

**EFRA Committee survey**  
**November 2024**

*1. What major unresolved policy challenges are you or your stakeholders facing?*

In advance of the recent General Election the Countryside Alliance published our Rural Charter, a manifesto setting out our priorities for this Parliament. These were as follows:

- Respecting rural communities.
- Tackling the blight of rural crime.
- Championing British farmers and food producers.
- Recognising the role of wildlife management and the value of trail hunting, shooting and fishing.
- Delivering a connected countryside.

Taken together these items encapsulate what we see as the major challenges facing rural communities. In broad terms, we are keen to address the ‘rural premium’, the added costs of living that residents must pay by virtue of living in a rural area. This is a key challenge to rural Britain and reflects the reality of our members’ and supporters’ daily lives.

*2. What issues should the EFRA Committee prioritise in 2025 and why?*

We would suggest that the following issues are suitable for early scrutiny by the Committee.

First, changes introduced in the November Budget to agricultural property relief from inheritance tax on family farms have provoked significant controversy over the impact they will have on the sector. The actual number of farms that will be impacted annually, and the degree of those impacts, have been subject to considerable disagreement between Ministers and farmers’ representatives and, according to some media outlets, within government. We suggest that the Committee could usefully seek to establish a factual basis for future discussion.

Second, fly-tipping remains a matter of particular concern in rural areas, with 1.08 million instances having been reported in England in 2022-23. It has been suggested that the situation is not helped by the patchwork nature of relevant legislation and enforcement bodies. Investigatory and enforcement responsibilities are split between local authorities and the Environment Agency, depending on the circumstances of the incident; no single, national body has been charged with gripping the issue. We believe a Committee investigation into fly-tipping legislation and enforcement could generate

invaluable insight for the government on how regulatory reform might help deter and prevent fly-tipping.

Third, the last Parliament saw the passage of the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act which stands to improve considerably the resilience of rural businesses to theft but to date, regulations to make the Act operational have yet to be brought forward. We would value any contribution the Committee could make to encouraging the Government to bring forward such regulations without further delay. In future years we would also appreciate efforts to monitor the effectiveness of the Act and accompanying regulations in preventing theft and aiding the recovery of stolen equipment.

*3. Are there longer term or emerging issues that would benefit from Committee scrutiny over the next five years? For example, issues relating to climate change or new technologies.*

The most significant long-term issue we perceive in rural policy is the lack of co-ordination within government. Despite there being a government department whose name includes the words 'Rural Affairs', matters of vital importance to rural communities are determined by a plethora of other departments including Health, Education, Transport, Science and Technology and the Home Office. However, no single government office or body is responsible for ensuring that the impacts of proposed policies on the countryside are fully considered, given the particular circumstances and challenges it faces. We find it bizarre that the previous government legislated to create a committee to monitor the impact of government policies on animals in view of their status as sentient beings, yet no similar mechanism exists to take a cross-departmental view of rurality. We believe the most valuable contribution the Committee could make across this Parliament would be to inquire into the government's general approach to rural affairs and the co-ordination of policy affecting rural communities.

Second, we expect rural communities to face distinctive impacts from policies intended to promote decarbonisation. A key example would be the electrification of road transport. We are inclined to support this objective, but our overriding concern is to ensure that rural communities are not left behind or, worse, find themselves frozen out of access to private transport. Rural electricity grids must be robust enough to support the added load that will accompany widespread electric vehicle charging at peak times, and when the Treasury inevitably introduces some model of road pricing to make up for the shortfall in fuel duty revenues that will arise from the decline in internal combustion engine cars on the road, the adopted model must account for the necessity for people living in rural areas to take more, longer journeys. Similarly, recent developments in energy policy have impacted disproportionately on rural communities, with large-scale solar farms clustering around substations and disrupting local communities and

businesses that had grown up around land that been dedicated to food production but no longer is. We therefore suggest a Committee inquiry into the impacts of decarbonisation policies on rural communities.

*4. How could the Committee better gather and represent both your concerns and the views of those in your sector?*

We are generally satisfied with the standard consultation mechanisms used by Select Committees, primarily calls for written evidence and the taking of oral evidence. We are ready to supply both as issues arise that are of interest to our members and/or we have relevant expertise. Beyond that, the EFRA Committee is especially well-placed to undertake site visits, for instance to farms and game shoots, so we would encourage it to make use of these where appropriate.

*5. Do you have any examples of good practice where you have shared your concerns with Parliamentary or public bodies?*

The Countryside Alliance has a strong record of engagement with parliamentarians, public bodies and the government. While, as a campaigning organisation, we clearly have objectives around influencing policy, our aim is to do so in as helpful and co-operative a manner as possible. We aim to supply information that will be useful to policymakers regardless of whether they agree with our conclusions.

Recent policy successes have included helping develop and secure passage of the above-mentioned Equipment Theft Act, promoting and inducing the previous government to adopt changes to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 to clamp down on hare poaching, and engaging closely with newly elected and re-elected Police and Crime Commissioners in the development of their Police and Crime Plans.

*6. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about?*

Not immediately, but if any further questions should arise from our submission, please let us know.

*7. Are you representing an organisation? If so which one? Please leave your name and contact details*

This submission has been prepared by the Countryside Alliance. Please contact David M Bean, Parliament and Government Relations Manager, at [david-bean@countryside-alliance.org](mailto:david-bean@countryside-alliance.org).