

**RURAL MANIFESTO**  
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**COUNTRYSIDE  
ALLIANCE**

Love the countryside

**EDUCATION**

**COUNTRY  
PURSUITS**

**HOUSING**

**FARMING**

**SERVICES**



# A vibrant countryside needs five key changes

## HOUSING

Promote local solutions to the lack of affordable rural housing

## EDUCATION

Enable all children to gain a practical understanding of the countryside

## FARMING

Support British farmers and producers

## COUNTRY PURSUITS

Repeal the Hunting Act and champion country pursuits

## SERVICES

Ensure an accessible and reliable rural transport network

# FOREWORD

Our countryside is a national treasure admired around the world but it is also a home and workplace for millions of Britons. Yet those who live and work there can be forgiven for feeling at times that it does not receive the political support it deserves.

Divisive politics, media misrepresentation and a lack of understanding can create a gap between rural and urban areas. Yet there should be no conflict over “town or country”. The challenge is doing the best for both town and country.

I represent an inner-city constituency in Parliament but grew up on a farm in Northern Ireland, so I can see both “sides”. That explains why I am such a strong advocate of the Countryside Alliance’s aims and ideals.

In the ten years since the Alliance was formed, its campaigns have had a significant impact on the political landscape and made it Channel 4 News’ “Political Campaigner of the Decade”. It has built its reputation around inspiring people. This manifesto is based on what they say in their hundreds of thousands – people from all walks of life, united by their love of the countryside and their desire to see it survive and thrive.

The Alliance believes that rural needs, just like urban needs, are about basic rights. Rural people have the right to equality of healthcare, service provision and decent affordable housing. The right for farmers and other rural businesses to compete in fair markets at home and abroad. The right to engage in country pursuits and other activities free from discrimination or prejudice.



This manifesto flags up several key issues which truly matter to individuals and groups within rural communities. These are issues that genuinely affect peoples’ lives in the countryside right now. They provoke passion, idealism, energy, anger and frustration. They put people on the street, inspire them to participate and ultimately drive them to vote in large numbers.

There are many pieces to the rural jigsaw but this is a manifesto for today – to help change lives for the better. It is about creating a positive mood for the country as much as enacting laws. There are other issues but there is a sense of urgency about those selected for this manifesto.

Our aims are deliberately realistic and achievable. In these challenging times a vital, working and thriving countryside for the benefit of the whole nation is more necessary than ever.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Hoey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kate Hoey MP  
Chairman, Countryside Alliance

# HOUSING

The availability of affordable housing is vital for all communities. However, because rural areas are different economically, structurally and geographically the solutions required need to take account of these differences.

Homes and jobs need to go together. Without homes and jobs there is no community to support local shops and services. Communities must be looked at as a whole. Each part of the jigsaw which makes a community sustainable, and enables it to thrive, is dependent on the other parts. The lack of affordable housing, both to buy and rent, threatens the future of many rural communities.

The ongoing movement of population from cities to the countryside has seen the rural population grow at twice the rate of urban areas. This has driven up house prices,

pricing young families out of the communities in which they work and in which, often, they have been brought up. The lack of affordable rural homes is exacerbated by lower rural wages relative to the cost of homes.

The movement of young people away from rural areas, as a result of a lack of affordable housing, leads to the break up of family and social networks leaving behind an increasingly elderly population who are often isolated and dependent on public services. Those young people unable to find homes often move to more urban areas placing a further strain on affordable housing provision in these areas.

The Government's response to the Matthew Taylor Review on affordable housing shows an encouraging consensus on the way forward but what is needed now is action.

## THE WAY FORWARD

There is no single solution to the problem of affordable housing. However, by simplifying the process, giving powers to local communities and providing the right fiscal incentives the Government can empower local communities to meet their needs.

## KEY FACTS

- The number of people who have been put on social housing waiting lists in rural areas has risen by 54 per cent in 10 years. Only five per cent of houses in villages are social housing compared to the national average of 23 per cent.
- Average wages for people working in rural communities are £4,655 lower than the national average, yet the cheapest 25 per cent of homes in rural areas are £16,000 more expensive.
- In rural areas only 17 per cent of purchases are by first-time buyers compared with 33 per cent in urban areas.
- It is estimated that 11,000 new affordable homes per year are needed over the next five years in settlements of less than 10,000 inhabitants.

## WE CALL FOR...

- Locally-led initiatives to develop small clusters of affordable housing where they meet the criteria of local support, good design, and are affordable in perpetuity to local people.
- An immediate reduction of VAT to 5 per cent, for all repair, maintenance and home improvement work, as agreed by the EU in March 2009. Where such reductions have been tried in other EU countries it has shown that a cut would increase Treasury revenue, encourage the bringing back into use of the 960,000 empty properties in the UK, as well as helping the Government achieve its target of cutting carbon emissions by 80 per cent by 2050.
- The use of 'exception sites', where the size of development is dictated by need, should be extended responsibly. Local authorities must also take advantage of the provision in Planning Policy Statement 7, which allows for land unsuitable for commercial development to be used for affordable housing.
- Incentives to be provided for landowners to offer land for housing at an affordable price. These might include tax benefits or options for nominating a family member or employee for some of the property.



Georgie, 19, lives with her sister Polly and parents John and Sally Hammond in Shropshire. She works for her father's business, loves her local community and wants to make her home in the area but house prices are out of her reach. This is why the next government must promote local solutions to the lack of affordable housing.

# EDUCATION

Children and young people have become disconnected from the countryside and the many environmental and health benefits that it has to offer. When three in four people can't identify a horse chestnut tree it is vital that we engage with children from every background to close this gap in knowledge about the countryside. All children should have a better understanding of the natural richness of the countryside and what it is like to live and work there.

A knowledge and understanding of the environment, food and rural affairs must no longer take a back seat in the National Curriculum, especially given the importance of addressing the global issues of food security, climate change and biodiversity. While theoretical knowledge is vital, formative learning also happens outside the classroom. In the UK research has shown activity in

natural settings can improve mood, stress and energy levels in young people and in those with significant to severe behavioural problems.

While everyone wants their child to be safe in school, wrapping them in cotton wool is not good for their confidence, social skills or understanding of the natural world. Statistically, accidents are extremely rare and do not justify disproportionate restrictions on outdoor learning for young people.

All children should have the opportunity to feel the freedom, wonder and inspiration of the countryside that can be experienced through activities such as walking over a moor, netting a fish or planting a tree. Every school should be empowered to make this a reality.

## THE WAY FORWARD

Health and safety guidance for teachers and accreditation schemes for providers now give schools the confidence to let children 'get their hands dirty'. But the priority given to outdoor education remains low. Outdoor education improves young people's confidence, social skills and understanding of the environment and it must become a core subject in the National Curriculum.

## KEY FACTS

- Four fifths of children would like more freedom to play outside.
- Nearly half of young people and adults cannot identify an English oak tree and 62 per cent of children claim to spend more time playing indoors than any other place – action is needed to reconnect people with nature.
- Less than 10 per cent of 7-11 year olds spend time playing in places such as woodlands and heaths.
- Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) show a 40 per cent improvement in their symptoms when taking part in activities in green spaces.

## WE CALL FOR...

- The Government to include outdoor education within the National Curriculum as a compulsory subject. Outdoor education has proven benefits for young people. Around the country a network of 850 accredited farms are already providing quality learning experiences.
- Fair and consistent funding across all schools to enable learning outside the classroom to be part of every child's education regardless of the locality and profile of a school.
- Rural-based activities to be made accessible for disadvantaged children and young people who stand to benefit through outdoor learning. Fishing can successfully rehabilitate young offenders and fight social exclusion but its use within schools remains limited. It should be promoted more widely for the benefits to be fully realised.
- Children to have greater access to accurate information about the countryside. For example, The Countryside Investigators is a new online curriculum based education resource, created by The Countryside Alliance Foundation, providing balanced information about the countryside and its management. It should be promoted to all schools to help children better understand the people and activities that shape the countryside.



Sam, Jack, Sophie and Daniel from Northumberland are not part of the 83 per cent who couldn't identify a bluebell in a recent survey. Neither did they make up the one in ten who didn't know what a sheep looked like. However, all four felt that children should be able to gain a practical understanding of the countryside at school.

# FARMING

Farming and land management are central to the character, environment and well-being of Britain. British farmers and producers not only produce food to some of the highest standards in the world but they also play a vital role, as they have done over many centuries, in shaping and maintaining the very landscape and communities for which Britain is so famous.

Britain's unique landscapes of moor, down and fell – all of which would soon return to scrub without farming – not only provide numerous opportunities for outdoor activities but also underpin domestic and overseas tourism. The day-to-day management of these landscapes is undertaken by farmers and land managers who see themselves as stewards of the land they manage and invest both their time and money accordingly.

To look at the countryside as nothing more than a picture postcard backdrop to food production and tourism – as key as these industries are to Britain both rural and urban

– is however to miss the point. Innovation exists at all levels and in all sectors of the rural economy and there is within British farming significant, yet untapped, potential for new and dynamic industries.

As well as being the guardians of the British countryside, farmers and land managers have a huge role to play in helping Britain meet the key challenges of this century. Ensuring that Britain has the right mix of food and energy to meet the dual challenges of global instability and climate change is not something that can be achieved in Whitehall alone and is something farmers will, as they have done before, relish and take pride in helping to accomplish.

If, however, British farmers are to continue to make their valuable contribution to Britain's rural communities, and the nation as a whole, it is vital that the industry receives the recognition that it deserves, as this will enable it to unlock its potential for the benefit of all.

## THE WAY FORWARD

Policies, at both a UK and an EU level, should acknowledge the many overlapping functions of farming and not promote one element at the expense of another. Any policies, should as far as is possible, be future-proofed so that farmers have the stability they need to make long-term decisions and investments in terms of both time and money.

## KEY FACTS

- Farming contributed £5.6 billion to the UK economy in 2007. The UK food chain, of which farming is a key component, employed 3.6 million people in 2008; 14 per cent of all employees in Great Britain.
- In 2007, the UK was 61 per cent self-sufficient in all food; a decline of 15 per cent since 1995.
- In England alone, it is estimated that farmers undertake £412 million of unpaid landscape management work each year.
- It is estimated that 61 per cent of all pork and pork products eaten in the UK in 2005 was imported, with 70 per cent of those imports likely to have been illegal to produce in the UK on the grounds of pig welfare.

## WE CALL FOR...

- Investment in agricultural research and education is key to ensuring that British agriculture remains at the forefront of an international and ever-changing industry and is able to respond to the challenges of the 21st century.
- The potential of farming and its by-products as a significant and often existing source of renewable energy to be harnessed not only as a way of mitigating climate change but also of increasing our energy mix and therefore our energy security.
- The procurement of British produce must be a priority for all public bodies.
- The adoption of a mandatory country of origin labelling framework to ensure that British consumers are able to make an informed choice and have confidence in the products they buy would represent an important step in providing British farmers and producers with the support they deserve.



Mark and Anne Careless are third generation tenant farmers, who farm a mixed beef, sheep, poultry and arable unit in Warwickshire. Farmers do not always get the recognition they deserve, yet with food production rising up the national agenda, now is the time to promote and support Britain's farmers and producers.

# COUNTRY PURSUITS

Country pursuits such as hunting, fishing, shooting and falconry make an important contribution to the environment. They are a focus for the communities in which they take place and encourage stewardship and responsible habitat management. The shooting community alone spends £250 million and 2.7 million days a year on conservation.

These combined activities are hugely valuable to the UK economy. They also have important social benefits and contribute to the health and general well being of the nation. Fishing, for example, has been shown to play an important role in tackling truancy and anti-social behaviour. Country pursuits are more popular than ever and lie at the heart of many people's way of life.

## THE WAY FORWARD

Country pursuits need support and encouragement to thrive so that people from all backgrounds have the opportunity to participate in them. It should be the responsibility of government, together with the respective governing bodies, to ensure that there is an understanding amongst the public of these activities and their benefits.

To ensure that these benefits are available for all, and survive into the future, it is vital that the Government and its agencies do all that they can to increase the opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to participate. Those who choose to participate should be able to do so free from prejudice and discrimination.

The Hunting Act is unique in that its effects are entirely negative. It diminishes respect for Parliament; it puts law-abiding people at risk of prosecution; it diverts police attention from real crime; it brings no benefit to the environment; it is a blatant example of political prejudice and it does nothing for the welfare or conservation of the species it claims to 'protect'.

## KEY FACTS

- More than four million people went fishing last year. The annual economic activity associated with fishing is as much as £2.75 billion.
- Game shooting is worth £1.6 billion to the UK economy and supports the equivalent of 70,000 full-time jobs.
- Two-thirds of the UK rural land area is managed for shooting.
- Over 1.5 million days have been spent hunting by individuals since 2004.

## WE CALL FOR...

- Country pursuits to receive a fair and balanced hearing in Parliament and in public. The Government should fund and empower the third sector to deliver increased opportunities for people to participate in country pursuits and outdoor life. The Countryside Alliance Foundation's Fishing for Schools and Casting for Recovery, which is funded by The Foundation, are successful examples that could easily be expanded.
- Home Office guidance should be provided to police forces to ensure they enforce, consistently and rigorously, the law against animal rights intimidation and violence in the countryside.
- Shooting sports should receive the full support of government and sports funding. Game shooting's importance to rural tourism and the economy should be recognised. There should be no further unnecessary restrictions on firearms or shooting in the UK.
- The Hunting Act should be repealed. The Act is unworkable, bad law and bad for animal welfare. The Act is fundamentally illiberal, based not on principle and evidence but prejudice. Such laws should have no place in a modern, tolerant and free society.



Tony Wright is huntsman of the Exmoor Foxhounds and is living proof that the Hunting Act needs to be repealed. After two years of being dragged through the courts, he cleared his name and exposed a dreadful piece of legislation. Repeal of the Act is vital and would protect all rural pursuits for generations to come.

# SERVICES

Rural services are the glue which holds communities together. For some years, rural public services have been in much faster comparative decline than equivalent services across the country; something that continues to be exacerbated by inequality of funding. This can often result in council tax in rural areas being higher while public service provision remains poorer.

Problems concerning the access to rural services are inseparable from those surrounding public transport. Rural isolation, combined with the continuing decline in bus and train services, can hit people hard. Added to this, the relentless closure of local social and commercial services means that the car is a necessity for rural life.

Cars are vital in rural areas because a lack of alternatives to public transport often forces rural people to rely

on private transport. Coupled with travelling longer distances to access essential services, many are spending a higher percentage of their household income on motoring. However, the expense of car ownership is increasingly out of reach for many rural families. Countless reports have highlighted a lack of transport as the overriding cause of social exclusion in the countryside. This is particularly prevalent amongst young, elderly and disabled members of the community.

If services continue to be centralised, and if any policy to reduce car usage under plans to combat climate change is to be realised, it is vital that the provision of public transport meets the needs of rural communities. This is not happening right now.

## THE WAY FORWARD

The problem of access to services in the countryside is inseparable from public transport problems. Without adequate public transport rural communities are more dependent on car ownership to access basic services such as healthcare, education and banking. For geographic and social reasons the need for viable public transport in rural areas is far more acute than in urban areas. Reliable public transport is good for both the environment and rural communities.

## KEY FACTS

- Rural England has lost one fifth of its entire post office network since 2000.
- With more than 600 filling stations closing a year, motorists in some rural areas are being left up to 30 miles away from their nearest forecourt.
- Studies confirm that healthcare services cost more to provide in rural areas. It has been calculated that additional costs of between 7.5 per cent and 10 per cent are required to deliver health services to rural populations.
- People living in rural areas travel around 10,000 miles per year to access essential services – that's 43 per cent more than residents of towns.

## WE CALL FOR...

- The Government to collaborate with rural local authorities, putting greater priority on the improvement of rural bus services. This must move up the political agenda otherwise talk of mitigating climate change through car reduction is totally meaningless.
- Local authorities in conjunction with local communities should develop trial projects on fixed-route taxi bus services and demand-responsive transport. These could provide rural communities with an accessible, efficient and reliable public transport schemes.
- Where there is a demand for the opening up of local branch lines, Network Rail, alongside local authorities should give consideration to piloting 'local franchises' to explore the viability. Passenger numbers on many rural lines in Britain have increased in recent years as a result of marketing and local promotion.
- All councils must ensure the delivery of sustainable rural transport through their local transport plans under the Local Transport Act 2008. Government policy on transport must be rural proofed to ensure that rural transport needs are sufficiently prioritised.



Roy Jones from Oxfordshire has had Multiple Sclerosis for several years, and finds it hard to get from his hamlet to the nearest bus stop. Gillian Oldfield lives near Roy and knows that catching a bus to the local towns can involve several changes and long delays. Both would like a reliable rural transport network.

# COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

Love the countryside

Thank you for reading the Rural Manifesto. If you would like to find out more about the work of the Countryside Alliance please visit our website

**[countryside-alliance.org.uk](http://countryside-alliance.org.uk)**

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# **IT'S A FACT**

**Voter turnout in rural areas at the last General Election was 63 per cent, significantly higher than the national average.**