

THE RURAL COALITION

The Rural Coalition

STATEMENT 2017

The Rural Coalition is twelve national organisations who subscribe to a vision for a living and working countryside in England. Given many shared values, we seek to be more influential by joining in common cause. In this statement we set out our key principles, policies and actions which we would urge the new Government to apply to rural communities

The Rural Coalition believes that the following **four principles** should underpin policy making:

OUR POLICY PRINCIPLES



Brexit discussions must recognise 'rural' is more than agriculture and the natural environment.



All Brexit negotiations and post-Brexit policies must be rural proofed.



Policies and funding must deliver a fair deal for rural communities.



Decision-making, funding and delivery must be devolved and involve rural communities.

9.3 MILLION people

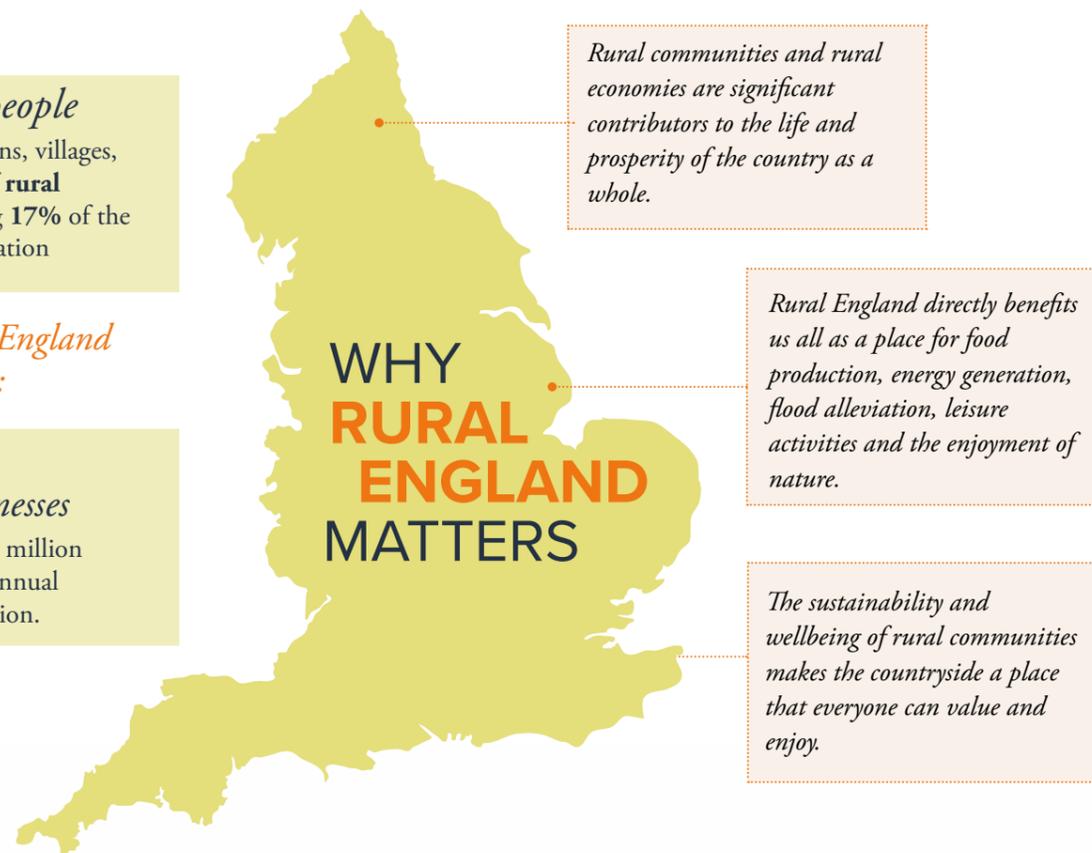
Live in the small towns, villages, hamlets and farms of **rural England**, comprising 17% of the country's total population

Rural areas of England are also home to:

524,000

Registered businesses

Employing up to 3.7 million people and with an annual turnover of £404 billion.



TAKING UP THE BREXIT CHALLENGE

European Union trade, regulations, funding programmes and migrant labour have all helped to shape rural areas. Negotiations about leaving the EU and decisions about UK policies in the future must, therefore, take full account of the needs of rural communities and businesses.

Four underpinning principles

Our starting point is that four principles should underpin policy making to promote sustainable rural communities:

Brexit discussions must recognise 'rural' is more than agriculture and the natural environment. Both these issues are critical, but are only part of the rural agenda and other issues risk being squeezed out of the debate. Rural economies are made up of diverse business sectors and rural communities share the same varied needs as communities elsewhere.



All Brexit negotiations and post-Brexit policies must be rural proofed. Rural areas are shaped by policies from across Government, on topics such as taxation, housing, health and social care, education, workforce skills, business support and broadband connectivity. All Whitehall departments should rural proof their Brexit and post-Brexit work, testing policy proposals to ensure that they are designed to suit rural circumstances and meet rural needs.

Policies and funding must deliver a fair deal for rural communities. Many rural communities are feeling left behind. Those communities (and taxpayers) deserve an equitable share of service provision and its funding. It is vital that services are accessible to rural communities and businesses. Focusing delivery in larger settlements may be an easy option, but it is not a fair option.

Decision-making, funding and delivery must be devolved and involve rural communities. Rural areas are varied. Decisions, funding and delivery are more likely to take account of local needs and circumstances if they are devolved to the most appropriate local or very local levels. Engagement with rural communities, who are part of the solution, will make them even more relevant.

Four policy priorities

The Rural Coalition believes that the evidence points to four policy priorities:

A meaningful increase in the delivery of affordable housing in villages and small towns. Across rural England there is a severe and growing shortage of affordable housing for local people. Many areas are turning into enclaves of the affluent. Yet the number of affordable rural homes built is dispiritingly low. The previous Government's Housing White Paper was a good start, but much more action is needed to address the backlog and meet future needs. The planning system must deliver more affordable homes to help sustain rural communities.

Proper recognition of rural service delivery challenges and services designed to meet rural needs. Important services and facilities are being cut back in rural areas as a result of public sector austerity and private sector cost-cutting and efficiency savings. Adult social care and bus services are among the most affected. Yet rural local authorities receive much less funding (per resident) than local authorities elsewhere.

Long-term support for social action, to help communities become more resilient. Many rural communities have shown real initiative, making neighbourhood plans, running services, managing assets and engaging with renewable energy projects. Communities and their parish councils are part of the solution to rural policy challenges. However, this underpinning of rural life needs sustained support, especially if the benefits are to become widespread.

Business support and infrastructure which reaches rural areas, so the rural economy can grow and create quality jobs. Important grant funds for rural businesses and projects – the LEADER and EAFRD programmes¹ – will cease after exiting the EU. Modern businesses also depend on connectivity to broadband and mobile networks, yet a quarter of rural premises cannot access fast broadband. The follow up to the last Government's Industrial Strategy needs to put in place support to release the potential of rural areas and to address market failures.



Photo Credit: Anthony Ferran (anthonyferran.co.uk)

PROGRESS SINCE OUR 2015 DOCUMENT

In reaching our view about principles and future priorities we have reviewed the three policy areas highlighted in our Rural Challenge 2015 document and what progress has been made. This evidence shows that in the two years since its publication:

- **Growing and sustaining the rural economy:** *some progress has been made.*
- **Providing affordable housing for local people:** *progress has been disappointing.*
- **Working for healthy rural communities:** *progress has been mixed.*

The evidence that underpins this assessment of progress can be found at: www.ruralcoalition.org.uk

¹ These programmes offer grants for projects which contribute towards economic development, diversification and productivity in rural areas. EAFRD is managed by Local Enterprise Partnerships and LEADER is managed by Local Action Groups.

Four key actions now needed

Action by Government will be crucial, since it sets the policy framework and decides on overall resources. Government departments must, therefore, up their rural proofing game. But many other organisations will help deliver those policies, including local authorities and LEPs. They too must take rural proofing seriously.

*The Rural Coalition now calls on the incoming Government to take **four positive actions**:*

Introduce an ambitious annual target for the number of new affordable homes built in rural areas and a dedicated rural affordable housing funding programme.

Deliver a support programme for rural businesses and community entrepreneurs.

Ensure that the extra costs of delivering services in rural areas are properly reflected in any funding formula, such as those used for local government, education and the NHS.

Provide a comprehensive community infrastructure support programme, which recognises the pressures on volunteers, helps those places with less capacity and spreads existing good rural practice.

THE RURAL COALITION OFFER



The **Rural Coalition** offers itself as a partner for all Government departments and their agencies, drawing on a wealth of expertise and access to rural practitioners.

In exchange:

We will help to identify solutions to rural policy and delivery challenges.

We will be a sounding board – somewhere to turn to for rural proofing advice, when developing policies and programmes.

We will use our networks to seek out examples of good rural practice and local innovation.

*Above all, the **Rural Coalition** wants a Brexit deal and domestic policy agenda that works for rural communities and is ready to **play its part** in helping to achieve this.*

Members of the Rural Coalition

Action with Communities in Rural England

Campaign to Protect Rural England

Country Land and Business Association

Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre

National Association of Local Councils

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

Rural Coalition President:

Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans

Rural Coalition Chair:

Margaret Clark CBE

Website:

www.ruralcoalition.org.uk