



2015-2020 Manifesto Summary

The planning system

- Give planning authorities need the flexibility to write and interpret Local Plan policies which can reflect local priorities and circumstances.
- Rethink the exemption of single plot self-build homes from the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- Ensure there is continued grant funding both for Neighbourhood Planning groups and to cover the additional costs that they bring for local planning authorities.

Affordable housing

- Introduce a dedicated rural affordable housing funding programme. Registered Providers to increase the current level of housing supply in rural communities by 6% per year for each of the next five years.
- Recognise the additional cost of building social housing in smaller rural settlements, when the HCA assesses value for money of schemes and awards grants.
- Give local authorities (1) the flexibility to suspend the Right to Buy where they can demonstrate it doesn't suit local circumstances and (2) the ability to stipulate that Right to Buy properties can only be sold on to someone with a local connection.

Local government funding

- Ensure that the extra costs of delivering services in rural areas are properly, and fully, reflected in all funding formulae
- Government proposals contained in its 2012 Consultation must be implemented in full and that the whole of the pre-damped amounts exemplified should flow through to the 170 Councils and Fire Authorities concerned.

Public transport

- Encourage and incentivise bus operators, local authorities and communities to work in partnership, so they can find local solutions that reduce the frontline impact on services that are a result of tightening public sector budgets.
- Reform the statutory concessionary fares scheme so it applies to and is fully funded by central Government to apply to the public transport that is actually available in a local area (including community transport).
- Provide sufficient extra funding for local authorities to enable them to provide transport to 16 to 19 year olds still in education.
- Protect the value of Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) under any future payment regime and ensure that rural areas are not disadvantaged by revisions. .

Access to health facilities

- Review the NHS resource allocation formula for Clinical Commissioning Groups, so that their funding more closely matches local levels of actual and predicted demand for services and service delivery costs.
- Take urgent action to address a growing rural recruitment problem as many GPs and Practice Nurses retire. A career in rural practice must be made attractive and, if necessary, incentivised.
- Take more account of accessibility by public transport, including for rural communities, in NHS service planning and review exercises.
- Support investment which can pilot and roll-out models of care delivery that are shown to be cost-effective and well suited to rural circumstances, such as tele-medicine and outreach services.
- Ensure funding allocations to local authorities for public health services are put on a fairer footing, as a matter of urgency, basing them upon local demand and needs (rather than historic patterns of spend) and taking proper account of sparsity costs.

Older people's services

The Rural Services Manifesto

- Ensure, as noted earlier, that the formula used to allocate local government finance properly takes better account of the additional cost of delivering services such as adult social care in rural areas.
- Ensure that where older people's support services are subject to competition, new providers cannot cherry pick.
- Support local initiatives such as Good Neighbour, Village Agent and First Contact schemes, which help older people remain in their own homes and improve their quality of life. .

Tackling fuel poverty

- Recognise that fuel poverty is a significant rural issue and that rising fuel prices hit many rural households hard. Policy initiatives should therefore target rural needs and be designed to suit rural circumstances.
- Amend the eligibility criteria for phase two of the Green Deal Home Improvement Scheme so it applies to oil and LPG boilers.
- Press energy providers hard to meet the 15% rural target for ECO and to refocus their efforts on solid wall homes. The rural fuel poor, who contribute to ECO through their energy bills, must start to see more benefits.

Viable village services

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- Commit that there will be no programme of post office closures during the lifetime of the 2017 to 2022 Parliament and the access measures for the post office network will be maintained.
- Do more to invest in the future of Community Post Offices, which are typically the last shop in the village. Establish a Post Bank, owned by the Post Office, to offer a full range of banking services through its network.
- Anyone living more than five miles from a dispensing chemist should be offered some nearer or alternate means of collection.
- Uphold the Royal Mail USO and introduce measures that stop blatant cherry picking by other postal operators, to the detriment of rural customers.

Broadband and mobile connectivity

- Introduce a more ambitious target for universal provision, set much higher than 2Mbps.
- Focus the broadband strategy and investment on achieving coverage where there is genuine market failure, with no broadband available or in prospect,
- Ensure improved mobile phone network coverage and competition is achieved.

The rural economy

- Brexit and Post Brexit policies must recognise 'rural' is more than agriculture and the natural environment. Long term support for social action to help communities more resilient are required as is Business Support and Infrastructure which reaches rural areas so the rural economy can grow and create quality jobs.
- All Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) whose geographies include rural communities and rural based businesses to ensure their Strategic Economic Plans will benefit them. All LEPs to appoint someone to their Boards with a clear role to act as a rural champion.
- Ensure that Growth Fund support managed by LEPs is available to micro and small businesses.
- Act upon the report from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which identified geographic gaps in university/HE provision in rural areas and which highlighted the key role the sector plays in workforce skills and economic growth. Maintain funding support for the specialist colleges that are central to the supply of skilled personnel ready to enter the agricultural and land-based sector.