

RURAL PLANNING CHAPTER

RURAL
PLANNING



RURAL
ECONOMIES



RURAL
TRANSPORT



RURAL
CONNECTIVITY

RURAL
AFFORDABLE
HOUSING

FAIR
FUNDING

WINNING THE RURAL ✓OTE

A ROADMAP TO RURAL SUCCESS



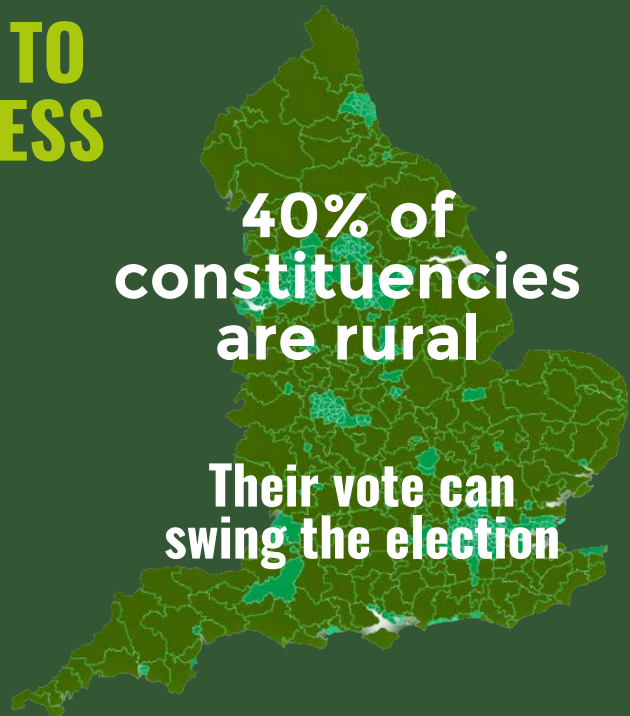
RURAL
NET ZERO

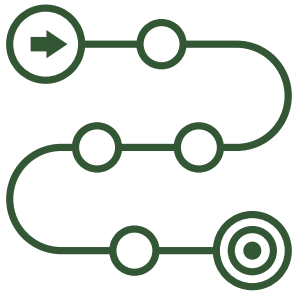
RURAL
HEALTH &
CARE



40% of
constituencies
are rural

Their vote can
swing the election





Rural Planning

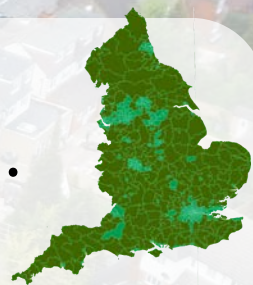


RURAL
SERVICES
NETWORK



WINNING THE
RURAL ✓ VOTE

40% of Constituencies are Rural. Rural Planning Matters.



A future-focused vision for rural communities involves not just building the right homes in the right places but also ensuring thriving, sustainable communities. This entails equipping villages and towns with the necessary infrastructure to support sustainable living and local business prosperity, including access to crucial services.

Effective planning policies, rigorously rural-proofed, are essential to avoid drawbacks and tailor solutions to the unique needs of rural communities. The planning system plays a pivotal role in balancing economic, social, and environmental demands, both in shaping policies and in making decisions on individual applications. It's also crucial in preserving or enhancing essential services, community facilities, and town centres, significantly contributing to rural life quality.

Additionally, as rural communities highly value their local environment, the planning system is tasked with safeguarding against unsuitable development, recognising that the English countryside is not only a cherished asset but also a cornerstone of rural tourism and the broader visitor economy.



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THE NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

PRE
2023

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies and how it expects them to be applied through the planning system at a local level. Its overarching aim is to help achieve sustainable development, balancing economic, social, and environmental objectives. More detail about interpreting policies in the NPPF is provided by Planning Practice Guidance.

Local Planning

- ▶ Local planning authorities (LPAs), including district, borough, unitary councils, and National Park Authorities, are responsible for creating Local Plans for the next 10-20 years and regularly updating them. These plans set proactive development policies and guidelines for planning applications, aligning with local needs and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

If an LPA lacks a current Local Plan or its policies are outdated, the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' applies. This presumption generally leads to granting planning permissions unless the site is protected under NPPF (e.g., green belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Park) or the negative impacts of the development significantly outweigh the benefits.

The Government mandates LPAs to submit their Local Plans for examination by 30 June 2025, and adopt them by 31 December 2026, under the old plan-making system. If LPAs miss these deadlines or their plans fail examination, they must follow the new plan-making system. Local plans from the old system will remain valid for the first 30 months of the new system, providing LPAs time to adapt and protecting them from speculative development, even if their plans are over five years old. However, there are concerns about the ability of rural planning authorities to keep their local plans current.

2023

Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

Significant parts of this Act relate to the planning system. Amongst other things, they will replace Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) with an Infrastructure Levy, introduce Design Codes seeking to improve quality of new buildings, replace Environmental Impact Assessments with simpler Environmental Outcome Reports, strengthen planning enforcement powers and give local planning authorities new powers to help bring empty town centre properties back into use. The Act also seeks to bring about digitisation of the planning system.

The Act introduces a new category of planning policies: national development management policies (NDMPs) to be drawn up by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The Secretary of State must consult the public on proposed NDMPs. NDMPs will carry the same weight as local plans in decision-making on planning applications. In case of a conflict between the two, NDMPs will override local plans. The Local Government Association has expressed concern that, in case of a conflict with local plans, NDMPs could override local plans. The LGA argued that this undermined "the idea of a local, plan-led system".

On 17 October 2023, during a debate on the Bill, the government said it would consult on specific policies that would become NDMPs following the passage of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. The Bill received Royal Assent on 26 October 2023. At the time of writing (December 2023), a consultation has not yet been published.

Meeting Housing Needs

- ▶ Central Government's aim is for 300,000 new homes to be built annually (an aim not yet achieved). However, it no longer sets housing targets for individual local planning authority areas which it expects them to meet. Instead, authorities must calculate housing needs in their area (in most cases using a standard method) and must demonstrate they have development sites to deliver five years housing supply (though, in future, this will be relaxed where there is an up-to-date Local Plan).

Neighbourhood Plans

- ▶ Parish and Town Councils (or Neighbourhood Forums in unparished areas) can, if they wish, produce a Neighbourhood Plan, with policies which reflect the land use and development priorities of local residents. These must conform with both the area's Local Plan and the NPPF. Neighbourhood Plans only take effect after having demonstrated majority support through a local referendum.

Countryside Protection

- ▶ Development is strictly controlled in high value landscapes designated as National Parks or National Landscapes (formally Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). Countryside around major cities is also, often, protected as Green Belt to avoid urban sprawl. So too are places designated as important for wildlife or their habitats, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. More widely, Local Plans try to manage the scale, type, and character of development in small rural settlements and to restrict development in open countryside. Conversely, many rural towns have large extension sites allocated for house building.

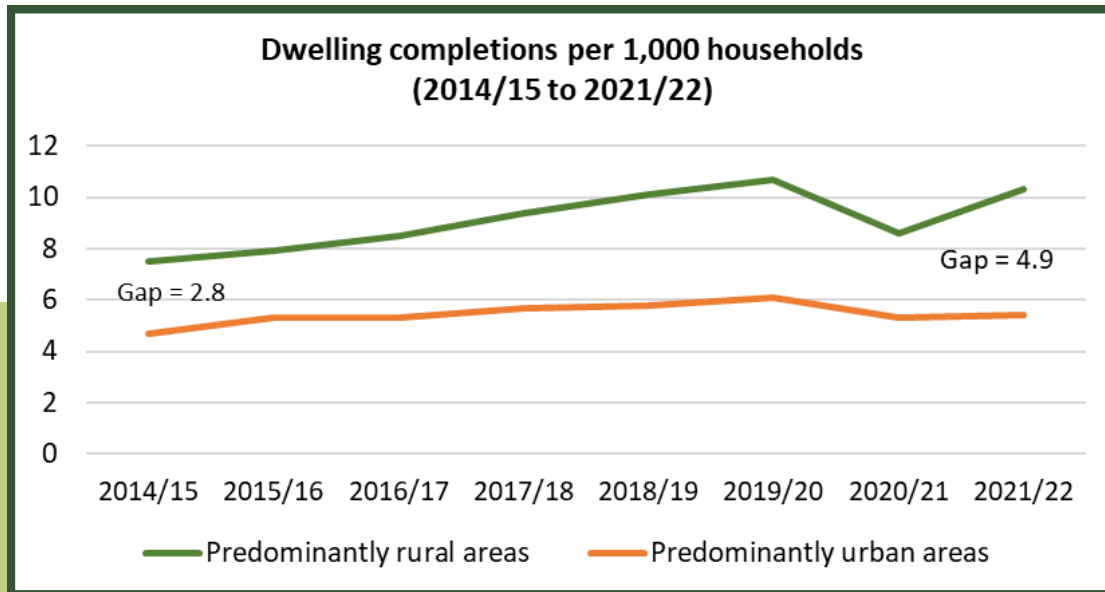
Energy Infrastructure and Renewables

- ▶ A growing planning debate of interest for rural areas is the need to increase renewable energy generation and expand capacity on the electricity grid (to decarbonise the economy and improve energy security). Following a report by the Electricity Network Commissioner, the Government announced (November 2023) plans to speed up decision making for new energy infrastructure proposals and to offer properties close to new power infrastructure up to £1,000 off their electricity bills over a ten-year period.

2024



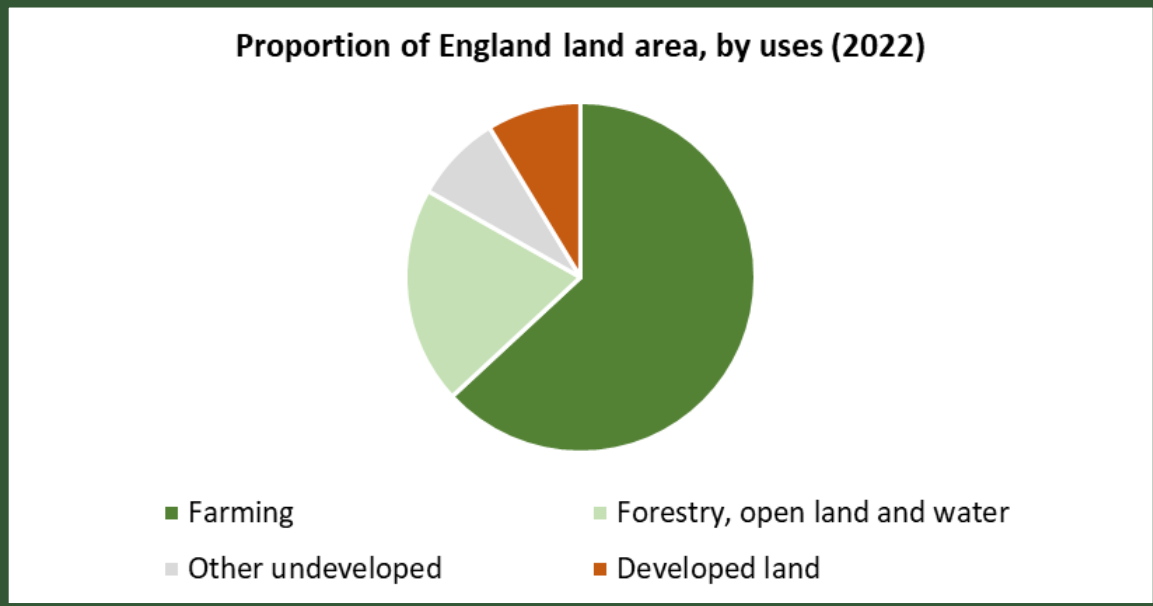
THE RURAL REALITY



In predominantly rural areas 93% of new additions to the housing stock has been because of new build developments. A further 7% were due to change of building use and around 1% due to conversions.

Almost 9% of the land area of England is taken up by developed uses.[1] These include residential, industrial, commercial, transport and utilities, mineral extraction, and landfill.

[1] Land Use in England 2022, DLUHC (2022)



Over 91% of the land area of England is taken up by undeveloped uses. These include farming, which comprises 63% of England’s land area. Some of the undeveloped land lies within urban settlements e.g. as parks, playing fields and residential gardens.

There are ten designated National Parks in England, which collectively cover over 9% of the country’s land area.[1] The largest of these are the Lake District National Park at 2,362 square kilometres and the Yorkshire Dales at 2,179 square kilometres. Some 334,000 people live in a National Park, more than a third of them in the South Downs National Park.

[1] Key Facts and Figures for all 15 UK National Parks, National Parks UK (website accessed 2023)



SPECIFIC POLICY ASKS IN THE ROADMAP TO RURAL SUCCESS: RURAL PLANNING

Calls for the first 18 months of the next General Election

Calls for the first 3 years of the next General Election

DELIVER

Deliver an effective approach to Neighbourhood Plans into which rural communities have spent a huge amount of time and effort.



PROTECT

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

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.

ADDRESS

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

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

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.



SUPPORT FOR THE ABOVE CALLS

ZONING IN LOCAL PLANS

There's a critical need for flexibility in zoning that recognizes the diversity within rural areas. Simplistic divisions of land into Growth, Renewal, and Protection zones may not adequately address rural specifics. Policies must allow for development that supports sustainable communities without stifling growth.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The heart of effective rural planning lies in its people. Proposals to streamline the planning process must not sideline the invaluable input of local residents, councils, and stakeholders. Ensuring diverse avenues for engagement, including both digital and traditional methods, is paramount.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

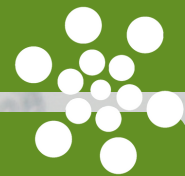
The future role of Neighbourhood Plans must be solidified to truly reflect community aspirations and provide more than mere design guidance. Recognising the investment of time and effort by communities into these plans, their integrity and objectives must be preserved.

INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

It's vital that this does not dilute the ability of local authorities to demand specific affordable housing provisions and other local benefits. A nuanced approach is necessary to ensure that rural areas receive the infrastructure support they need without compromising local character and needs.




POLICY SOLUTIONS



RURAL PLANNING


Fostering sustainable rural communities hinges on a responsive and flexible land use planning system. Recognising the distinct needs of rural settlements, a successful approach must not only accommodate diverse housing demands but also cater to the evolving workspace needs of local businesses.

ADAPTABLE LAND USE PLANNING SYSTEM




A robust land use planning system is crucial for building sustainable rural communities. This system should be flexible enough to address the unique needs and characteristics of both small and large rural settlements.

DIVERSE HOUSING OPTIONS



Rural communities need a variety of housing options to suit their evolving populations. This includes different tenures, sizes, and types of dwellings, especially designed to accommodate various age groups.

VERSATILE WORKSPACES



To support local businesses and their diverse requirements, rural areas must provide adaptable workspaces. These spaces should cater to businesses looking to expand or relocate, fostering economic growth and sustainability in rural communities.

RSN RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT CONSULTATIONS



The Landscape Review

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/further-reading-documents/planning/rsn-landscape-review-response.pdf>

National Planning Policy Framework

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/further-reading-documents/planning/rsn-landscape-review-response.pdf>

Permitted Development Rights Consultation

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/further-reading-documents/planning/permitted-development-rights-rsn-reponse.pdf>

Infrastructure Levy

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/manifesto-2023/further-reading-documents/planning/infrastructure-levy-copy-of-final-submission.pdf>

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



Think before you print. Document published 15.04.24 and subject to regular updates, check our website for the latest version.



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