



Delivering for Rural

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The background of the image is a close-up photograph of several stacks of gold coins. The coins are arranged in three main stacks of varying heights, with some coins lying flat in the foreground. The lighting is bright, highlighting the metallic texture and the ridged edges of the coins.

The Rural Services Network is fighting for a fair deal for rural communities, in all public sector funding



RURAL PLANNING

RURAL ECONOMIES

RURAL TRANSPORT

RURAL CONNECTIVITY

RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING

FAIR FUNDING

RURAL NET ZERO

RURAL HEALTH & CARE

RURAL SERVICES NETWORK

Delivering for Rural

Unlocking Rural Prosperity

A map of the United Kingdom with green and blue regions.

Facts about Rural Funding

1

Successive Governments have underfunded Rural Councils

2

Rural residents pay more in council tax

3

It costs more to deliver services in rural areas



36%

**Urban areas will receive 36%
more in Government Funded
Spending Power per head than
Rural in 2024-2025**

Urban local authorities will receive some 36% (£141.71) MORE in Government Funded Spending Power per head compared to rural authorities in 2024 /2025



20%

Rural Residents will pay on average 20% more per head in Council Tax

Rural residents will pay, on average, 20% (£112.33) MORE per head in Council Tax than their urban counterparts due to receiving less government grant in 2024/2025



Urban authorities in 2023/2024 budgeted to spend almost **double** that of rural authorities on discretionary services





For something as simple as refuse collection, it costs more to deliver that service in a rural, sparsely populated area compared to an urban street.

Fair Funding

FAIR FUNDING

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

VOTE



Warning!

Urban voters receive 38% more per head in government funding

Rural voters pay 20% more in Council Tax per head


Find out more [here](#)

Access to Health & Care

Rural Access to Health and Care Services

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

Over 30% of rural voters are 65+



Warning!

Urban Councils receive 57.5% more per head to spend on public health

Rural voters can wait 3 times longer for an ambulance

Find out more [here](#)

Rural Transport

Rural Transport

Improved public transport is better for the environment...
...reduces issues of social isolation
...provides access to training, skills and employment



Warning!

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 more [here](#)

Rural Connectivity

Rural Digital Connectivity

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



Warning!

Only 47% of rural voters have Gigabit capability

49% of rural voters do not get 4G mobile coverage on all networks indoors

Find out more [here](#)

Rural Economy

Rural Economy

There are over half a million rural businesses in England...
...that is 23% of all registered businesses



Warning!

Productivity and GVA in rural areas is lower than urban

Rural voters earn £1,600 less a year

Find out more [here](#)

Affordable Housing

Rural Affordable Housing

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



Warning!

The rural fuel poverty gap is nearly 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 more [here](#)

Rural Net Zero

RURAL NET ZERO

Rural households emissions are 19% higher than urban...
...yet rural areas have the resources to contribute to Net Zero



Warning!

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

Rural voters are more reliant on costly fossil fuels

Find out more [here](#)

Rural Planning

Rural Planning

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



Warning!

There are almost 100,000 second homes in rural areas

Most rural developments are too small to include affordable homes

Find out more [here](#)

Rural Fair Funding

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.

Access to Health & Care

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.

Rural Transport

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 quality 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 Connectivity

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.

Rural Economy

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. Around 50% of rural businesses are micro and small businesses, with research showing that the rural economy is broadly similar to the urban one. But, if policies only focusses 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.

Affordable Housing

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.

Rural Net Zero

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, pausing the imminent move to phase out the replacement of fossil fuel heating in off grid homes by 2026 (10 years earlier than urban) and adopting a 'heat pump first' approach to replacements. Instead, government should proactively adopt a technology-neutral Net Zero approach, so individuals can choose the most appropriate solution. Government should focus on funding and capability support to achieve low carbon homes.
- Protect rural communities and businesses by not increasing duty or taxes on vehicle fuel cost. Such duties/laxes disproportionately hit rural residents, business, and service providers until comprehensive electric rail 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.

Rural Planning

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 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.