

10 policy pieces for a better countryside

Your countryside should include **housing** for local people seeking local jobs, but development must be sensitive to community and environmental needs.

Your countryside needs to be celebrated for its **business** innovation whilst new enterprises should be allowed to flourish.

Your countryside can take the lead in ensuring sustainable **energy** sources, guaranteeing national energy security.

Your countryside has a network of vital rural **services** which should be protected because of its enormous social and economic value.

Your countryside is enriched by **country pursuits**, whose participants should be free from prejudice and discrimination.

Your countryside is the nation's larder, which means that British **farmers and producers** should be championed.

Your countryside has a rich natural **environment** because of land managers who should be encouraged as they shape the land for future generations.

Your countryside hides **crime** behind a picturesque landscape, so tackling it should be given a priority equal to urban areas.

Your countryside can enjoy real progress, but the Government should respect **local democracy** and empower rural communities.

Your countryside is for everyone, so **education** should bridge the gap between urban and rural communities to enable mutual understanding to thrive.

Want to know more? Go to countryside-alliance.org.uk

Your countryside should include **housing** for local people seeking local jobs, but development must be sensitive to community and environmental needs.

It's a fact

The average price in rural areas is £246,000. That translates to 7.1 times the average income, reflecting not only higher property prices in the countryside but lower incomes too.

Why we care

The inability of country people to live close to their place of work is one of the greatest threats to the countryside itself. Many rural people are unable to buy a first home in the area where they grew up and where they work. We will continue to ensure that affordable housing is one of the key priorities for government.

The Countryside Alliance believes that:

- Planning decisions on the provision of affordable housing, jobs and services must be taken locally to ensure they meet the needs of those communities
- VAT on all maintenance and home improvement work should be cut so that it is not cheaper to build a new home than to renovate an existing building
- Local authorities should undertake an urgent review of all current planning applications and assess flood risk and flood defences in respect of any future house building, as laid out in Planning Policy Statement 25
- All monies raised from the increase in council tax on second homes must be ring-fenced for local housing needs
- Local authorities should take advantage of the provision in Planning Policy Statement 7, which allows for land unsuitable for commercial development to be used for affordable housing

Want to know more? Go to countryside-alliance.org.uk



Your countryside needs to be celebrated for its **business** innovation whilst new enterprises should be allowed to flourish.

It's a fact

In remote rural areas the number of businesses per 10,000 people is almost three times the level in urban areas.

Why we care

Rural areas are vibrant and thriving when it comes to business, with higher levels of self-employment and lower levels of unemployment. However, this economic health often fails to translate into material benefits for residents, with the cost of living significantly higher in rural areas. We will work to help rural businesses succeed.

The Countryside Alliance believes that:

- Red tape should be cut to improve the profitability of rural businesses
- Rural tourism is thriving, but many businesses are vulnerable because of their size and seasonal nature. Reductions in business rates and other fiscal measures should be used to ensure the long-term sustainability of businesses where appropriate
- Planning regulations should fully support the role of rural enterprise and pay special attention to ensure that rural businesses do not suffer due to the lack of business support services in an area
- To revitalise local businesses, large organisations should be encouraged to adopt home-working schemes
- The Job Seekers' Allowance should be reviewed to ensure it accounts for the seasonality of work in rural areas. This will help ensure that skilled people remain in communities for skilled work in season

Want to know more? Go to countryside-alliance.org.uk



Your countryside can take the lead in ensuring sustainable **energy** sources, guaranteeing national energy security.

It's a fact

£5 billion worth of energy is wasted annually in the UK.

Why we care

There is increased demand on the world's global fuel supply, so the Government needs to act now to ensure the nation's energy needs are met closer to home. We are focused on protecting the environment through individual responsibility, energy efficiency initiatives, and a realistic combination of energy sources.

The Countryside Alliance believes that:

- Households should be given proper incentives by government to deliver better energy efficiency
- People in rural areas should not suffer fuel poverty as a direct result of their remote location
- The Government should reconsider the establishment of the Renewable Heat Obligation with its obvious benefits for the environment
- The skills of British farmers and land managers must be used to exploit the huge potential offered by agriculture in providing renewable energy sources as part of the energy mix to ensure secure future supplies
- New housing developments should meet strict environmental standards to ensure their impact is minimal

Want to know more? Go to countryside-alliance.org.uk



Your countryside has a network of vital rural **services** which should be protected because of its enormous social and economic value.

It's a fact

91% of respondents in independent research from PostWatch felt post offices played an important role in their community.

Why we care

Rural services are crucial components of life in the country and provide the glue which holds these communities together, particularly in remote areas. The additional social element means that they often play a more significant role than in towns and cities. We will work to ensure that local authority funding criteria used by Government takes into account the sparsity factor.

The Countryside Alliance believes that:

- Planning regulations for pubs, shops and post offices should be changed to allow their integration under single roof 'co-locations' where there is a community need
- Transport schemes must be provided with reference to the social and economic needs of the locality, and not simply around the needs of visitors to an area
- Polyclinics could benefit rural areas but they should be opposed if they destroy local relationships between GPs and patients
- The future of the Post Office network must be intelligently planned to ensure a vibrant and sustainable network that will serve communities now and in the future
- The policy presumption against the closure of rural schools should be enforced to prevent avoidable closures

Want to know more? Go to countryside-alliance.org.uk



Your countryside is enriched by **country pursuits**, whose participants should be free from prejudice and discrimination.

It's a fact

More than five million people in Britain have participated in country pursuits.

Why we care

Rural pursuits such as falconry, hunting, fishing, shooting and ferreting are more popular than ever. There is now a growing recognition that these activities offer environmental, welfare, economic and cultural benefits on a grand scale, a mix relatively uncommon in modern day Britain. We are committed to a positive debate about how country pursuits are integral to the countryside.

The Countryside Alliance believes that:

- Country pursuits should receive a fair and balanced hearing in Parliament, in public and in the media
- There should be increased opportunity for people to participate in country pursuits which offer healthy, unique experiences in attractive locations
- Funding should continue to be available for special projects allowing people from diverse backgrounds to participate in angling
- The Government needs to promote the self-regulation of an increasingly valuable shooting sector
- The Hunting Act must be repealed because it is unworkable, illiberal and bad for animal welfare

Want to know more? Go to countryside-alliance.org.uk



Your countryside is the nation's larder, which means that British **farmers and producers** should be championed.

It's a fact

British farmers produce enough beef and lamb for over 500 million Sunday roasts every year.

Why we care

While the farming community understands that there is a need to adapt to a changing global market, there is a strong feeling that the UK Government displays contempt for the sector as a whole and the contribution it makes to the rural economy and environment. Change for the better is to be encouraged, but change that destroys the fabric of a nation must be resisted. We will continue to promote the sustainable and productive use of the land for both traditional food farming and non-food crops.

The Countryside Alliance believes that:

- Given the accelerating decline in self-sufficiency, the Government should base its farming policies on the strategic need for food, energy and water
- EU food labelling legislation is needed to give the consumer better knowledge of welfare and origin, exposing the hypocrisy of cross-border animal welfare standards
- Commercially driven marketing co-operatives should be encouraged as a means of redressing the balance between primary producer and the food retailers
- Small-scale producers should be allowed to flourish in a fair environment, adding to local diversity and reducing food miles
- The marketing and promotion of specialist food products, such as game or cheese, should be closely integrated into regional tourism strategies

Want to know more? Go to countryside-alliance.org.uk



Your countryside has a rich natural **environment** because of land managers who should be encouraged as they shape the land for future generations.

It's a fact

There were over 2.6 million incidents of fly-tipping in 2006 – 07 at a cost of £140 a minute to the public purse. This represents a 5% increase in just 12 months.

Why we care

Good management of land or water results from vibrant local economies and communities. The evidence suggests that the greatest contributors to the health of the landscape are those communities which derive their way of life from it. We will work with land managers to ensure that the good work they do is recognised.

The Countryside Alliance believes that:

- Conservation should be dynamic and economically viable, not a system preserved entirely by subsidy or regulation. Nature conservation objectives should take full account of local economic and social issues
- Traditional skills within the community, many of which provide conservation benefits should be used and developed
- Everyone should have access to the countryside. However, the expertise of local land managers should be valued and respected by Government and those who use the land in their leisure time
- The current protectionist movement to put environmental rights on an equal footing to human rights in international law should be properly scrutinised. Future legislation must take into account current wildlife and land management practices
- Local Authorities should fulfil their legal obligation to clamp down on fly-tipping and make it easier for people to dispose of their waste legally

Want to know more? Go to countryside-alliance.org.uk



Your countryside hides **crime** behind a picturesque landscape, so tackling it should be given a priority equal to urban areas.

It's a fact

Burglary rates in rural areas are now around three times higher than 25 years ago.

Why we care

Crime in rural areas has been steadily increasing over the last few years. Law and order was rated one of the top five priorities by all parishes in a recent analysis of parish plans. We will promote and protect the rights of people living in rural areas to feel safe in their own communities.

The Countryside Alliance believes that:

- Any proposals to change police forces must be rural proofed by the Commission for Rural Communities to ensure that those affected receive an appropriate level of police cover and funding
- The Government should take steps to improve emergency service call out and response times in rural areas
- Further steps should be taken to prevent youth crime, including the development of innovative facilities and activities to prevent boredom in towns and villages
- 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
- The Government should reassess the police funding formula to take adequate account of the population sparsity factor, which places a special emphasis on the importance of a viable rural police network

Want to know more? Go to countryside-alliance.org.uk



Your countryside can enjoy real progress, but the Government should respect **local democracy** and empower rural communities.

It's a fact

The voting turnout in rural areas at the last General Election was 63%, significantly higher than the national average.

Why we care

The Government should be looking at ways of investing more decision-making powers at local government level. The countryside still needs meaningful rural community emancipation and empowerment, starting at parish level and extending to district and county councils. We will endeavour to ensure that the views of communities are heard at all levels of government.

The Countryside Alliance believes that:

- The powers and authority of parish councils should be set in a clear legislative framework to give them a more powerful voice and ensure that local communities can feed into, and influence, decisions which directly affect them
- The Sustainable Communities Act should be promoted to ensure local authorities and communities make full use of the powers contained within the Act
- Training programmes should be developed to improve the resources of parish officers and support people with relevant skills to become members of parish councils
- Executive powers, especially in relation to planning, should be devolved from Whitehall and not vice-versa
- Where unitary authorities exist, there is a need to ensure that these authorities are not dominated by representation from urban areas at expense of rural communities

Want to know more? Go to countryside-alliance.org.uk



Your countryside is for everyone, so **education** should bridge the gap between urban and rural communities to enable mutual understanding to thrive.

It's a fact

One in three inner-city school children do not know that eggs come from chickens.

Why we care

Our countryside is for all of us, but it is also a place where food comes from and where communities live and work. The more people learn about the mechanics of the rural landscape, its people and wildlife, the greater its army of protectors. The Countryside Alliance Foundation exists to bring together town and country, providing an educational vehicle for all those who wish to promote and enhance the countryside for future generations.

The Countryside Alliance believes that:

- Subjects such as the environment, food and rural affairs should have a more mainstream role within the National Curriculum
- The Education Outside the Classroom Manifesto should be encouraged, provided teachers are protected from the current compensation culture
- More rural-based facilities should be made available to disadvantaged young people who stand to benefit through outdoor learning
- The wider public should have the option to enjoy greater access to accurate information about the conservation, management, and enjoyment of the countryside
- Better food education must move higher up the political agenda enabling people to make informed choices about healthy eating

Want to know more? Go to countryside-alliance.org.uk





Thank you for reading The Rural Jigsaw. If you would like to support our campaigns by making a donation or becoming a member please visit our website:

countryside-alliance.org.uk

Or you can contact us via:

Telephone:

0844 669 8000

E-Mail:

info@countryside-alliance.org.uk

**“ The Countryside Alliance is
the main lobbying group
on countryside issues ”**

The Economist

Countryside Alliance
The Old Town Hall
367 Kennington Road
London SE11 4PT

Tel: 020 7840 9200
Fax: 020 7793 8484

Email: info@countryside-alliance.org.uk
Website: countryside-alliance.org.uk
© 2008 Countryside Alliance

Channel 4
Political Awards
WINNER
Political Personality of the Decade

**COUNTRYSIDE
ALLIANCE**
Love the countryside