



## **Your Parliamentary Update: Made glorious summer**

As Summer Recess beckons we are pleased to offer this update on parliamentary and political activity affecting rural Britain. We hope you will enjoy a well-earned break over the coming months and look forward to seeing many of you at the autumn conferences.

This edition includes:

- Future Countryside
- Online Safety Bill
- Equipment Theft (Prevention) Bill
- Defending livestock farming
- Species reintroductions
- The 'rural premium'
- Countryside Alliance Awards National Champions

## Future Countryside

The Countryside Alliance Foundation supported the highly successful inaugural [Future Countryside](#) event at Hatfield House, which brought together an extraordinary and diverse gathering of rural interests.

Speaking at the event the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Thérèse Coffey MP, [unveiled](#) the Government's Unleashing Rural Opportunity programme. The plan draws together existing and new work to drive job creation and growth in rural areas, with specific measures falling under the plan's four main themes of housing, communities, connectivity and growth.

Another notable intervention was from Lord Mandelson, who [called for](#) "a new relationship between the Labour Party and British farming and between Labour and rural communities" and warned activists against obsessing about divisive rural issues for overtly political reasons. He said it would be "wrong for the Left to stoke culture wars against rural minorities".

## Online Safety Bill amendments update

The amendments to the [Online Safety Bill](#), for which we campaigned, to enable it to tackle malicious fake reviews have not been adopted by the Government. They were moved in the House of Lords by Baroness Buscombe and Lord Garnier, and while our primary aim has not succeeded we are pleased to have secured recognition from the Government that fake reviews

motivated by ideological hostility are a genuine problem that steps must be taken to tackle.

The Government has argued that the issue may be addressed through powers in the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill. We and our parliamentary colleagues shall continue the discussions. We are also grateful to have received poorly publicised details about how victims can seek redress under existing powers, so will be working to supply this important information to those who need it.

#### [Equipment Theft \(Prevention\) Bill receives Royal Assent](#)

We are grateful to MPs and peers from across both Houses for their support for the [Equipment Theft \(Prevention\) Bill](#), which is set to receive Royal Assent imminently. Especial thanks are due to Greg Smith MP for conceiving it and Lord Blencathra for shepherding it through the House of Lords. The Bill will require all new mechanised agricultural equipment to be fitted with a marked engine immobiliser, and dealers to retain sales records. Regulations covering other trade tools are expected to follow.

The Countryside Alliance has supported this Bill from the outset, participating in initial framing discussions and briefing Members of both Houses. The Bill received unanimous support at each parliamentary stage and has been passed without amendment.

### Councils back Alliance-supported motion to defend livestock farming

In our last edition we reported on attacks on livestock farming and the consumption of dairy and meat, with efforts being made to lobby councils to discriminate directly against livestock farming, meat and dairy, denying consumer choice. Having begun the fightback [in the media](#), we are bringing our campaign to defend livestock farmers to town halls across the country. Already two councils, [Cornwall](#) and [Northamptonshire](#), have passed motions supported by the Countryside Alliance that commit them to support local farmers and encourage shopping and sourcing locally, regardless of dietary preference.

If your local authority colleagues are interested in promoting the supply of high-quality local food that caters to all diets, we can help: please get in touch at [politics@countryside-alliance.org](mailto:politics@countryside-alliance.org). We also remain committed to promoting national legislation to protect UK livestock farming, which operates to among the highest standards of sustainability and animal welfare in the world.

### EFRA Committee reports on species reintroductions

The House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee [published its report](#) on species reintroductions on 11 July, following an inquiry launched in November. The Countryside Alliance submitted a response along with other groups representing the interests of farmers, land managers and conservationists.

In our evidence, we made it clear that the Countryside Alliance is not opposed to species reintroductions as such. However, reintroductions must focus on species of clear benefit to ecosystems while recognising that the countryside is a living and working environment. The guiding principle must be that only the right species are reintroduced in the right places, with an acceptance that wildlife management may be necessary, including lethal control. We were pleased that the report recognised the potential impact on rural communities and the importance of ensuring that any harms are mitigated and compensated.

#### APPG highlights 'rural premium'

The APPG for Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse has [published its report](#) into the impact of spiralling living costs in rural areas, after the Countryside Alliance [submitted evidence](#) to its consultation. Examples of what the report terms the 'rural premium' include lack of access to the lowest-cost food and resulting reductions in purchasing power, lack of access to cash arising from closures of banks and post offices, and higher costs of transport.

As The Telegraph [also reported](#), it quotes our 2022 research showing that rural households spend almost £800 a year more on fuel than people who live in urban areas, and spend up to 6 pence per litre more for petrol. As well as campaigning for improved public transport options in rural areas we have called for an urgent VAT cut on road fuel; while the APPG has not adopted that suggestion it does recommend that the Rural Fuel Duty Relief scheme be extended.

## [Countryside Alliance Awards UK Champions celebrated](#)

MPs, peers and businesses from across the UK gathered at the House of Lords in May to discover and celebrate the [winners of the Countryside Alliance Awards](#). National Champions and Highly Commended businesses were selected in each of the five categories of Local Food / Drink, Village Shop / Post Office, Butcher, Pub and Rural Enterprise. The Clarissa Dickson Wright Award was also made to an exceptional enterprise prioritising slow food, taste, quality and support for our farmers and producers.

Preparations for next year's Awards are already under way, and when the time comes we hope we can count on your support in securing another excellent collection of nominees.



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