

# RURAL LENS REVIEW



## The Queen's Speech 2021

Published May 2021



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## INTRODUCTION

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The State Opening of Parliament on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> May marked the formal start of the parliamentary year. During the ceremony, the Queen's Speech allows the Government to set out its priorities and programme for the coming session, including the legislation that it intends to pass. Politically, the occasion of the Queen's Speech is important because it is a test of the Government's ability to command the confidence of the Commons. Given the Conservatives' majority however there was little opposition this year.

Following the speech, debate in the Commons takes place over six sitting days, with each subsequent day's debate centred around a theme, which is usually chosen by the Leader of the Opposition. Any MP can table an amendment to the address, or sign an amendment tabled by another MP in order to show their support. These can only be debated and voted on during the final two days of debate, with the Speaker able to choose a maximum of four amendments for debate.

The note below is intended as a briefing note on the main points of relevance in the Queen's Speech and the Government's more detailed supporting note and key facts from a rural perspective. A full list of the legislative proposals announced at the Queen's Speech, including bills being brought forward can be found [here](#).

## OVERVIEW

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The Queen's Speech states that the programme it sets out will deliver a pandemic recovery that makes the UK stronger, healthier and more prosperous.

In particular it sets out proposals to:

- Beat COVID-19 and back the NHS
- Build Back Better – with a variety of measures for jobs and the economic recovery
- To protect the United Kingdom and its citizen and build back safer
- Build back fairer and increase and improve opportunity
- Build back a cleaner and greener UK
- Strengthen the Union and constitution and promote Global Britain.

**NB (1) There are numerous 'sub-sections' beneath each of the above proposals, including key facts where relevant.  
(2) Much of the Government's supporting note sets out what the Government has done already in the policy areas concerned. Details of future actions which do not need legislative change are also articulated in many areas.**

Further details of relevant policies in each of these areas (**in the Government's words**) which may be important from a rural perspective are outlined below:

The Speech sets out how the Government will **beat COVID-19 and back the NHS**:

- Continue the lifesaving Vaccine Programme – the biggest in NHS history – and plan for a potential booster campaign.
- Prioritise recovery in NHS services to bring down waiting times and deliver the care that people need, committing an additional £29 billion (£9.6 billion for the NHS) this year.
- The Health and Care Bill will lay the foundations for a more integrated and efficient health and care system, giving the NHS and local authorities the tools to level up health and care across England.
- The Government will bring forward proposals for social care reform in 2021 to ensure that every person receives care that provides the dignity and security they deserve.
- The Government will continue to work to improve the health and wellbeing of the nation, including tackling obesity, making healthier choices easier and more affordable for everyone.
- The Government will address the impact of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing and will continue work to reform the Mental Health Act.

The Government will **build back better**, with a variety of measures for **jobs and economic recovery**:

- To unleash the full potential of people and places across the country, the Government will level up across the UK, boosting jobs, driving growth and innovation, increasing opportunity for everyone, and ensuring everyone has access to excellent public services, regardless of where they live. A Levelling Up White Paper will set out bold new policy interventions to improve livelihoods and opportunity in all parts of the UK as we recover from the pandemic, grasping the opportunities of Brexit.
- The Government's Plan for Jobs will increase job opportunities in all parts of the UK and the Plan for Growth will lay the foundations for a recovery driven by the private sector, spreading investments and opportunity throughout the UK. The Government will bring public service debt under control through a fair and progressive package that achieves fiscal sustainability, delivers first-class frontline public services and builds the future economy.
- A Skills and Post-16 Education Bill will transform access to skills across the country to ensure that people can train and retrain at any stage of their lives, supporting them to move into higher quality, higher skilled jobs and equipping the workforce with the skills employers need.
- The Government will make the UK a global science superpower by developing the Life Sciences sector, increasing public expenditure on research and development to £22 billion.
- The Government will transform UK infrastructure, providing jobs in the short term, and creating the conditions for long-term sustainable growth.
- The Planning Bill will create a simpler, faster and more modern planning system, ensuring homes and infrastructure can be delivered more quickly across England.
- The Government will reform rail and bus networks to deliver a better, greener and more reliable service for passengers, including simpler fares. High Speed 2 is already creating thousands of jobs and boosting productivity and will provide low-carbon transport. The High-Speed Rail (Crewe-Manchester) Bill will bring biggest cities closer together, a key component of levelling up.
- The National Insurance Contributions Bill will provide a relief for employers of veterans, for employers in Freeports, and for the self-employed who receive NHS Test and Trace Payments.

Following the departure from the EU, The Government will introduce a number of significant regulatory reforms that supports British business, including:

- A Subsidy Control Bill that will implement a domestic UK subsidy control regime that reflects strategic interests and national circumstances;
  - A Procurement Bill that will consolidate and streamline the 350+ EU-derived regulations and make the procurement regime quicker, simpler and easier to use
  - A Professional Qualifications Bill that will create a new bespoke framework for the UK to recognise professional qualifications from across the world to ensure employers can access professionals where there are UK shortages.
- The Turing Scheme will give young people across the UK, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, the opportunity to work and study globally.

To **protect the United Kingdom and its citizens**, the Speech sets out how the Government will **build back safer**:

- The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill to cut crime, support police and build confidence in criminal justice system.
- The Government will address the effect of COVID-19 on the criminal justice system, speeding up cases and renewing efforts to tackle issues that pre-date the pandemic.
- The Government will refresh the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy to better protect women and improve outcomes for rape cases.
- A draft Victims bill will place the simplified and stronger set of rights for victims, set out in the new Victims' Code, on a statutory footing.
- The New Plan for Immigration Legislation will better protect and support those in genuine need of asylum, deter illegal entry into the UK, break the business model of criminal trafficking networks.
- A draft Online Safety Bill will make the UK the safest place in the world to be online, improving protections for users, especially children, whilst protecting freedom of expression, making companies responsible for their users' safety online, and supporting a thriving and fast-growing digital sector.
- The Counter-State Threats Bill will provide the security services and law enforcement agencies with the tools they need to tackle the evolving threat from hostile activity by foreign states and foreign actors.

- The Telecommunications (Security) Bill will ensure the long-term security and resilience of the UK's telecoms networks and minimise the threat of high-risk vendors.
- The Government will continue an unprecedented programme of funding and modernisation of the Armed Forces.

The Queen's Speech contains a variety of measures to **build back fairer and improve and increase opportunity**:

- The Education Recovery Plan will contain a package of ambitious and long-term measures to make sure pupils have the chance to make up their learning over the course of this Parliament.
- The Building Safety Bill will strengthen the regulatory system for building safety, changing the industry culture and introducing rigorous safety standards for construction products and a clearer path to redress for homeowners.
- The Leasehold Reform (Ground Rents) Bill will ensure leaseholders of new, long residential leases cannot be charged a financial ground rent for no tangible service.
- The Government will bring forward reforms to deliver a fairer and more effective private rental market in England.
- The Government will continue efforts to level up and unite the whole country, responding in detail to the findings and recommendations of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities.
- The Government will ban conversion therapy, ensuring abhorrent and coercive practices are prohibited.
- The Dormant Assets Bill will unlock around an additional £880 million for social and environmental initiatives across the UK.

The Speech reaffirms the Government's commitment to **building back a cleaner and greener UK**:

- The Government will continue to lead the way globally in acting on climate change, hosting the vital COP26 climate negotiations in November. The sector strategies and comprehensive Net Zero Strategy will transition the UK to a net zero economy by 2050.
- The Environment Bill will set legally binding targets, restore nature and biodiversity, tackle air pollution, establish an independent Office for Environmental Protection, cut plastic use and revolutionize how we recycle.
- Taking the opportunities presented by having left the EU, the Government will demonstrate its commitment to the highest standards of animal welfare by delivering important animal welfare and conservation improvements.

Finally, the Queen's Speech sets out how the Government will **strengthen the Union and the constitution** and continue to **promote Global Britain**:

- The Government will protect and promote the strengths of the United Kingdom, building on hundreds of years of partnership as the most successful political and economic union in history.
- The Electoral Integrity Bill will place the participation of British citizens at the heart of democracy and maintain confidence in the electoral process.
- The Higher Education (Free Speech) Bill will strengthen freedom of speech and academic freedom in higher education in England.
- A Judicial Review Bill will protect the judiciary from being drawn into political questions and preserve the integrity of Judicial Review for its intended purpose.
- The Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill will repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, reinstating the constitutional principle that the Government of the day has the confidence of Parliament and is able to seek a fresh democratic mandate when it is needed.
- The Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Bill will strengthen Northern Ireland's institutions, making them more sustainable and resilient.
- The Government will introduce legislation to address the legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland that delivers better outcomes for victims and survivors, focuses on information recovery and reconciliation, and ends the cycle of investigations.
- To ensure a coherent approach to foreign relations, The Government will stop public bodies from imposing their own approach or views via boycott, divestment or sanctions campaigns.
- The Government will implement the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy



## DEEP DIVE INTO THE ANNOUNCEMENTS

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The below sets out a series of tables on the **key legislative proposals or important statements announced at the Queen's Speech** which could impact on rural communities and service delivery, alongside (where appropriate) RSN comments on these from a rural perspective, including what the RSN will look out for as more detail emerges.

The tables are split under the following headings:

**Public Finances**

**Police Crime and Sentencing and Courts Bill**

**Health and Care**

**Connectivity**

**Transport**

**Skills and Education**

**Economy**

**Housing**

**Net Zero**

After each table we have also listed **relevant policy asks from our RSN [Revitalising Rural – Realising the Vision](#)** campaign

By their very nature proposals contained in a Queens Speech set out quite high-level policy rationale but little absolute detail of exactly what the legislation will propose and how it will be implemented. The devil will be in the detail.

In many instances the RSN has already reviewed the subjects **“Through a Rural Lens”** where the Government has issued relatively recent Consultations, White Papers or made Policy Statements. Generally, we will not repeat those comments/rural issues here but do, in the RSN comments column, provide links to those documents.

**There some general, overarching, points the RSN wishes to stress which apply across the proposals as a whole. They are:**

- Many of the measures in the Queen’s Speech will impact on rural communities and businesses. It is essential that proper, effective and transparent rural proofing of the legislation and the delivery is in place across government and that policies are nuanced to ensure that rural areas can both benefit from the proposals and contribute to the recovery and well-being of the nation. Local delivery to meet local needs is essential
- If rural proofing is properly carried out, it will make a reality of the Government’s statement in the supporting documents: “To unleash the full potential of people and places across the country, **we will level up across the UK, boosting jobs, driving growth and innovation, increasing opportunity for everyone, and ensuring everyone has access to excellent public services, regardless of where they live.**”
- Public services must receive a fair share of whatever resources the Treasury funds. In addition to the current underfunding of rural areas it must be paramount that for any financial measures resulting from the legislation, rural areas must receive a fair share of the funding available and the funding formulae should also take account of the particular needs and circumstances of rural areas.
- The Levelling Up White Paper must give proper attention to needs in rural areas, particularly those heavily dependent on vulnerable employment sectors or lacking access to good quality services. High priority must be given to improving digital connectivity in all rural areas. With the right investment rural areas have the potential to make a significant contribution to building back better.
- There are some specific proposals which are crucial to the well-being of rural communities and business, in particular the proposed legislation on the reform of the NHS, education and skills, reform of the rail and bus networks, planning and housing and ensuring the supply of affordable housing in all rural areas not just ‘designated rural areas. The rural voice must be built into the development of these proposals from the start.
- Making the connections between the various proposed measures and legislation are crucial to their success in rural areas, since many of them are interrelated e.g., jobs and transport, housing and schools. **Although the RSN continues to believe that a Rural Strategy is the best and most appropriate way of addressing these interrelationships, we nevertheless urge the Government, without further delay, to set out their long-awaited vision for rural areas (as promised in their response to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy in 2019). That vision will set the context for addressing the needs of rural areas and unlocking their potential.**

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen’s Speech	RSN Initial Comments
<p data-bbox="143 754 286 823"><b>Public Finances</b></p> <ul data-bbox="331 339 1155 818" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong public finances are a fundamental part of a strong economy and a strong Union. The certainty that comes from ensuring the public finances are on a sustainable path will support economic stability across the UK. This is also necessary given the risks posed by high debt and will build fiscal resilience, allowing the Government to provide support to households and the economy when it is needed most.</li> <li>• With sound fiscal management and careful prioritisation, fiscal sustainability can be achieved while continuing to deliver first-class frontline public services and building the future economy.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="331 882 562 911"><b><u>Procurement Bill</u></b></p> <ul data-bbox="331 948 1155 1257" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government will introduce a Procurement Bill that consolidates the 350+ EU derived regulations and creates a single, uniform framework, including defence procurement, to allow more freedom for suppliers and the public sector to innovate and work in partnership with the private sector.</li> <li>• Make public procurement more accessible for new entrants such as small businesses and voluntary, charitable and social enterprises to compete for and win public contracts.</li> </ul>	<p data-bbox="1182 331 2051 395"><b>See the RSN Policy Asks regarding Fair Funding and the need for nuanced policy</b></p> <p data-bbox="1182 424 2145 708">Some of the questions about how the Government will get control of public debt were answered in the March Budget (the target is to stop borrowing to fund day-to-day spending by 2025-26). Corporation tax rates will be increased to 25% over the parliament (reversing the promised reduction from 19% to 17%). We do not know how the Chancellor will balance the spending pressures (levelling-up, social care, recovery from pandemic) with fiscal plans to balance the budget (2025-26) – but some tax increases are inevitable.</p> <p data-bbox="1182 737 2145 986">For local government the main concern will be whether the Chancellor makes cash- terms or real-terms cuts in funding for the sector. The balance between funding growth pressures from grant and council tax is also going to be important. Our advice in the March Budget was that unprotected services could expect real terms cuts in funding. We will not get any clarity about the detail of the Government’s fiscal plans until the Spending Review in Autumn 2021.</p> <p data-bbox="1182 1015 2040 1043">(The above comments are from RSN Finance Consultants – Pixel)</p> <p data-bbox="1182 1088 2145 1264">Generally, the <b>Procurement Bill proposals</b> are welcomed from a rural perspective enabling Councils, through procurement, to work with local businesses and third sector bodies so that spend will be retained in the local economy. Value for money will remain an important consideration and fair and robust procurement processes will still be needed.</p>

## RSN Revitalising Rural Policy Asks – Public Finances and 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 to ensure that rural areas are not left behind in levelling up England.

**Recognising rural need:** Government should take full account of the needs of rural areas, their economies, and their communities and that the impacts of any measures flowing from it are both proportionate to rural areas and properly rural proofed.

**Public and mental health services:** in the light of recent experience, Government should give more prominence to public health and mental health services. Both need better resourcing to become more accessible in rural areas. Historic funding allocations for public health cannot be justified and need an urgent overhaul to even out provision. Good practice in rural provision of mental health services needs active promotion and encouragement. Large disparities in numbers of mental health professionals working in rural and urban areas need resolving.

**Social care provision:** Government should implement the findings of its Fair Funding Review to help level-up the provision of social care services in rural areas, taking full account of their delivery cost in more sparsely populated areas. This would also enable improved or more consistent engagement with and commissioning of ‘low level’ support services for vulnerable rural residents, which are typically delivered locally by voluntary and community sector organisations.

**Rural schools:** the revised National Funding Formula helps to compensate many rural schools for the relatively high underlying running costs (per pupil) that small schools inevitably face. It should, however, be set to allow for more than minimum staffing levels. A share of the capital funding pot for school modernisation and maintenance projects should be set aside for small schools. They often lose out, with capital spending focused on larger projects at urban schools. Government should support and offer some funding to help collaboration or clustering between small rural schools, so they benefit from shared resources and expertise.

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech		RSN Initial Comments
<b>Police Crime and Sentencing and Courts Bill</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protecting the public by giving police the tools they need to tackle crime and disorder, and ensuring justice and the protection of the public by extending the length of time spent in prison by serious and dangerous offenders</li> </ul>	<p>The Police Funding Formula is unfair to rural areas. One of the tools needed to tackle crime and disorder in rural areas is fair funding to meet the needs of rural communities</p> <p>Research for the National Rural Crime Network (the RSN is represented on its Executive Group) has shown that the additional costs of policing rural areas are unavoidable and have a significant impact on service delivery. Some of the key-findings are set out below:</p> <p>Fixed, non-staff costs are higher amongst rural forces which cannot benefit from economies of scale due to the need to serve more dispersed, low density populations. For example, this equates to £32.1 million across the 10 smallest forces (by population), the equivalent of over 600 officers. Given that rural forces generally have smaller workforces than urban forces, this has implications for service delivery.</p> <p>Significantly higher round-trip distances are found in forces serving low-density populations, increasing costs. As rural forces have lower officer numbers, the burden per officer is also higher by up to 65 per cent. These two factors combined again represent implications for service delivery, as well as officer welfare.</p> <p>All forces experience seasonal variations, but the minimum-relative-to-maximum variation, especially for daily crime and Anti - Social Behaviour is far greater in rural forces, especially those with National Parks and coastal areas attracting holiday-makers. The seasonality of demand must be recognised not only to ensure geographic equity, but also that minimum levels of service can be maintained throughout the year.</p>

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech		RSN Initial Comments
<p><b>Police Crime and Sentencing and Courts Bill</b></p> <p><b>Continued</b></p>		<p>Rural forces see a greater responsibility for other services, often having to deal with service provision out of hours or in isolated areas. This is intensified by lower levels of third sector support outside cities. Mental health responsibilities are particularly noticeable, particularly with regard to dementia and missing person cases due to elderly populations.</p> <p>These additional costs, being largely non-crime related, fail to be accounted for by the proposed funding formula, significantly disadvantaging rural forces.</p>

### RSN Revitalising Rural Policy Asks - Policing

**Public Sector Funding:** 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.

**Recognising rural need:** Government should take full account of the needs of rural areas, their economies, and their communities and that the impacts of any measures flowing from it are both proportionate to rural areas and properly rural proofed.

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech		RSN Initial Comments
<p><b>Health and Care</b></p>	<p><b>Health &amp; Care Bill</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driving integration of health and care through the delivery of an Integrated Care System in every part of the country.</li> <li>• Ensuring NHS England, in a new combined form, is accountable to Government, Parliament and taxpayers while maintaining the NHS's clinical and day-to-day operational independence.</li> <li>• Enabling the system to most effectively prevent illness, support our ageing population, tackle health inequalities, tailor support to the needs of local populations, and enhance patient safety and quality in the provision of healthcare services.</li> </ul> <p><b>Mental Health Act Reform</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government will respond to the consultation later this year, which will pave the way for future legislation. The Government remains committed to ambitions set out in the NHS Long Term Plan to expand and transform mental health services in England and to invest an additional £2.3 billion a year in mental health services by 2023-24, so that two million more people will be able to access mental health support.</li> <li>• The pandemic has had an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of many people. The Government has set out its Mental Health Recovery Action Plan as part of the commitment to build back better. This plan is backed by a one-off targeted investment of £500 million, to ensure that the right support is in place over the coming year for everyone who needs it.</li> </ul>	<p>Integrated Care Groups covering rural areas should be required to rural proof their delivery plans. See Rural England C.I.C &amp; The National Centre for Rural Health &amp; Care's <a href="#">'Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit'</a> would assist in this process</p> <p>A fair funding system for both NHS and Public Health Services which reflects the circumstances of rural areas and the costs of meeting needs across rural areas is needed to enable this ambition to be achieved.</p> <p><b>See RSN Policy Ask on page 18 below.</b></p>

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech		RSN Initial Comments
<b>Health and Care continued.</b>	<p><b>Social Care Reform</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government is committed to improving the adult social care system and will bring forward proposals in 2021.</li> <li>• The Health and Care Bill included in the Queen's Speech will include provisions to improve the oversight of how social care is commissioned and delivered, and facilitate greater integration between health and care services by placing Integrated Care Systems on a statutory footing across the UK, putting more power and autonomy in the hands of local systems.</li> <li>• The Bill will include provisions to allow us to get much better data and evidence about the care that is delivered locally.</li> <li>• Our adult social care workforce underpins improvement of the social care system, and it is critical to support their development. We will listen and engage with staff groups about how to best support them.</li> <li>• More widely, we will continue to work with local and national partners to ensure our approach to reform is informed by diverse perspectives, including those with lived experience of the care sector.</li> </ul>	<p><b>See RSN Policy Ask on page 18 below.</b></p> <p>While the commitment to social care reform is welcome these words are similar to the announcement in the 2019 Queen's Speech. Coming forward with proposals is not the same as a commitment to introduce legislation. The proposed reforms must be wide ranging and not limited to the introduction of a new cap on care costs to individuals (important though that is). The proposals <b>MUST INCLUDE</b> the fair funding of local councils to meet their statutory responsibilities and properly reflect the additional costs of providing care in the rural context. This includes recognition of the Social Care Sector in rural areas and the challenges that sector faces. Local government must be an equal partner in Integrated Care Systems and these bodies should be fully aligned to social care authority boundaries</p> <p>Better data and evidence is a hugely important point. The NHS has a Workforce Development Plan and the Social Care Sector needs one too.</p>



Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech		RSN Initial Comments
<p><b>Health and Care continued.</b></p>	<p><b>Prevention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our health is shaped by many factors including the conditions in which we live; the choices we make; and the services we receive. We need a robust public health system that can respond to the complex, twenty-first century challenges to health such as obesity, poor air quality, substance misuse, smoking, mental illness and inactivity.</li> </ul>	<p>The Public Health allocations for local authorities to improve health in local populations for 2021/22 means that rural authorities will get 36% government funding than their urban counterparts. This is despite the fact that it costs more to deliver services in rural areas. The Government's ambitions cannot be realised in rural areas without Fair Funding.</p>

## RSN Revitalising Rural Policy Asks – Health and Care

**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 aligned with the costs rural areas typically face from 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.

**Primary and community care services:** local health partnerships should seize opportunities to create locally based multi-disciplinary teams and to develop health hubs in rural town locations. Hubs should aim to make a wide range of treatments and services more accessible to nearby rural populations, thereby avoiding the need for many patients to travel to main hospitals. They should provide services such as minor procedures, diagnostic tests, baby clinics, rehabilitation, and re-enablement. Local pharmaceutical services need to be retained in rural areas, which in some cases means supporting dispensing GP surgeries.

**Public and mental health services:** in the light of recent experience, Government should give more prominence to public health and mental health services. Both need better resourcing to become more accessible in rural areas. Historic funding allocations for public health cannot be justified and need urgent overhaul to even out provision. Good practice in rural provision of mental health services needs active promotion and encouragement. Large disparities in numbers of mental health professionals working in rural and urban areas need resolving.

**Social care provision:** Government should implement the findings of its Fair Funding Review to help level-up the provision of social care services in rural areas, taking full account of their delivery cost in more sparsely populated areas. This would also enable improved or more consistent engagement with and commissioning of 'low level' support services for vulnerable rural residents, which are typically delivered locally by voluntary and community sector organisations.

**Workforce and recruitment:** Government and the NHS should ensure that delivery of the NHS Workforce Plan includes an explicit rural dimension. Pay bonuses should be considered to attract recruits into those rural places with the highest vacancy and turnover rates. Medical training should include a rural placement, wherever possible, to give trainees exposure to work in rural settings. Similar initiatives are needed to cope with serious rural shortages in the social care workforce.

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen’s Speech		RSN Initial Comments
Connectivity	<p><b>Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill</b></p> <p>This will accelerate and improve the deployment and use of digital communications networks. This will support the installation, maintenance, upgrading and sharing of apparatus that enables better telecommunications coverage and connectivity.</p>	<p>See RSN Policy Ask on Mobile Networks below.</p> <p><a href="#">Click here to view RSN response to DCMS committee “Broadband and the Road to 5G Inquiry”</a></p>

## RSN Revitalising Rural Policy Asks – Digital Connectivity

**Broadband USO:** the Government should urgently direct the industry regulator, Ofcom, to 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.

**Gigabit-capable connectivity:** 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 originally set out by Government in 2018. Government should work urgently with the telecoms industry to resolve any capacity issues and to bring forward the remainder of the £5 billion investment into the period to 2025. Digital connectivity will be key to levelling-up rural areas and their economies. All rural areas need a clear timetable for when they will receive gigabit-capable connectivity and remote areas with the worst connectivity should be first in line for that public investment.

**Mobile networks:** the Shared Rural Network initiative, to plug gaps in 4G provision, is helpful, if not a total solution. Delivery of this initiative must be carefully and transparently monitored by Ofcom, to ensure that network providers are on track to meet their objectives and targets. Options should also be explored to address any remaining mobile ‘not spots’ by 2025. Government should announce some further rural trials to pilot 5G connectivity within health and social care provision.

**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. 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.

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech		RSN Initial Comments
<b>Transport</b>	<p><b>Rail and Bus Reform</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government will publish a White Paper containing proposals that will transform the railways and deliver for passengers. The Government will ensure that decisions are taken in the interest of passengers, using new contracts that will get trains running on time, introduce modern ways to pay, make rail more accessible and inclusive, and work more closely with local communities.</li> <li>• The National Bus Strategy outlined how the Government will spend the £3 billion announced by the Prime Minister to transform buses outside London. In order to access that transformational funding, local authorities and operators will be required to work together to improve services.</li> <li>• These reforms will be a major part of levelling up by ensuring there are more frequent, cheaper and more reliable bus services across the country which are easier to understand and use with integrated services and ticketing.</li> <li>• £120 million will be spent in the 2021-22 Financial Year on supporting the Government's commitment to introduce 4,000 zero-emission buses, building on the recent award of £50 million to Coventry from the All-Electric Bus Towns and Cities competition.</li> </ul>	<p>See:</p> <p><a href="#"><u>RSN Rural Lens Review of Bus Back Better – The National Bus Strategy.</u></a></p> <p>See:</p> <p><a href="#"><u>RSN response to the Future of Transport Rural Bus Strategy Call for Evidence.</u></a></p>

## RSN Revitalising Rural Policy Asks – Transport and Access to Services

**Covid-19 support:** in the short-term Government must retain its emergency financial support for public transport networks, so that rural bus and rail routes survive whilst pandemic restrictions are in place and whilst passenger confidence remains low. A significant public information campaign is required as soon as social distancing restrictions can be further relaxed to re-assure people about safety and encourage them back onto public transport.

*Since the RSN made this ask, the Government has announced that it will continue its emergency funding until no longer needed. Bus operators receiving the funding are expected to work closely with local transport authorities to agree service levels that respond to passenger demand and enable social distancing.*

**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 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.

**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. The Government's zero emission buses fund (ZEBRA) should target rural areas and a comprehensive review is needed of the electric grid and, where appropriate, hydrogen supply, to address that risk.

**Community transport:** The Rural Mobility Fund is useful, if modest in its scale. Lessons from that Fund's current round should form the basis for a larger funding pot which is sustained over a longer period. It should, especially, promote the use of community and demand-responsive transport schemes which serve outlying settlements and feed into bus or rail routes. App-based journey planners and booking technologies should be piloted to attract new users, as should through ticketing between transport providers. However, in many rural areas this may require improvements to mobile connectivity.

**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.

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech		RSN Initial Comments
<p><b>Skills and Post-16 Education</b></p>	<p><b>Skills and Post-16 Education Bill</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This will put employers at the heart of the post-16 skills system through the Skills Accelerator, by enabling employers and providers to collaborate to develop skills plans aimed at ensuring local skills provision meets local needs.</li> <li>• It will introduce the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, which will give individuals access to the equivalent of up to four years' worth of student loans for level 4-6 qualifications that they can use flexibly across their lifetime, at colleges as well as universities.</li> <li>• It will strengthen the system of accountability by extending existing powers for the Secretary of State for Education to intervene where colleges have failed to meet local needs, to direct structural change where required to secure improvement, and by amending the regulation of post-16 education and training providers to ensure quality.</li> </ul> <p>It will also strengthen the ability of the Office for Students to assess and regulate Higher Education provision in England, ensuring that they can regulate in line with minimum expectations of quality.</p>	<p>See the following RSN Rural Lens Reviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">A Plan for Jobs</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Build Back Better</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Skills for Jobs</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Education</b></p>	<p><b>Education Recovery Plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government is putting in place a package of measures to ensure no child is left behind as a result of the education and extracurricular activities they may have missed out on. It is working with the Education Recovery Commissioner – Sir Kevan Collins – to develop a long-term plan that builds back a better and fairer education system in England and delivers significant reforms to address the scale of this challenge.</li> <li>• This will include over £14 billion more in schools over the next three years to 2022-23, meaning all schools will receive more money for every pupil. The Government will also progress towards a single national funding formula that determines every school's funding, so that schools see greater consistency and fairness in their funding.</li> </ul>	<p>It will be important to ensure that across these programmes and initiatives rural issues such as the capacity of small schools and their staff, access both digital and to/from schools outside of normal- term times/hours.</p> <p>The costs necessary to support and maintain rural schools must be fully understood and reflected.</p>

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech		RSN Initial Comments
<p><b>Education continued.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From September 2021 the Government will be funding an entitlement for early career teachers in England to access world class professional development at the start of their career so they are trained in evidenced-based techniques.</li> <li>The Government will continue with the roll out of T Levels and Higher Technical Qualifications, as well as investing a further £1.3 billion over the next 5 years in higher education.</li> </ul> <p><b>Skills and Post-16 Education Bill</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This will put employers at the heart of the post-16 skills system through the Skills Accelerator, by enabling employers and providers to collaborate to develop skills plans aimed at ensuring local skills provision meets local needs.</li> <li>It will introduce the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, which will give individuals access to the equivalent of up to four years' worth of student loans for level 4-6 qualifications that they can use flexibly across their lifetime, at colleges as well as universities.</li> <li>It will strengthen the system of accountability by extending existing powers for the Secretary of State for Education to intervene where colleges have failed to meet local needs, to direct structural change where required to secure improvement, and by amending the regulation of post-16 education and training providers to ensure quality.</li> </ul> <p>To support vulnerable children the Government is investing £220 million in the Holiday Activities and Food programme, which will be expanded across England this year to provide healthy food and enriching activities during the school holiday. It is also investing £79 million to boost children and young people's mental health support.</p>	<p>Training to work in a rural environment is necessary to aid recruitment and retention</p>

## RSN Revitalising Rural Policy Asks – Education

**Rural schools:** the revised National Funding Formula helps to compensate many rural schools for the relatively high underlying running costs (per pupil) that small schools inevitably face. It should, however, be set to allow for more than minimum staffing levels. A share of the capital funding pot for school modernisation and maintenance projects should be set aside for small schools. They often lose out, with capital spending focused on larger projects at urban schools. Government should support and offer some funding to help collaboration or clustering between small rural schools, so they benefit from shared resources and expertise.

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech		RSN Initial Comments
<p><b>Economy</b></p>	<p><b>Levelling Up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Government will publish a landmark Levelling Up White Paper later this year, setting out bold new policy interventions to improve livelihoods and opportunity in all parts of the UK. It will grasp the opportunities of Brexit and set out the next steps in the plan to enable more people to get on in life, without feeling they have to leave their local area.</li> <li>Levelling up means creating new good jobs, boosting training and growing productivity in places that have seen economic decline and the loss of industry – not through a one-size-fits-all approach, but nurturing different types of economic growth and building on the different strengths that different places have.</li> </ul> <p><b>Key facts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The UK has significant regional disparities, both economic and social</li> <li>The UK's highest productivity region (London) is nearly 60 per cent more productive than its lowest (Wales).</li> <li>50 per cent of the population in London have graduate-level qualifications, compared to 33 per cent of the population in the North East of England.</li> <li>Healthy life expectancy in Glasgow, Dundee, Blackpool and Middlesbrough is ten years shorter than affluent local authorities in the South East. People in the most deprived fifth of neighbourhoods in England are about 50 per cent more likely to experience crime and antisocial behaviour than those in the richest fifth.</li> <li>Certain types of spending, transport, R&amp;D, housing, culture, are vital to boost productivity. Yet in Britain we have historically spent more on these things in places where productivity is already high:</li> <li>Between 2007-08 and 2018-19 capital spending on transport in London was around £6,600 per head, more than twice the average in the rest of England (£2,400).</li> </ul>	<p>Local delivery must be the way the national levelling up agenda is delivered.</p> <p>See the following RSN Rural Lens Reviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Government Place Based Funds</a></li> <li><a href="#">10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution</a></li> <li><a href="#">Build Back Better – A Government Plan for Growth</a></li> <li><a href="#">National Infrastructure Strategy</a></li> </ul> <p>See a study by Pragmatix Advisory (commissioned by the RSN and partners) on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Treasury Green Book</a></li> <li>Towards a UK Shared Prosperity Fund to be published June 2021</li> </ul>



Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech		RSN initial Comments
<p><b>Economy continued.</b></p>	<p><b>Local regeneration and town centre improvement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The new £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund will invest in infrastructure to improve everyday local life and boost growth and jobs, launching the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2022. The £830 million Future High Streets Fund is supporting regeneration in 72 areas across England.</li> <li>Through the Towns Fund the Government is investing £3.6 billion in 101 towns in England towards their own local priorities such as upgrades to high streets and transport, while investing £2.9 billion in City and Growth Deals to drive forward local economic priorities in cities across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland</li> </ul>	<p>In preparation for the Levelling Up White Paper and details of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund the RSN will seek to bring together a document which presents these issues from a rural perspective.</p> <p>The metrics used to determine areas in need of levelling up and just as importantly the objectives must be at a sufficiently fine grain of detail to see the issues from a rural perspective. For instance, using net household income as the income indicator misses the fact that income earned in the rural economy is substantially less than the nation – or regional averages.</p> <p>On 4 May 2021 the Government first announced that it would publish a 'Levelling Up White Paper' later this year. The announcement states that the White paper "focus on challenges including improving living standards, growing the private sector and increasing and spreading opportunity." Publication of the metrics to be used must be published alongside this White Paper.</p> <p>Levelling up must be about much more than Capital Projects. The statement of 4th May referred to above infers that the government accepts by referring to improving living standards – but this is open to interpretation and the RSN will have to review the detail in White Paper once published.</p> <p>The cost of living in rural communities (set against lower incomes earned in the local economy) are significant factors which should be reflected in determining disparities between areas.</p> <p>Local delivery is essential to ensure local needs and opportunities are met.</p> <p>See RSN Rural Lens Review on <a href="#">Government Place Based Funds</a>.</p>

## RSN Revitalising Rural Policy Asks – Economy

### UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Levelling Up Fund

**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.

**Dedicated rural funding:** Government should create a dedicated rural funding stream of a proportionate size within the overall UK Shared Prosperity and Levelling Up Funds, with resources which are ring-fenced for use on rural support. This approach will ensure that rural businesses and economies can benefit from the Funds in a way that is fair. It will also enable specific tailoring of that funding to be effective in meeting rural circumstances and needs. The lesson from the past is that without a dedicated rural funding stream larger urban projects are likely to scoop the pot.

**Funding level and targeting:** Government should commit to matching or exceeding the level of resources that rural areas of England formally received under EU programmes (through ERDF and ESF funds, as well as from rural-specific LEADER and EAFRD funds). Any attempt to allocate funding in rural areas must take account of the scattered nature of their needs and should avoid applying urban spatial targeting approaches (such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation). A low productivity measure may be more appropriate.

**Programme design:** a dedicated rural funding stream should retain the better features of the LEADER approach, which used a locally-led ‘bottom-up’ economic development approach to ensure that local priorities are addressed and suitable projects are brought forward. To ensure that varied priorities and needs across rural England can be met the funding stream should be flexible in its design. It should be capable of supporting start-up business and existing businesses with growth potential, and it should be open to social and community enterprise.

### Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Industrial Strategies

**Local Enterprise Partnerships:** every LEP whose area includes rural places (even if these are not many) should have a rural representative or champion sitting on its Board. To harness input from a wider range of rural interests, all such LEPs should also have an advisory rural sub-group or equivalent that helps shape their strategies and programmes. The End of Year reports from LEPs should include information monitoring and publicly presenting their activities and outputs in rural areas.

**Local Industrial Strategies:** LIS documents now need some repurposing so that a key element becomes supporting the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions. Every LEP whose area includes rural places should demonstrate that it has rural proofed its LIS document to take proper account of rural needs and to allocate a fair share of resources. Those LIS strategies must look to support smaller-scale projects, suited to rural areas, and must not simply focus on large infrastructure projects in or around big urban centres.

## RSN Revitalising Rural Policy Asks – Economy continued

### Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Industrial Strategies continued

**Growth and Diversification:** LEPs should consider creating small-scale Local Growth Hubs at a market town level where their economic needs are more acute. More generally, LEPs should support the diversification of rural economies, especially into growth sectors such as creative, digital and green energy. This would tap into their growth potential and create good quality jobs.

### Rural Business Advice and Guidance

**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 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.

**Targeting rural growth potential:** Growth Hubs must ensure that they reach rural based businesses with their advice and guidance, including the self-employed, micro-businesses and social or community enterprises. Their performance metric should not simply be the number of rural businesses supported, but what different that support makes. They should consider having dedicated rural business support officers, who operate locally and have access to a wider network of specialist providers or advisers.

**Specialist support organisations:** Government should make grant funding pots available to the Plunkett Foundation and Locality, to help them provide specialist advice and guidance to social and community enterprises, many of them in rural locations and delivering valuable local services (such as community-run shops) to rural communities.

**Exploiting digital connectivity:** Advice and guidance should be widely available so that rural businesses can make better use of digital connectivity. This could help them take advantage of new opportunities and reach new markets. Advice could boost their digital skills, build their online presence, develop online selling, and ensure their online security. This must be backed up by actions to improve rural connectivity.

**Peer to peer support:** Local networks where rural based business owners and managers can meet should be encouraged and supported. Advice from peers is often of real practical value. On average rural businesses are less well networked than their urban counterparts. Peer support can be especially beneficial for recent start-up businesses if they can tap into the experience of those more established.

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech	RSN initial Comments
<p data-bbox="168 762 300 799"><b>Housing</b></p> <p data-bbox="369 312 1081 344"><b>Planning Bill, Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Bill</b></p> <ul data-bbox="369 368 1120 1310" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laws to modernise the planning system, so that more homes can be built, will be brought forward, along with measures to end the practice of ground rents for new leasehold properties.</li> <li>• It will change local plans so that they provide more certainty over the type, scale and design of development permitted on different categories of land.</li> <li>• It will decrease the time it takes for developments to go through the planning system.</li> <li>• It will replace the existing systems for funding affordable housing and infrastructure from development with a new more predictable and more transparent levy.</li> <li>• It will use post-Brexit freedoms to simplify and enhance the framework for environmental assessments for developments.</li> <li>• It will reform the framework for locally led development corporations to ensure local areas have access to appropriate delivery vehicles to support growth and regeneration.</li> </ul>	<p data-bbox="1144 312 1995 344">See the following RSN briefing notes and consultation responses:</p> <ul data-bbox="1144 368 2175 560" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The Rural Implications of the Planning White Paper</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Update note on Changes to the Current Planning System following the government response to the original consultation</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">First Homes Consultation</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Supporting Housing Delivery and Public Service Infrastructure</a></li> </ul> <p data-bbox="1144 639 2186 823">Speed and simplicity are admirable objectives but are overridden by the need to ensure the quality of the decisions. Any new system must be able to respond to different geographies. It will also remain important that local communities have a genuine voice when plans are being drawn up and that the role of Neighbourhood plans are strengthened not weakened.</p> <p data-bbox="1144 839 2186 951">Local Councils must have flexibility in the setting of the Infrastructure Levy to ensure there is sufficient funding locally to meet the costs of public infrastructure alongside new housing.</p> <p data-bbox="1144 967 2186 1078">The financial and other impacts of this policy on the delivery of small rural affordable housing schemes must be understood and taken into account in the policy detail.</p>

## RSN Revitalising Rural Policy Asks – Rural Affordable Housing

**Affordable housing quotas:** Government should amend its existing policy on quotas. Local planning authorities should be able to require an affordable housing contribution from development sites building fewer than 10 dwellings (i.e., those building 5 to 9 dwellings) in all rural settlements with a population under 3,000 residents – or with a population density of less than 2 persons per hectare. Furthermore, those authorities should be able to require that the affordable housing be delivered on-site. The current system, where on small sites a financial contribution is required, the actual affordable housing provided can be some distance from the original contribution site, means the affordable housing funded can be far away in a different (larger) settlement.

*Since the RSN made this ask the Government has announced that it is putting aside, for now, its Planning White Paper proposal to increase the development site threshold for affordable housing from 10 dwellings to 40 or 50 dwellings. This proposal could have proved disastrous for rural areas.*

**Grant funding:** Homes England should increase the provision in its recently announced Affordable Homes Programme from 10% to at least 13% to match last year's delivery. Even this 13% needs to be increased over the life of the CSR, given that 17% of England's population live in rural areas. The programme should offer grants at realistic levels which are realistic to ensure good design and energy efficiency, and which recognise extra building costs typical on small development sites in rural areas.

**Community-led housing:** the Community Housing Fund, which offers grants and supports community-led schemes, has been useful, although the fund is stretched and could be increased. A share of that fund should be allocated to projects in rural areas, such as Community Land Trusts, Co-housing schemes and Self-build projects. This would restore an original rural objective of the fund.

**Exception sites:** the principle of delivering low-cost housing suited to first time buyers is not disputed, especially if it meets rural needs of young families and essential workers. However, the proposed introduction of a First Homes tenure must not be at the expense of much-needed rural affordable homes for rent. Local planning authorities must, therefore, be able to set policies that require Exception Sites to deliver solely or predominantly affordable homes to rent in all smaller settlements (and not just those in 'designated' rural areas). Without that, landowners will inevitably be attracted to release land for more financially attractive first-time buyer homes.

**Sales of affordable homes:** Government should allow local authorities to retain 100% of the proceeds from Right to Buy sales (rather than the current 50%), so they can re-invest this to replenish the dwindling stock of affordable housing for rent. The local authorities also need time and the ability, where necessary, to allocate more support per unit. Lessons for rural areas must be learnt from the voluntary Right to Buy pilot scheme for housing association tenants, before any further roll out of that scheme is considered.

*Since the RSN made this ask the Government has announced that it is extending the time period given to local housing authorities to re-use financial receipts from Right to Buy sales.*

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech		RSN initial Comments
<b>Net Zero</b>	<p><b>Environment Bill</b></p> <p>The main elements of the Bill are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placing a duty on Ministers to ensure environmental considerations are central to policy development; setting legally binding targets; producing a long-term environmental improvement plan; and setting up the independent Office for Environmental Protection.</li> <li>• Preserving resources by minimising waste, promoting resource efficiency, and moving towards a circular economy. These measures include extended producer responsibility, product labelling powers, introducing a consistent approach to recycling across local authorities in England, introducing a deposit return scheme for drinks containers, and providing for more effective litter enforcement. It will also provide the powers to introduce charges for single use plastic items to combat pollution.</li> <li>• Improving air quality by requiring the Secretary of State to set at least two legally binding targets on air quality for PM2.5, the most harmful air pollutant.</li> <li>• Managing water sustainably through modernised legislation to secure a long term, resilient water supply and wastewater services.</li> <li>• Protecting nature by mandating '<b>biodiversity net gain</b>' in the planning system, ensuring new houses are not built at the expense of nature and delivering thriving natural spaces for communities.</li> <li>• Improve planning for nature recovery through Local Nature Recovery Strategies and create Nature Recovery Networks to join up nature sites and create wildlife-rich places, giving communities a greater say in the protection of local trees.</li> <li>• Placing requirements on larger businesses that use agricultural commodities associated with deforestation. These requirements will prohibit larger businesses from using key agricultural commodities produced on illegally deforested land.</li> <li>• Put forward amendments to the Environment Bill to reduce the harm from storm overflows to rivers, waterways and coastlines. New duties will require the Government to publish a plan to reduce sewage discharges from storm overflows by September 2022 and report to Parliament the progress of implementing the plan.</li> </ul>	<p>The financial and other impacts of '<b>biodiversity net gain</b>' policy on the delivery of small rural affordable housing schemes must be understood and taken into account in the policy detail.</p>

Key Legislative Proposals and Statement from the Queen's Speech	RSN initial Comments
<p data-bbox="165 719 320 807"><b>Net Zero Continued.</b></p> <p data-bbox="371 264 896 296"><b>Climate Change, Net Zero and COP26</b></p> <ul data-bbox="371 320 1724 943" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="371 320 1724 427">• The Government has laid legislation to set Carbon Budget 6 at the level recommended by the Climate Change Committee, which would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 78 per cent by 2035 compared to future estimates of 1990 emissions levels – the most ambitious in the world.</li> <li data-bbox="371 440 1724 587">• The Prime Minister has laid out a Ten Point Plan for a green industrial revolution over the next decade. The Plan will mobilise £12 billion of Government investment and could unlock three times as much private sector investment by 2030 to create thousands of highly-skilled green jobs, build back a greener economy and level up opportunity across the country.</li> <li data-bbox="371 600 1724 707">• Announced new offshore wind ports supporting up to 60,000 jobs, supported over 100,000 businesses and public bodies to transition to low carbon heating, and helping tens of thousands of households to upgrade the energy efficiency of their homes.</li> <li data-bbox="371 719 1724 826">• Published an Energy White Paper which sets out the transformation of the UK's energy system. Policies included will create new industries and investment in green innovation and will support up to 220,000 jobs by 2030.</li> <li data-bbox="371 839 1724 943">• The Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy sets out an ambitious blueprint to deliver the world's first low-carbon industrial sector and over £1 billion to cut emissions, as well as supporting up to 80,000 jobs over the next three decades.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="371 1142 1724 1246">The forthcoming sector strategies, including Heat and Buildings, the Transport Decarbonisation Plan, and the comprehensive Net Zero Strategy will set out the Government's vision for transitioning to a net zero economy by 2050.</p>	<p data-bbox="1749 719 2195 791">See the following RSN Rural Lens Reviews:</p> <ul data-bbox="1749 804 2150 1082" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1749 804 2150 876">• <a href="#"><u>10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution</u></a></li> <li data-bbox="1749 888 2150 995">• <a href="#"><u>Build Back Better – A Government Plan for Growth</u></a></li> <li data-bbox="1749 1008 2150 1082">• <a href="#"><u>National Infrastructure Strategy</u></a></li> </ul> <p data-bbox="1749 1142 2195 1246">See the RSN response to: <a href="#"><u>The Future of Building Standards Consultation.</u></a></p>

## RSN Revitalising Rural Policy Asks – Net Zero/Decarbonisation

**Economic growth programmes:** all such programmes should 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. Government should use its Covid-19 recovery package, *A Plan for Jobs 2020*, to improve energy efficiency in rural homes, especially off the mains gas grid. This would make them greener and easier to heat, whilst supporting green jobs for tradespeople in rural areas.

**Housing and renewables:** 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 indicates are a priority. The approach for retrofitting existing homes, including eligibility to access the Homes Upgrade Grant, therefore needs to cover other options such as biofuels and heat networks.

**Housing energy efficiency:** 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.

**Electric vehicle charging:** 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.

**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 commercially in rural areas unless bus service patronage grows. The Government's ZEBRA funding scheme should specifically target some uncommercial rural areas. 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.

**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, sub-stations and connections are made fit-for-purpose. This will be particularly relevant in rural areas, where infrastructure is often less robust.

**Local energy networks:** Government should provide gap funding to kick start the development of decentralised energy networks in rural areas, where they typically face higher costs due to serving low population and housing densities. This would support the growth of networks that are based on local renewable production or combined heat and power technologies. These could also help retain money within local rural economies and support local jobs.

**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.