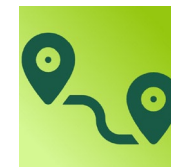


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Chapter	Title of Ask	First Version	Amended January 2021
Rural Fair Funding	Public Sector Funding	Public services should be fairly funded to ensure that additional costs of delivering rural services are recognised and adequately funded.	Public services should be fairly funded to ensure that additional costs of delivering rural services are recognised and adequately funded to ensure that rural areas are not left behind in levelling up England.
Rural Digital Connectivity	Broadband USO	Industry regulator, Ofcom, should review and upgrade the broadband Universal Service Obligation, which (at 10 Mbps) is out-of-date and inadequate for, what have become, some everyday essential uses. To reflect the new normal the USO should be upgraded to superfast broadband download speeds of 25 to 30 Mbps minimum. Costs passed on to consumers seeking a USO connection must be reasonable. This would level the playing field for rural residents and businesses until full fibre connectivity can be rolled out.	Industry regulator, Ofcom, should review and upgrade the broadband Universal Service Obligation, which (at 10 Mbps) is out-of-date and inadequate for, what have become, some everyday essential uses. To reflect the new normal the USO should be upgraded to superfast broadband download speeds of 25 to 30 Mbps minimum. Costs passed on to consumers seeking a USO connection must be reasonable. This would level the playing field for rural residents and businesses until gigabit-capable connectivity can be rolled out.
Rural Digital Connectivity	Gigabit-capable connectivity	The Government goal for universal full fibre networks, achieved with public investment to ensure their roll out in unviable rural areas, is welcome. However, given the pace of technological change, the timescale for this goal should formally be brought forward to 2025, with public investment plans to match. This likely requires a Government commitment of around £5 billion in the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review period (2021-25). No match funding from local government should be required to address this market failure. It is imperative that this investment commences quickly so rural connectivity keeps pace. Areas with the worst connectivity should be first in line for the investment. Access to superfast digital networks is key to the long-term future of rural towns and should be a national priority.	The Government goal for universal gigabit-capable networks, achieved with public investment to ensure their roll out in unviable rural areas, is welcome. However, announcements in late 2020 that 15% of premises will be excluded from the 2025 target and that firm public funding for that period is reduced from £5 billion to £1.2 billion are hugely disappointing. Published procurement plans make clear that it is premises in highly rural or remoter areas which could again be left behind. This effectively abandons the outside-in approach which was set out by Government in 2018. Government should work urgently with the telecoms industry and revisit its plans for the period to 2025. Digital connectivity will be key to levelling-up rural areas and their economies. All rural areas need clarity when they will receive gigabit-capable

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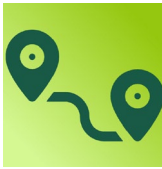
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			connectivity and remote areas with the worst connectivity should be first in line for that public investment.
Rural Digital Connectivity	Digital skills and inclusion	Government should announce a fully funded Digital Inclusion Programme, so no citizens (rural or otherwise) are left behind due to their lack of online skills or their inability to pay for basic equipment and connection charges. Key strands are likely to include training and the recycling of IT. The Covid-19 experience has brought home just how important this issue now is, with some left isolated and cut-off from basic services. Although it will require national resource, this should be a locally delivered programme, involving statutory, private and voluntary sector organisations working in partnership.	Government should announce a fully funded Digital Inclusion Programme, so no citizens (rural or otherwise) are left behind due to their lack of online skills or their inability to pay for basic equipment and connection charges. Key strands are likely to include training and the recycling of IT. As recently highlighted by the Communications Consumer Panel, the Covid-19 experience has brought home just how important this issue now is, with some left isolated and struggling to access basic services, such as shopping, banking, education and health care. Although it will require national resource, this should be a locally delivered programme, involving statutory, private and voluntary sector organisations working in partnership.
Rural Transport and Access to Services	Bus Route Provision	Government must ensure that its planned National Bus Strategy has objectives for rural provision, with ambitions to better serve rural communities and their economic needs on a sustainable basis. A fair share of the extra resources now starting to flow must reach rural areas, to improve existing routes, restore valued lost routes and establish new routes where clear gaps exist. This must be backed up by ensuring predominantly rural local authorities regain their ability to offer necessary revenue support, which means Government implementing the findings of its Fair Funding Review and taking full account of the costs of rural service delivery.	Government must ensure that its planned National Bus Strategy has objectives for rural provision, with ambitions to better serve rural communities and their economic needs on a sustainable basis. A fair share of the extra resources now starting to flow must reach rural areas, to improve existing routes, restore valued lost routes and establish new routes where clear gaps exist. This must be backed up by ensuring predominantly rural local authorities regain and sustain their ability to offer necessary revenue support, which means Government implementing the findings of its Fair Funding Review and taking full account of the costs of rural service delivery.

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Rural Transport and Access to Services	Zero emission buses		As described in the section on decarbonisation, the high costs of introducing electric or hydrogen buses and their fuelling facilities could prove problematic in rural areas. A comprehensive review is needed of the electric grid and, where appropriate, hydrogen supply, to address this risk.
Rural Transport and Access to Services	Cycling and walking:	Government should recognise the potential to improve cycling and walking infrastructure in rural towns, to nearby villages and in urban fringe areas. This can reduce car dependency and improve access to rural employment, services, and retail centres. Funding streams being made available to develop such infrastructure must reach rural areas and not simply focus on larger urban settlements. The condition of rural roads needs addressing as it can be a barrier to cycling.	Government should recognise the potential to improve cycling and walking infrastructure in rural towns, to nearby villages and in urban fringe areas. This can reduce car dependency and congestion, and improve access to rural employment, services, and retail centres. Funding streams being made available to develop such infrastructure must reach rural areas and not simply focus on larger urban settlements. The condition of rural roads needs addressing as it can be a barrier to cycling.
Access to Rural Health and Care Services	Access and travel to hospitals:	Local health partnerships (STPs and ICSs) and trusts should take better account of accessibility and transport availability when drawing up plans to reconfigure acute and emergency services at their main hospital sites. This should address access for patients, visitors, and staff from rural locations, including those without a car or those unable to drive. It is especially important for patients whose treatments require a regular visit. Hospital transport schemes should also be made more widely available. This and other issues would be easier to address if funding allocations to local NHS areas were better	Local health partnerships (STPs and ICSs) and trusts should take better account of accessibility and transport availability when drawing up plans to reconfigure acute and emergency services at their main hospital sites. This should address access for patients, visitors, and staff from rural locations, including those without a car or those unable to drive. It is especially important for patients whose treatments require a regular visit. Hospital transport schemes should also be made more widely available. This and other issues would be easier to address if funding allocations to local NHS areas were better aligned with the costs rural areas typically face from

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		aligned with the costs rural areas typically face from serving an older aged population.	serving an older aged population. The hospital building programme should be used to improve access to hospitals in rural areas which are not well served.
Rural Economies	Levelling up		The new Levelling Up Fund, due to commence in 2021/22, needs clear criteria setting to determine eligible areas and these should take account of rural needs. It should fund small as well as large projects and should take a broad definition of infrastructure, which includes investment to support improved local government service provision.
Rural Economies	Fund Timing		It is disappointing that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will not commence properly until 2022, leaving a gap after EU funds cease. However, it is now essential that pilots for the fund, due to run in 2021/22, include some rural areas. This will enable rural lessons to be learnt in time to inform the full roll out of the fund.
Rural Economies	Covid-19 Support	The Government Plan for Jobs 2020 includes welcome measures to help businesses survive and retain staff, though some of its measures could be more nuanced to better support rural business needs. Many small businesses lack the capacity to withstand a long period of financial hardship (especially if that extends to Winter months) and many consumer-facing businesses are greatly impacted by social distancing limitations. Measures should be withdrawn gradually and taking account of different sectoral needs.	The Government Plan for Jobs 2020 includes welcome measures to help businesses survive and retain staff, though some of its measures could be more nuanced to better support rural business needs. Many small businesses lack the capacity to withstand a long period of financial hardship and many consumer-facing businesses are greatly impacted by social distancing limitations. Lockdown measures should be withdrawn gradually and taking account of different sectoral needs.

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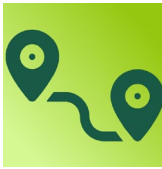
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Rural Further Education, Training and Skills	Plan for Jobs		Measures that are being introduced under the Plan for Jobs, whilst broadly welcome, need to be designed more carefully and flexibly so they take account of rural circumstances and are accessible to rural clients.
Rural Further Education, Training and Skills	Further Education	For rural young people three linked issues need addressing – travel options to access FE, the cost of that travel and the choice of institutions/courses available. Students aged 17 or 18 should be entitled to statutory free travel to FE colleges or schools, matching the existing scheme for those aged up to 16. This scheme should be fully funded by central Government. Area Reviews of FE provision should take more account of the complexities of rural travel when recommending college mergers.	For rural young people three linked issues need addressing – travel options to access FE, the cost of that travel and the choice of institutions/courses available. Students aged 17 or 18 should be entitled to statutory free travel to FE colleges or schools, matching the existing scheme for those aged up to 16. This scheme should be fully funded by central Government.
Rural Further Education, Training and Skills	Careers Advice	Young people in rural areas need better local access to impartial and high-quality careers information and guidance, to help them understand all post-16 opportunities that are available to them. This would help to raise ambitions and would better enable young people to navigate career pathways, so they can acquire the right skills	The Government’s Careers Strategy has gone some way to improving the advice on offer to pupils. Young people in rural areas need local access to impartial and high-quality careers information and guidance, to help them understand all post-16 opportunities. This will help to raise ambitions and better enable young people to navigate career pathways, so they can acquire the right skills. One challenge is ensuring that careers advisers understand opportunities within the land-based sector.
Rural Further Education, Training and Skills	Skills Advisory Panels	These Panels should help coordinate the typically fragmented training offer in an area from different organisations and funding streams. Wherever relevant, they should include representatives with experience of rural business needs. Their advice to Local Enterprise Partnerships needs to assess and	These Panels need to recruit businesspeople who have knowledge or experience across a range of sectors and who understand the current skills policy framework. This should include representatives with experience of rural business needs. Their advice to Local Enterprise Partnerships needs to assess and highlight any specific

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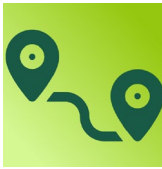
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		highlight any specific skill needs of rural based businesses. It should support rural objectives within Local Industrial Strategies.	skill needs of rural based businesses. It should support rural objectives within Local Industrial Strategies.
Rural Further Education, Training and Skills	Access to training	Training providers should consider how they can make courses more accessible to rural based businesses and their staff. Solutions could include providing outreach sessions at hub locations in market towns. It could also include making more training content available in an online format, with rural connectivity a prerequisite.	With no centrally funded adult education budget, some colleges and training providers have been opting out of training provision for that population group. The proposed Lifetime Skills Guarantee should help. Government needs to show how it can financially support provision. It is important that courses are accessible to rural based businesses and their staff. Solutions could include providing outreach sessions at hub locations in market towns and making more training content available online, with rural connectivity a prerequisite.
Rural Town Centres and High Streets	Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund	Government should support rural place-making by reviewing and expanding its Future High Streets Fund, so additional places can benefit. The criteria for and flexibility of this Fund should be reviewed to make it easier for small rural town centres to succeed. A feasibility grant pot should be considered, payable to help small towns develop their application bid to the Fund.	Government should support rural place-making by reviewing and expanding its Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund, so additional places can benefit. The criteria for and flexibility of these Funds should be reviewed to make it easier for small rural town centres to succeed. The funds currently favour larger towns and largely overlook rural needs.
Sustainable Farming and Land Management	Seasonal Labour	Government should be more sympathetic to the seasonal labour needs of the agricultural sector. It should quickly develop policies which ensure an adequate supply from 2021 onwards, whether through agreement with the EU or a greatly expanded SAWS scheme or both. The support for Agri-tech robotics and AI should also be increase.	Government should be more sympathetic to the seasonal labour needs of the agricultural sector. It should quickly develop policies which ensure an adequate supply from 2021 onwards, which could involve a greatly expanded SAWS scheme. The support for Agri-tech robotics and AI should also be increased.

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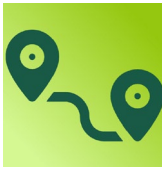
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Sustainable Farming and Land Management	Flood Management		The Government's six-year programme to improve flood defences is welcome. Urgent action is needed in rural areas which have experienced serious flood events during the last few years. A timescale for the works should be provided to those rural communities.
Decarbonising Rural Communities	Housing and renewables:	Housebuilders, homeowners and landlords should be incentivised to install or adopt renewable or low carbon energy technologies. For maximum effect this should be in conjunction with making homes more energy efficient. It could usefully include a Net Zero Retrofit Programme to address the carbon footprint of the existing housing stock and match small-scale investment in renewables, such as PV panels and ground or air heat source pumps. Such a programme would also contribute to tackling rural fuel poverty.	Housebuilders, homeowners and landlords should be incentivised to install or adopt renewable or low carbon energy technologies, which would also help address rural fuel poverty. The target recently set for installing heat pumps is useful, but that technology will not suit some properties, not least many older and hard-to-decarbonise homes in off-grid rural areas which the Government has indicated are a priority. The approach for retrofitting existing homes, including eligibility to access the Homes Upgrade Grant, therefore needs to include other options such as biofuels and heat networks.
Decarbonising Rural Communities	Housing energy efficiency	The technology for housing development to Passivhaus standards exists, but the financial model needs development, not least in rural areas where development sites tend to be small and have fewer economies of scale. Some pilot exemplar rural schemes should be supported to test feasibility and improve viability of the approach, paving the way for commercial provision to such standards in future.	For maximum effect, the switch to renewables should happen in conjunction with making homes more energy efficient. The technology for housing development to Passivhaus standards exists, but the financial model needs development, not least in rural areas where development sites tend to be small and have fewer economies of scale. Some pilot exemplar rural schemes should be supported to test feasibility and improve viability of the approach, paving the way for commercial provision to such standards in future.

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Decarbonising Rural Communities	Electric vehicle charging	A funded strategy is needed to expand considerably the network of electric vehicle public charging points along rural roads. Drivers in rural areas are more likely to travel further and gaps in the network are a practical constraint given typical ranges of e-vehicles. Planning is needed now for the growth potential in e-vehicle ownership. Wherever possible fast chargers should be installed. Also needed is support for investment relevant to rural buses, HGVs, and agricultural vehicles (which, for buses, includes hydrogen technology).	The funding recently announced by Government to make quicker progress with rolling out rapid charging infrastructure is welcome. It must, however, be used to improve the network of public charging points across rural areas (including those areas distant from motorways or trunk roads). Drivers in rural areas are more likely to travel further and gaps in the network are a practical constraint given typical ranges of e-vehicles.
Decarbonising Rural Communities	Rural buses		Introducing buses using electric battery or hydrogen fuel cell technologies involves significant investment, both in new vehicles and depot fuelling facilities. This may be hard to justify in rural areas unless bus service patronage grows. Current electric buses also have a limited range that will be inadequate for some rural routes. A comprehensive review is needed of the electric grid and, where appropriate, hydrogen supply to avoid punitive upgrade costs arising in rural areas.
Decarbonising Rural Communities	Electricity network capacity		The path towards net zero will significantly boost demand for electricity, not least to heat homes and charge cars. Government and energy industry must ensure that electricity distribution networks, substations and connections are made fit-for-purpose. This will be particularly relevant in rural areas, where infrastructure is often less robust.



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Decarbonising Rural Communities	Local Services		it should not be overlooked that one of the most effective ways to reduce carbon emissions in rural areas is to retain and, where possible, grow locally based services, such as food shops, post offices, schools, GP surgeries and transport networks. Equally, that providing good digital connectivity will reduce the need for rural residents to travel and enable home working. Policies for public transport, digital, land use planning, community action, education and health all have a part to play.