

## ABOUT THE COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

The Countryside Alliance is known for championing the countryside and defending the rural way of life, from food and farming, local businesses and services, to the injustices of poor mobile phone signal and broadband in the countryside. We represent the interests of those who live and work in the countryside and enjoy it.

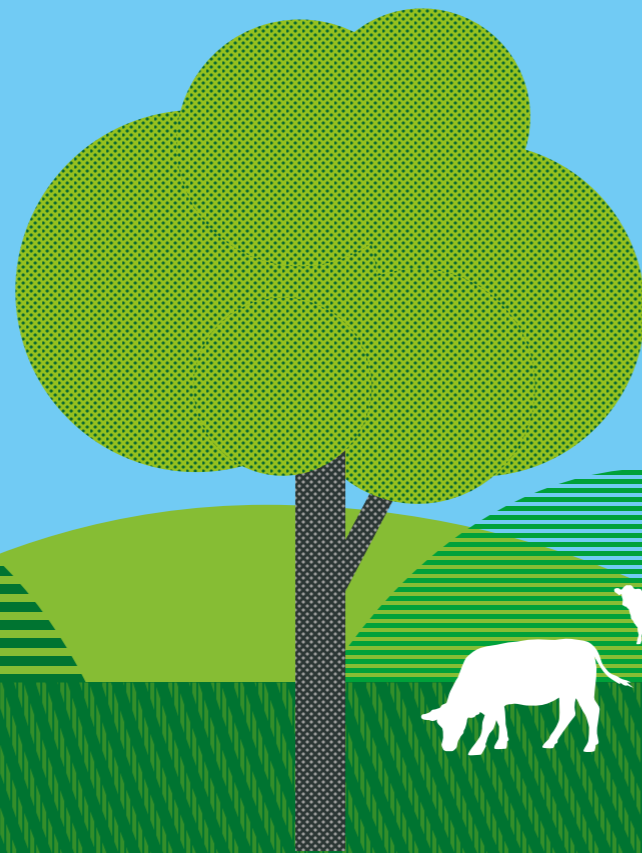
With over 100,000 members and supporters the Countryside Alliance promotes and protects rural life in parliament, in the media and on the ground.

Our vision is a future for the countryside which both preserves its traditional values and promotes a thriving rural community and economy; a countryside sustainably managed and sustainably enjoyed; a countryside where rural communities have equal access to the facilities and services enjoyed in urban communities; a countryside where people can pursue their businesses, activities and lives in a society that appreciates and understands their way of life.



# Rural Charter

## CHAMPIONING OUR COUNTRYSIDE



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# Introduction

While the UK countryside offers many a much-needed escape from the hustle and bustle of urban life, it is also a home and place of work for millions of people. It faces its own set of unique and often complex challenges and, sadly, there is a feeling amongst many in rural communities that within the corridors of Whitehall, the countryside is all too often forgotten or at best considered only as an afterthought.

Since our formation 27 years ago, the Countryside Alliance has been at the forefront of ensuring the rural voice is heard. In our frequent discussions with politicians from across all parties, we have made the case that the 2024 General Election will be won or lost in rural constituencies. Political parties have a real opportunity to show that they care, and to understand that for the UK to succeed the countryside must prosper.

The first major hurdle for all parties is whether their policies align with rural people's priorities, or whether they simply revert to policies that are more about doing things to the countryside than doing things for it.

Our Rural Charter provides input on what we believe all political parties should be prioritising: tackling rural crime; championing farmers and producers; recognising the role of wildlife management and the value of trail hunting, shooting and fishing; and delivering a connected countryside.

The countryside can, and will, play its part in making the UK a prosperous country, but policymakers must demonstrate they understand and respect the rural way of life and commit to tackling the issues facing our communities with genuine focus and commitment.

# Rural Charter

Respect rural communities

Tackle the blight of rural crime

Champion British farmers and producers

Recognise the role of wildlife management and the value of trail hunting, shooting and fishing

Deliver a connected countryside

# Tackling rural crime

Crime is a key issue for rural communities and the next government must recognise that tackling crime and increasing police visibility is a priority for the rural electorate. While there is increasing awareness in the corridors of Westminster of the growing problem of rural crime, this awareness is often not felt by the communities that live and work in the countryside nor reflected in government policies. Fifty per cent of people who responded to our 2023 Rural Crime Survey told us they don't think the police take rural crime seriously and 35% said they have had a crime committed against them in the past 12 months.

Livestock worrying, fly-tipping, agricultural machinery theft, and hare poaching were all crimes identified by respondents as issues they wanted the police to prioritise tackling. Livestock worrying was on the political agenda in the last parliament with legislation proposed to tackle the problem. We urge the next government to carry this forward.

New research from the House of Commons Library shows a 32% increase in rural crime since 2011, compared to 24% in urban areas. This includes nearly 130,000 more reported offences, with an additional 30,000 cases of criminal damage and arson. These figures highlight a significant disconnect between rural issues and government policies.

Our Rural Crime Survey results infer that we have a rural population simply putting up with the crime they experience and making do as best they can. There is often no escape from the effects of rural crime, with the fear of crime doing just as much damage as the crimes that are committed.

Good rural policing is about far more than the number of police officers on the ground. If we truly want to tackle rural crime, we must form effective partnerships between the police, rural communities and other authorities to ensure that the needs of our rural communities are truly understood and that the availability of services matches those needs. As rural crime rates rise faster than urban ones, we call on the next government to address this issue urgently.

## COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE CALLS FOR:

- ♦ An overhaul of the way police prioritise rural crime to reflect the growing serious and organised element of rural criminality and its impact on rural communities.
- ♦ The police to implement strategies that foster collaboration and rebuild trust between police and rural communities, including by encouraging reporting.
- ♦ The police to respond to every report that is made, in order to address the growing feeling that police cannot or will not do anything about rural crime.
- ♦ Greater support of dedicated rural crime teams through fair funding for rural police forces.

# £100M

Fly-tipping costs the UK over £100m per year in order to clean it up



## Agricultural machinery theft rose by 29% in 2022



## Livestock theft has risen 8.7% since 2022

# 44%

of people in rural areas have felt intimidated by criminality or criminals over the past year

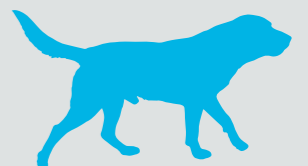


# 50%

OF PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS DO NOT THINK THE POLICE TAKE RURAL CRIME SERIOUSLY



1 IN 3 PEOPLE DID NOT REPORT A CRIME THEY WERE A VICTIM OF



SHEEP WORRYING HAS BEEN REPORTED AS THE MOST FREQUENTLY OCCURRING RURAL CRIME

# 33%

OF FARMERS HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY FLY-TIPPING

# Championing British farmers

British farmers and food producers work tirelessly to supply food to the highest standards, preserve our countryside, and support our nation's food security. As they face an array of challenges – from uncertain economic conditions to misinformation spread by activists about meat and dairy – it is imperative that the government stands behind British farmers and the agriculture industry.

Results from our recent investigation indicate that public bodies rarely mandate local sourcing in their food procurement policies and also, often lack knowledge of the origins of their catering. They should lead by example, promoting local produce and safeguarding farmers' land from diversion to initiatives like rewilding.

Meat production faces criticism, leading to mandates for plant-based catering at councils and universities and proposals for a meat tax. Yet, studies confirm that UK livestock farming operates to among the highest standards of sustainability and animal welfare in the world. Specifically, research from the Committee on Climate Change found that British beef production is about half as carbon-intensive as the global average. Additionally, game meat, such as venison, is a non-farmed alternative that is nutrient-dense and sustainably harvested, and its consumption supports conservation efforts.

Advocates for compulsory veganism overlook nuances in British food production and send a misleading message that all meat and dairy is harmful. Furthermore, they shift the highly personal decision of dietary choice from the private to the public sphere. Ultimately, the simplest way to shop sustainably is to purchase food locally, where possible, reducing food miles between farm and fork. This in turn helps the British farming sector to thrive, and prevents reliance on lower quality imports, produced to lower standards of welfare and sustainability.

## COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE CALLS FOR:

- ♦ 50% of food procured by public bodies must be British.
- ♦ Public bodies to be banned from removing meat and dairy produce from menus and greater consumption of sustainable game meat, including venison, across the public sector.
- ♦ A commitment to use all public platforms to promote the importance of shopping locally and supporting British farmers and producers.
- ♦ Proposals for a meat tax to be rejected.



1 in 8 people is employed in agriculture



THE FOOD AND FARMING INDUSTRY GENERATES OVER £128 BILLION A YEAR FOR THE UK ECONOMY

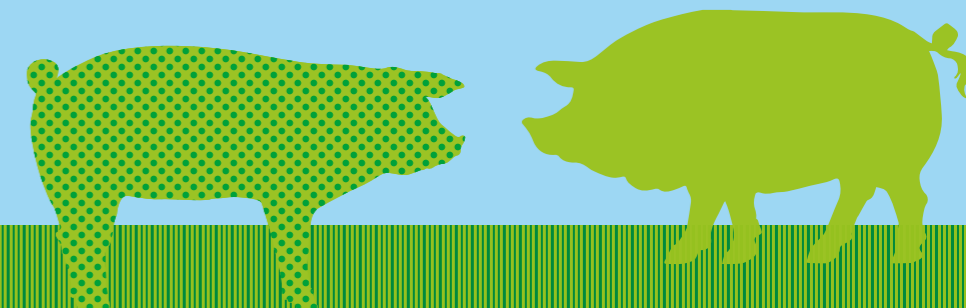
UK FARMERS EXPORT  
**£11 BILLION**  
WORTH OF FOOD  
TO THE EU

Farming businesses are essential for rural tourism, which accounts for 70-80% of all domestic UK tourism and adds

**£14.56 BILLION**  
to England and Wales' Gross Value Added



UK farmers export **£25 BILLION** worth of food, feed, and drink around the world



# Wildlife Management

The British countryside is our nation's larder, a place for recreation and plays a major role in our response to climate change. The management carried out by farmers and land managers is vital if we are to tackle the challenges of climate change, ensure biodiversity recovery and meet net zero. No government can meet these challenges without working with rural communities and drawing on their knowledge and skills. Policies that seek to impose solutions from above or do not understand the need for the management of wildlife are harmful to communities and environmental sustainability.

Deer management is critical to allow natural regeneration and the establishment of new woodland, fox and corvid control protects many of our most threatened species, and eradication of invasive species from mink to grey squirrels preserves our countryside. Restrictions on wildlife management threaten vulnerable species, habitats and food security.

Trail hunting promotes hedgerow management and conservation across the country, game shooting is hugely beneficial for conservation, and fishing protects rivers and lakes, with fishermen the first to raise concerns about pollution. Trail hunting, shooting and fishing also contribute to the rural economy and the social cohesion of the countryside. These are important activities that hold communities together in some of the most marginal areas of rural Britain and should be valued by government.

The countryside is for everyone, and the government should continue to promote the ability for more people to visit rural areas, whilst recognising the needs of those who live and work there. Managed access ensures vulnerable habitats are protected and the ability to produce food is not compromised.

## COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE CALLS FOR:

- ♦ No unjustified restrictions on wildlife management, trail hunting or other rural activities.
- ♦ Wildlife laws based on sound evidence and a consistent and principled approach across species.
- ♦ Improved water quality and a national fisheries policy which supports recreational fishing.
- ♦ Promoting the ability for more people to visit the countryside through managed and responsible access.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SHOOTING TO THE UK ECONOMY IS VALUED AT

**£3.3bn**

Trail hunts contributed more than **£400k** to charities and good causes last year

Angling is worth more than **£4 billion** to the UK economy and the rod licence raised nearly **£21 million** last year for the Environment Agency to use for management of inland water

TENS OF THOUSANDS OF SUPPORTERS ATTEND BOXING DAY TRAIL HUNTING MEETS

**£500m**

the value of conservation effort by people who shoot

**7.6 MILLION**

hectares are actively managed for conservation

REGISTERED HUNTS CARRY OUT OVER **12,000 DAYS** TRAIL HUNTING EVERY YEAR



# Delivering a connected countryside

As the anchors for key industries including food production, tourism and hospitality, rural communities are a cornerstone of our country's way of life. Yet in too many ways they are being left behind. Creating a fair deal for the countryside, connecting it fully to the modern United Kingdom, is a critical challenge facing the next government.

Much progress has been made in rolling out superfast and gigabit-capable broadband and mobile infrastructure, but rural communities often find themselves at the back of the queue. The current government has consulted on new measures to help the hardest to reach areas and on the future of the Universal Service Obligation. The next government needs to invest to deliver on these ambitions.

All major parties agree that electrification is the future of road transport. Rural areas in particular face two challenges; they need an adequate network of charging points including at people's homes; and a robust enough electric grid infrastructure to support the extra demand, particularly at peak times such as when people come home from work. Capital investment is vital to connect the countryside to both networks.

Some journeys will inevitably need to be made by car, but we must have the option to use public transport when we can. Public transport is a lifeline for rural communities and those on low incomes that would otherwise be left isolated and cut off from vital services. An extensive, reliable public transport network is essential to connect the countryside to centres of population and economic activity.

We all have a role in transitioning to a net zero economy, but rural communities have been asked to bear too much of the burden. Solar farms sited on agricultural land have threatened farming communities and food security. With the national effort of decarbonisation, built-up areas must play their role too. Homes and industrial buildings must be prioritised for renewable energy generation.

## COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE CALLS FOR:

- ♦ Fully funded proposals to improve broadband for very hard to reach premises and ensure the Universal Service Obligation delivers connectivity to rural communities.
- ♦ Preparation of rural communities for transport electrification ensuring access to an adequate charging infrastructure and a robust electricity grid.
- ♦ A reliable public transport network to serve and connect rural communities.
- ♦ Homes and industrial buildings to deliver solar and other renewable energy generation before using productive farmland.

For every £1 invested in digital skills you would get a return of £9.48 for UK PLC

Investing £1.4 billion in digital skills could reap economic benefits of £13.7 billion



ENHANCING RURAL DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY WOULD BOOST THE UK ECONOMY BY £65 BILLION

57%

OF RURAL PREMISES DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO FULL FIBRE BROADBAND

RURAL HOUSEHOLDS SPEND ALMOST £800 A YEAR MORE ON FUEL THAN PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN URBAN AREAS

19%

RURAL PRODUCTIVITY IS 19% LOWER THAN THE UK AVERAGE

90% of rural mobile sites do not have 5G deployed

Between 1990 and 2021, the UK's agricultural sector decreased its emissions by 12%

