logos below link to chapters on this page: <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/winning-the-rural-vote>

## Find out more about the Winning the Rural Vote Campaign, click the logos for more details.



Think before you print. Document published 05.02.24 and subject to regular updates, check our website for the latest version.



RURAL  
SERVICES  
NETWORK



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