

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

28 July 2022

Dear Mr Sunak

Unlocking the Potential of Rural Areas: questions for the Conservative Party Leadership candidates

You will know from your own, very rural, constituency, that rural communities and businesses face many challenges, from the rising cost of living to the move to Net Zero. The issues are not peculiar to rural people, but the circumstances of rural places – isolation, distance from markets and services, competition for housing – can exacerbate problems and require solutions tailored to local needs. In England, rural areas are home to 9.3 million people, about 17 % of the population, with predominantly rural areas home to some 545,000 registered businesses. Rural areas make an important contribution to the nation’s economic and social wellbeing, but many are held back by historical and underlying problems; low wages; limited opportunities (including to skills and post 16 education); older populations: poor access to services (including health); higher costs of living (including for Council Tax); and lack of affordable housing based on local earnings.

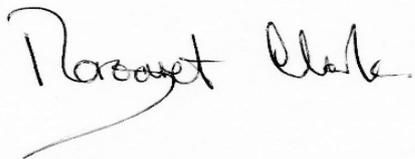
The Rural Coalition is an alliance of thirteen national organisations who subscribe to a vision for a living and working countryside in England. Each member brings its own perspective but given many shared values, we seek to be more influential by joining in common cause. The Coalition is anxious to ensure that the needs and circumstances of rural areas, and the people and businesses within them, should not be overlooked in the debate about the future leadership of the country. We are, therefore, inviting you, and your fellow candidate, to consider the key issues of importance to the future of our rural areas.

I attach a note of some specific questions which we believe need to be addressed and on which we should welcome your reflections and response. I appreciate that there will be many calls on your time over the next few weeks but these are important areas of concern to the Coalition and its members and their networks in every constituency covering rural areas throughout England. We hope, therefore, that you will be able to address the points raised.

We fully recognise that the nation as a whole is facing immense demands and challenges. Our primary concern is to ensure that rural issues will not be sidelined or overlooked but will receive proper attention and equitable treatment in the future.

I am writing in similar terms to your fellow candidate, Ms Truss. For clarity, the Coalition will be making the letters and questions available to its members and more widely.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Clark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Margaret Clark CBE
Chair, Rural Coalition

Members of the Rural Coalition: Action with Communities in Rural England, CPRE – The Countryside Charity, Country Land and Business Association, The Arthur Rank Centre, National Association of Local Councils, National Centre for Rural Health and Care, National Farmers Union, National Housing Federation, Plunkett Foundation, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Royal Town Planning Institute, Rural Services Network, Town and Country Planning Association.

President: Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans