

RURAL NET ZERO

CHAPTER

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





**RURAL
SERVICES
NETWORK**

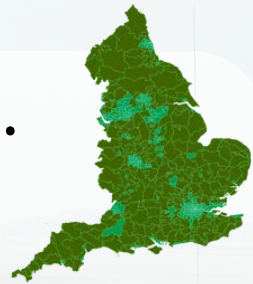


Rural Net Zero



**WINNING THE
RURAL ✓OTE**

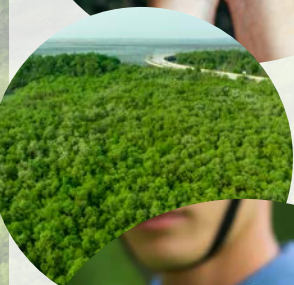
40% of Constituencies are Rural. Rural Net Zero Matters.



Rural areas, encompassing a substantial portion of England's population and land, play a pivotal role in combating climate change and achieving the net zero target. Their rich natural assets position them as key contributors to the transition, especially if supported by proper government investment for green growth and job creation. While rural communities can benefit from emerging green sectors and energy production, they face challenges, particularly in energy infrastructure, which must be addressed to meet the increased demands from electric vehicles and heat pumps.

The expansion of onshore wind and solar farms in these areas must ensure tangible local benefits to prevent resistance. Furthermore, addressing the unique energy needs of rural properties, especially those off the mains gas grid, is crucial for a fair transition.

Ultimately, achieving net zero requires a balanced approach that acknowledges and utilizes the unique capabilities and addresses the challenges of rural areas.



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THE NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

2008

▶ Net Zero Target

The Climate Change Act 2008 set an initial target for the UK to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 80%.

2019

▶ Net Zero Target Raised

The Net Zero Target ambition was raised, when Government set a statutory target for the UK to become net zero by 2050. That long-term target is translated into (decreasing) carbon budgets for forthcoming five-year periods. The independent Committee on Climate Change monitors progress and advises Government about further actions needed to achieve its trajectory to net zero.

2021

▶ The Net Zero Strategy

The Government published this document (also known as Build Back Greener) as a long-term transition plan, with policies which aimed to keep the UK on course to meet interim targets towards net zero in 2050. It built upon the Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution (2020) which, amongst other things, sought to create 250,000 green jobs by 2030. Follow up documents for specific sectors included: an Energy White Paper; The Road to Zero, which set a target date to end sales of new petrol and diesel cars; and the Future Homes Standard, which set a target date for all new housing to be zero carbon ready.

2023

▶ National Adaption Programme

Every five years the Government produces a document setting out risks and opportunities, to help the UK manage and adapt to climate change, not least in terms of the natural environment, businesses, buildings, infrastructure, and public health. NAP3, which covers the period 2023 to 2028.

▶ Revised Government Targets

The Prime Minister announced that certain key targets were being pushed back, whilst retaining the overall goal of reaching net zero by 2050. The ban on selling new petrol and diesel cars is now for 2035, the outright ban on installing home heating gas boilers by 2035 becomes an 80% phase-out target and requirements for private rental properties to meet energy efficiency targets are dropped. Notable from a rural perspective is that a planned 2026 target date to ban the installation of fossil fuel heating systems in off-grid properties has been aligned with the 2035 target for other properties.

▶ Onshore Windfarms

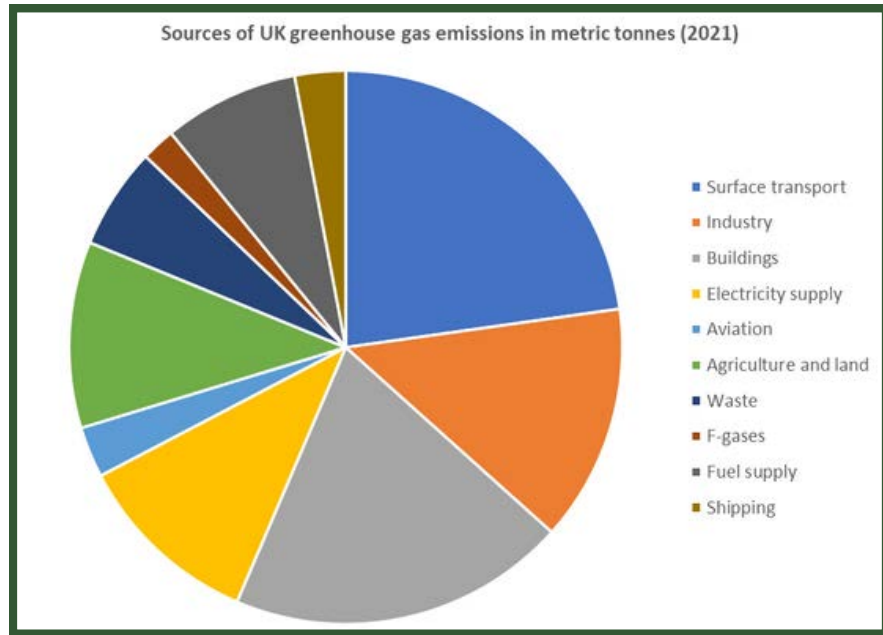
The Government announced new planning measures, intended to make it easier and quicker to develop onshore wind farms where they have support from local communities. Proposals will also be brought forward aimed at improving community benefits from such developments.

2024

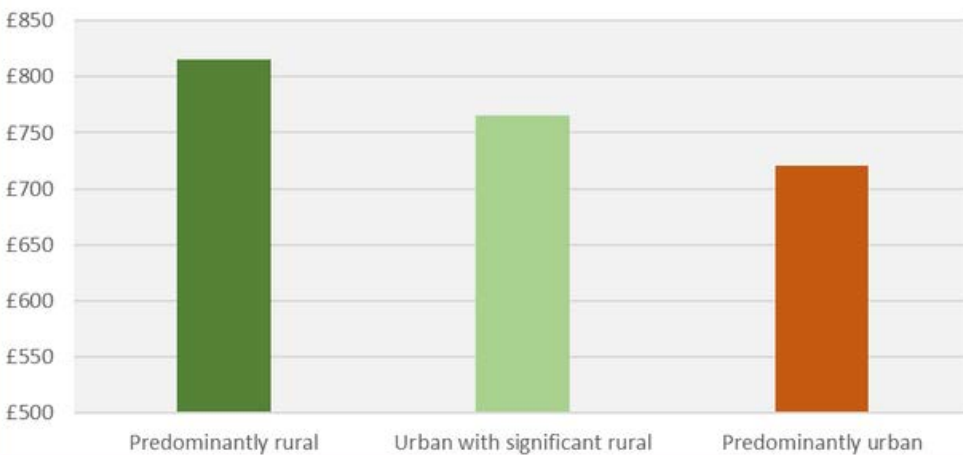


THE RURAL REALITY

According to the 2023 Progress Report to Parliament by the Committee on Climate Change, the provisional estimate for the UK's annual emissions of carbon dioxide in 2022 was 450 mega-tonnes of CO2 equivalent (MtCO2e). This is 9% below the pre-pandemic level in 2019 and 46% below the baseline level in 1990.



Average annual estimated energy costs for dwellings, by area type (£s in 2021)



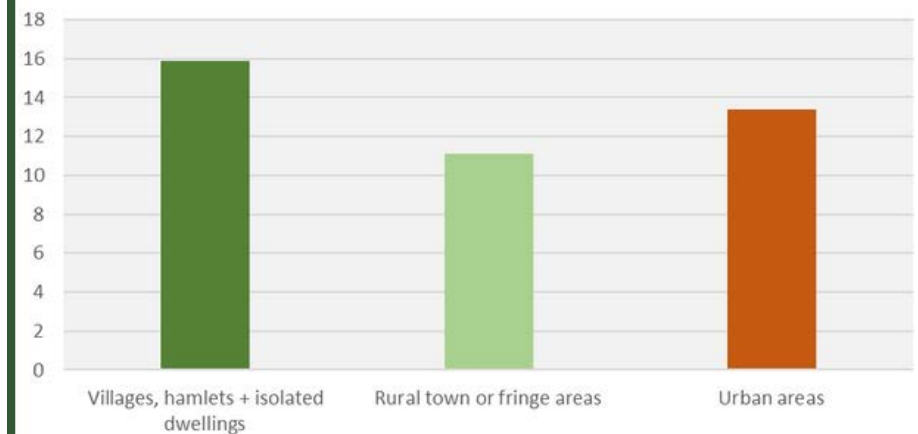
Latest figures for energy costs in domestic properties are for 2021, before the recent spike in prices, and are estimates based upon EPC data. They show that the average annual energy cost for a dwelling in predominantly rural areas was £815, which is £95 or 13% higher than in predominantly urban areas.

Figures for levels of fuel poverty in 2022 relate to households which fit the so-called LILEE definition: that is, where the dwelling's EPC rating is D or less and where the home cannot be kept warm without heating cost taking the household's residual income below the official poverty threshold.[1]

This shows that fuel poverty is a particular feature of smaller rural settlements, where it affected almost 16% of households.

[1] Statistical Digest of Rural England, Defra (2023)

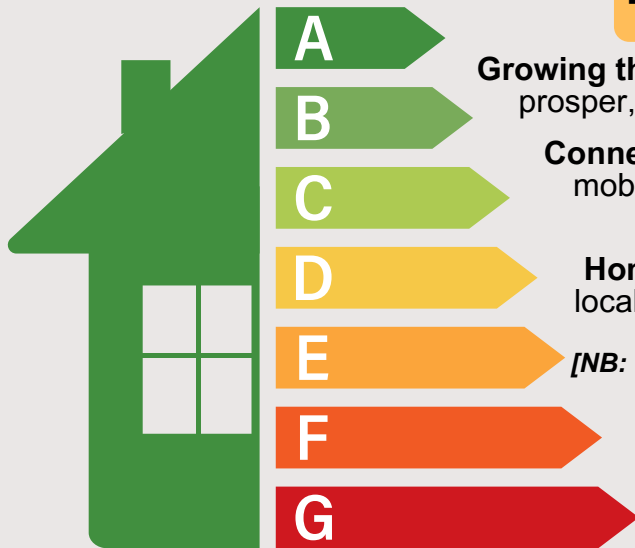
Proportion of households classed as living in fuel poverty, by settlement type (2022)



RURAL RESEARCH

In June 2023, the Government published a document “Unleashing Rural Opportunity”. It stated “We want to go further in unleashing the inherent potential that exists to grow the rural economy and support people in rural areas to build a prosperous, sustainable future as we transition to net zero. That is why we are launching Unleashing Rural Opportunity, based on 4 broad priorities that are key for rural areas to thrive. These are already being supported by many existing policies and this document underlines our commitment to further improving the quality of life for rural people by setting out additional initiatives we will undertake.”

THE 4 PRIORITY AREAS ARE:



Growing the Rural Economy – we will support rural areas so they can prosper, including by boosting opportunity through jobs and skills.





Connectivity – we will continue to deliver gigabit broadband and mobile coverage in rural areas and increase access to public transport.

Home Energy – we will facilitate the building of more homes for local people to buy where local communities want them, powered by secure and resilient energy supplies.

[NB: The reference here is homes to buy whilst the overwhelming need in rural communities is social rented homes]

Communities – we want rural communities to continue to be places where people want to live and work. We will improve access to high quality health and social care and take further action to tackle rural crime.

IN RURAL AREAS TRANSPORT MAY PROVE TO BE THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF THE DECARBONISATION AGENDA.[1] SPECIFIC CHALLENGES INCLUDE:

-  Increasing the scale and reach of the network of electric vehicle charging points (across relatively low demand locations).
-  Extending the range (or distance) electric vehicles can travel between recharges, so they are better suited to rural geographies.
-  Providing for growing demand on the electricity grid in rural areas, as the switchover to electric vehicles accelerates.
-  Making faster progress to develop hydrogen or alternative technologies, to aid decarbonisation of bus and HGV fleets in rural areas.

Figures for January 2023 show that there were 5,561 public charging points for electric vehicles available in predominantly rural areas of England.[2] Despite an expanding network, this was less than half the number in Greater London (11,521). Research finds, however, that the number of registered plug-in (electric or hybrid) vehicles in county and rural areas of England has increased by almost 450% over the four-year period from 2019 to 2023, to reach some 386,000 vehicles.[3]

Uncertainty about the capacity and resilience of the electricity grid, not least locally in rural areas, is a further consideration. Electricity demand is expected to increase twofold or more by 2050 as sectors such as transport, heating and industry electrify at scale.[4] Alongside this lie questions about long timescales being given to provide local or community-based energy schemes with grid connections, which can undermine investment.



[1] Opportunities and challenges for rural communities from net zero carbon legislation, Rural England CIC (2021)

[2] Zapmap data set relating to January 2023, accessed November 2023

[3] Electric Vehicle Infrastructure: Analysis the challenges in powering England's plug-in vehicle revolution, County Councils Network (2023)

[4] See, for example, Electricity Networks Commissioner – Companion Report Findings and Recommendations, Catapult Energy Systems (2023)



SPECIFIC POLICY ASKS IN THE ROADMAP TO RURAL SUCCESS: RURAL NET ZERO

Calls for the first 18 months of the next General Election

Calls for the first 3 years of the next General Election

DELIVER

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

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

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.

ADDRESS

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

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

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.

SUPPORT FOR THE ABOVE CALLS

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND HOUSING

Implement low carbon growth programmes, offering guidance and funding to rural businesses for reducing carbon footprints. Improve energy efficiency in rural homes, promoting green employment.

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND EFFICIENCY

Encourage renewable energy in housing, considering alternatives for homes unsuitable for heat pumps. Support energy-efficient housing models, especially in rural areas.

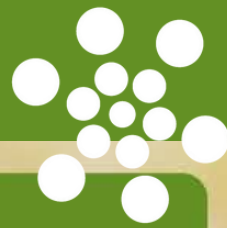
TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Expand rural electric vehicle charging networks and explore electric/hydrogen public transport options, ensuring infrastructure supports these changes.

ENERGY NETWORKS AND LOCAL SERVICES

Strengthen rural electricity networks for the net-zero transition and fund local renewable energy projects. Maintain and enhance local services and digital connectivity for sustainable rural living.





RURAL NET ZERO

There is an immediate opportunity to support a green economic recovery from the pandemic-induced recession, so that future growth contributes directly to the target to become a net zero country. Rural areas have a major part to play in that journey. Achieving greater energy efficiency is not generally constrained by technologies, but it does require a more strategic or joined-up policy approach than hitherto implemented, plus some gap funding to prove approaches can work, and create scalability.



'FABRIC FIRST' ENERGY STRATEGY

Implement strategies that prioritise energy efficiency in rural housing, ensuring readiness for technology-neutral net-zero approaches.



VEHICLE FUEL COST PROTECTION

Shield rural communities from increased vehicle fuel duties/taxes until an extensive electric rollout is implemented.



ECONOMIC GROWTH & LOW CARBON GOALS

Integrate clear low carbon and net-zero objectives in all economic growth programmes. Provide rural businesses with specialist advice and grant funding to reduce carbon footprints.



EXPAND LOCAL CHARGING NETWORK

Address the lack of public charging points in rural areas to support local economies, especially in tourist hotspots.



DECENTRALISE ENERGY NETWORKS

Promote the development of local renewable energy networks to foster self-sufficiency and boost local economies.



UPGRADE ELECTRICITY INFRASTRUCTURE FOR NET ZERO

Ensure the rural electricity distribution network is robust and ready for the increased demands of a net-zero future.





Opportunities and Challenges for Rural Communities from Net Zero Carbon Legislation published by Rural England CIC.

<https://ruralengland.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Net-Zero-Inquiry-Report-June-2021.pdf>

Decarbonising Heating and Hot Water in Rural Off-Gas Grid Properties published by Rural England CIC.

<https://ruralengland.org/new-report-sets-out-concerns-about-proposed-heat-pumps-policy-for-rural-off-gas-grid-properties/>

Rural SMEs and the net zero agenda published by National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise.

<https://nicre.co.uk/media/yyah2pd4/nicre-research-report-no-1-april-2021-rural-smes-and-the-net-zero-agenda.pdf>

Food farming and land use in a net zero UK published by National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise.

<https://nicre.co.uk/media/xyxlhtqw/nicre-sota-no-3-food-farming-and-land-use-in-a-net-zero-uk-november-2023-update.pdf>

RURAL LENS REVIEWS



The Rural Services Network produces rural lens reviews on government papers covering a wide range of topics, see: www.rsnonline.org.uk/tag/rural-lens for a comprehensive list of reviews. The Rural Lens reviews below are particularly relevant to **Rural Net Zero**

Mission Zero: Independent Review of Net Zero.

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-lens-review-on-mission-zero-independent-review-of-net-zero>.

Net Zero Strategy.

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/net-zero-strategy-rural-lens>

Heat and Buildings Strategy.

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-lens-review-heat-and-buildings-strategy>

Sustainable Warmth Protecting Vulnerable Households.

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/through-a-rural-lens-sustainable-warmth>

RSN RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT CONSULTATIONS

The Future Buildings Standard Consultation.

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/further-reading-documents/net-zero/future-building-standards-consultation-response-from-rsn-april-21.pdf>

Phasing out fossil fuel heating in homes.

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/further-reading-documents/net-zero/rsn-official-domestic-response.pdf>

Phasing out the installation of fossil fuel heating systems in businesses and public buildings off the gas grid.

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/further-reading-documents/net-zero/rsn-official-non-domestic-response.pdf>

Call for Evidence on Net Zero review.

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/further-reading-documents/net-zero/net-zero-review-rsn-consultation.pdf>

The Boiler Upgrade Scheme Regulations Consultation.

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/further-reading-documents/net-zero/rsn-response-boiler-upgrade-scheme-regulations-consultation-september-23.pdf>

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



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