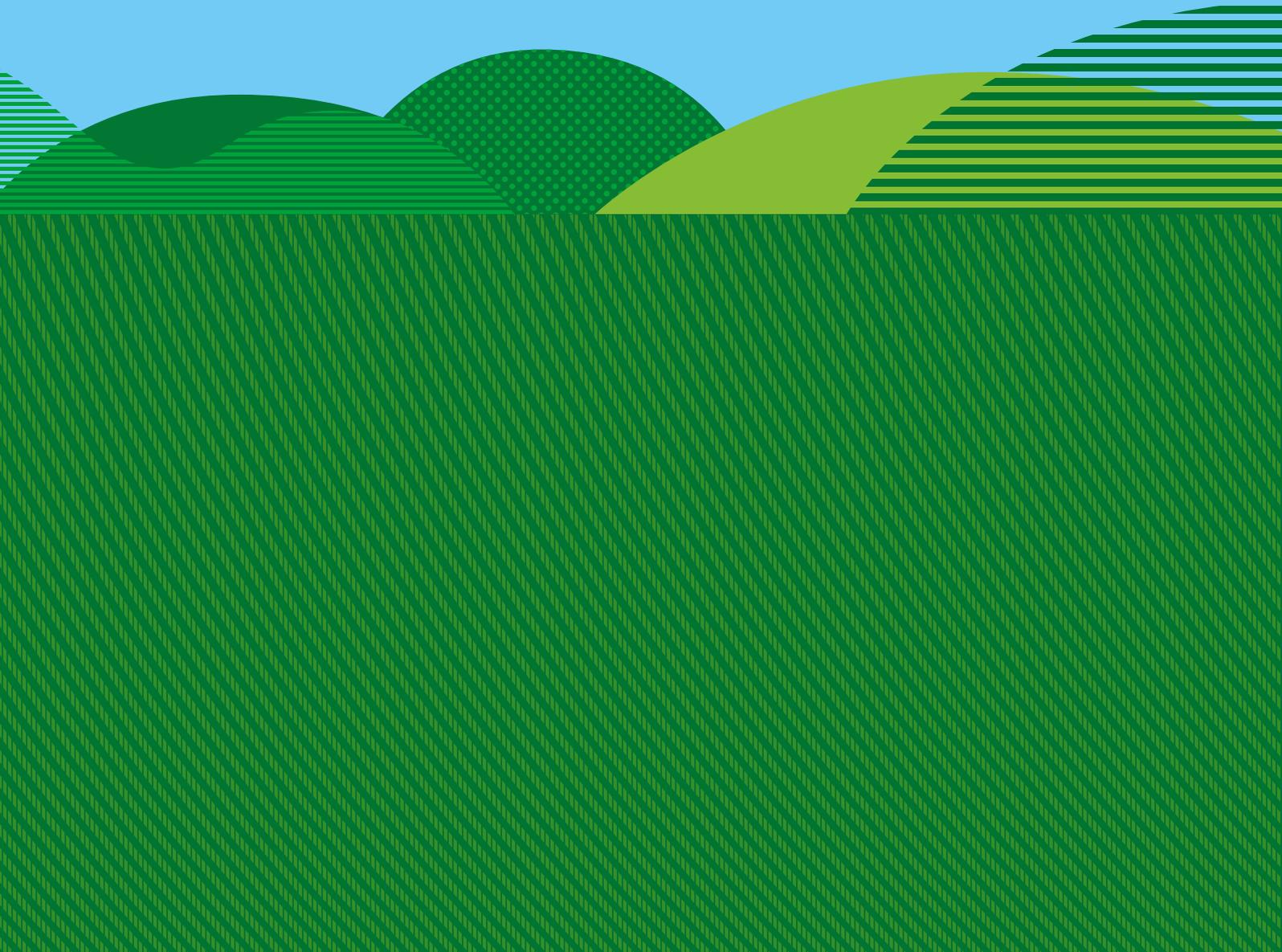


**Countryside  
Alliance**



# General Election Manifesto 2017

#ruralvote



# Introduction

Our countryside is a national treasure admired around the world but it is also a home and workplace for millions of Britons. Those who live and work there can be forgiven for feeling that the countryside is often treated as a theme park, not receiving the political support and action it needs and deserves. Rural life holds specific challenges and we urge the next government to recognise this and prioritise accordingly.

The Countryside Alliance was formed 20 years ago around a strong and vocal culture of campaigning and making the countryside's voice heard. We have had a significant impact on the rural and political landscape and that will continue. This manifesto highlights several key issues which truly matter to those who live and work in the countryside; from tackling rural crime and increasing the provision of affordable rural housing to ensuring universal access to high speed broadband and mobile phone signal.

It is clear that Brexit will be front and centre of the work of the next Parliament, and the decision to leave the EU will have a profound impact on the countryside. To this end we have published a policy document focusing on Brexit which addresses the key issues and opportunities for the countryside.

In addition to Brexit, the next Government will need to address other key rural issues, so we have launched a Rural Charter with our five priorities.

A living and working countryside is more important than ever and the Countryside Alliance will work to ensure rural Britain is well represented.

# Rural Charter

**Make Brexit work for  
the countryside**

**Buy British by  
supporting our farmers  
and producers**

**Repeal the Hunting Act  
and recognise the value  
of shooting and fishing**

**Connect the countryside  
by delivering first class  
digital infrastructure**

**Tackle crime in  
rural areas**

# Digital Communications

Digital growth is key to driving the UK economy forward, which is why new and innovative policies are needed to meet the increasing demand for connectivity and to ensure rural communities' needs are not forgotten.

Leaving the EU and establishing new trade deals with countries around the world will increase the need for UK businesses to be competitive. This means it is more important than ever that the UK Government invests in digital connectivity and skills.

Access to high speed and reliable broadband connectivity varies wildly across the country. A recent report by the telecommunications regulator Ofcom showed that households in rural areas are experiencing considerably slower speeds than their urban counterparts.

It is unacceptable that 960,000 homes in rural areas still cannot access upload and download speeds greater than 10Mbit/s. With the drive for digital by default and the ambition for the UK to have a world leading digital economy we must get the basics right by ensuring that people in the countryside have access to reliable high speed broadband and mobile connectivity.

Digital communications give rural businesses, including our important tourist industry, a window to the world. As we leave the EU it will become even more important for rural areas to be connected to mobile and high speed broadband in order to compete globally.

We need to ensure that not only do we have the infrastructure and coverage to meet this demand, but also to educate consumers and businesses about the benefits of high speed connectivity and ensure they have the right digital skills.

## **COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE CALLS FOR:**

- ♦ Dark fibre access (un-used fibre capacity) to be opened up to all broadband suppliers. This would allow competitors effectively and competitively to lease capacity from BT Openreach.
- ♦ Duct access to be opened up to allow all broadband suppliers to lay competing infrastructure alongside BT's existing network.
- ♦ Government to promote and support alternative technologies, such as satellite and mobile broadband, which can deliver connectivity to remoter rural areas.
- ♦ When we leave the EU the Government must seek to be at least as ambitious as the EU in digital connectivity and where possible look to exceed EU targets.

**960,000 homes**  
**< 10Mbit/s**

960,000 homes in rural areas still cannot access download speeds greater than 10Mbit/s



£120 BILLION IS GENERATED THROUGH THE INTERNET

**47%**  
OF PREMISES IN RURAL ENGLAND DO NOT GET ANY COVERAGE FROM AN OPERATOR

**59%**  
OF PREMISES IN RURAL SCOTLAND DO NOT GET ANY COVERAGE FROM AN OPERATOR

**68%**  
OF PREMISES IN RURAL WALES DO NOT GET ANY COVERAGE FROM AN OPERATOR

28% of the UK geographic area is not covered by 4G from any operator



# Food and Farming

Our food and farming industry is nationally important, generating over £108 billion a year for the UK economy and employing one in eight people. It is particularly important for our most rural areas where farming is often central to the economic and social life of the community as well as playing a vital role in conservation.

The UK produces some of the best food in the world, with the highest animal welfare and husbandry standards. Our new relationship with the EU, and any new trade deals with non-EU countries, must protect these standards and allow our produce to be promoted globally and compete on the basis of quality.

The agricultural sector also underpins much of our tourism industry in rural areas. Whether providing land and water for enjoyment, food for the table, or accommodation from which to explore our unique landscapes. We must champion our farmers and celebrate their contribution to the British landscape and economy. This would not only benefit the industry, but also increase visitor numbers and stimulate the wider economy.

Educating people, particularly the young, about food and farming and countryside management is essential. It is surprising how many people do not understand farming or gamekeeping practices and the vital role they play in maintaining a well-managed countryside.

Leaving the EU provides the opportunity to develop an agricultural policy that is appropriate for the UK, targeting support payments for the public good provided by farmers. It also provides the opportunity that consumers have the ability and confidence to support British farmers and producers.

## **COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE CALLS FOR:**

- ♦ Mandatory country of origin labelling to be extended, to ensure a level playing field for British farmers after we have left the EU, and allow consumers to make informed choices.
- ♦ The marketing and promotion of specialist food products such as game and whisky to be closely integrated into a national tourism strategy, and ensure the EU export market for these products remains tariff-free.
- ♦ Ensure that UK farmers and producers continue to have access to the EU labour market, which may include the reintroduction of a Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme.
- ♦ Establish a fully funded agricultural policy with support payments targeted at those farmers who are providing the most amount of public good but not being rewarded for this by the market.



1 in 8  
people is  
employed in  
agriculture



£108bn

THE FOOD AND FARMING INDUSTRY GENERATES  
OVER £108 BILLION A YEAR FOR THE UK ECONOMY

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

Tourism  
expenditure on  
food and drink is  
estimated to support

**81,000 JOBS**

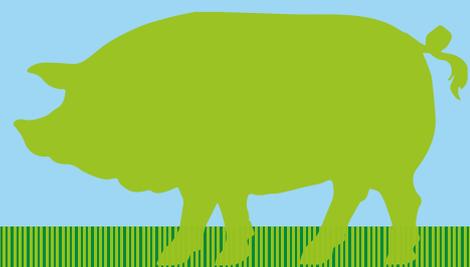
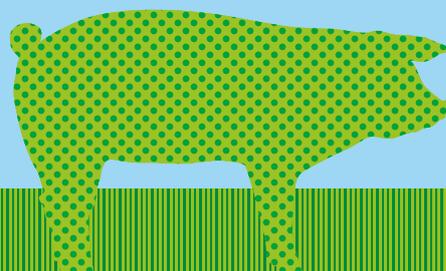
and

**£1.5 BILLION**

of GVA across rural  
tourism economies  
in England



Sales of local food and drink  
totalled almost **£10 billion**  
across England in 2013,  
almost **£3 billion** of which  
was sold in rural areas



# Rural Communities

Rural communities are a key part of the fabric of the British countryside, and are home to, and a place of work for, over 11 million people.

Residents of rural towns and villages across Britain do not have acceptable access to the most basic services, goods and amenities. They often have to travel longer distances for healthcare, petrol stations, financial services and shops; and pay a premium for basic essentials such as fuel for heating and transport. Furthermore, the shortfall in available housing to buy or rent is forcing local people out of the communities in which they work and in which they have often been brought up.

Rural services are the glue that holds rural communities together. An increasingly ageing population and lack of access to those services, whether due to limited public transport or lack of broadband, can lead to increasing levels of rural isolation.

Crime is a key issue for rural communities yet those communities feel that policing is often focussed on their urban neighbours. Residents and businesses in the countryside pay as much, and often more, per head of population for policing and they deserve equal treatment to their urban counterparts.

The lack of services and support in rural communities is hugely damaging and the Countryside Alliance believes that more must be done to ensure the future of safe, vibrant and sustainable rural communities.

## **COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE CALLS FOR:**

- ♦ The rural proofing of all policies to prevent increasing isolation of rural communities.
- ♦ Fair funding for policing to ensure the sparsity factor is recognised which will ensure the police are able to tackle crimes in remoter communities.
- ♦ Financial services, particularly business banking, to be offered by all major banks via the Post Office network.
- ♦ Incentives for landowners to make land available for affordable housing in rural communities.

# £800M



The true cost of crime in rural areas exceeds £800m



1 IN 6 PEOPLE IN THE UK LIVE IN A RURAL AREA



Seven out of ten villages in rural areas no longer have a shop



Rural commuters **PAY 25% MORE** for their monthly commute than those in urban areas

# 20%

OF THE POPULATION LIVE AND WORK IN RURAL AREAS AND YET ONLY



# 12%

OF BANK BRANCHES AND



# 11%

OF CASH MACHINES ARE LOCATED THERE



# Wildlife Management

The British countryside has been shaped by man over many centuries. It is our nation's larder, a place for recreation and also underpins tourism in this country. Our countryside is also a workplace that requires management to protect vulnerable habitats and species. The aim of wildlife management is to maintain healthy and balanced populations at levels that can be sustained by their local environment, and which are acceptable to farmers, landowners and the overall balance of all other wildlife. A lack of management threatens species and habitats, and the production of food.

Wildlife management is best achieved by a combination of methods undertaken by farmers, gamekeepers, landowners, naturalists and huntsmen, with their divergent interests, using the appropriate methods of control for their particular circumstances.

Game shooting goes hand in hand with wildlife management. Shooting has been scientifically shown to be beneficial for conservation and the rural economy.

People who hunt and shoot benefit from trade and travel opportunities with countries within the EU and these should be retained and developed as part of the UK's new relationship with the EU and any new trade deals with non-EU countries. It is also important that people from the EU retain the ability to visit the UK to shoot and hunt without any additional bureaucracy and costs.

The Countryside Alliance believes there needs to be a consistent, evidence based and principled approach to wildlife management and habitat protection across all species and that leaving the EU provides an opportunity to ensure that these laws are fit for purpose and appropriate for the UK.

## **COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE CALLS FOR:**

- ♦ Repeal of the Hunting Act.
- ♦ All wildlife laws to be based on sound evidence and a consistent and principled approach across species.
- ♦ Maintaining improvements in water quality and developing a national fisheries policy which supports recreational fishing after we leave the EU.
- ♦ Maintaining tariff-free and frictionless trade with the EU in firearms, ammunition and game meat, and ensure that those travelling to or from Europe to take part in country sports face no additional bureaucracy or costs after we leave the EU.



THE CONTRIBUTION  
OF SHOOTING  
TO THE UK ECONOMY  
IS VALUED AT

**£2bn**



SHOOTING SUPPORTS  
THE EQUIVALENT OF  
**74,000** FULL-TIME JOBS



**3.5 MILLION**  
UK ADULTS REGULARLY COARSE,  
GAME OR SEA FISH



**£250m**

is spent each year on conservation  
by people who shoot

**2,000,000**

hectares are actively managed  
for conservation



Angling is worth more  
than **£3 billion** to the  
UK economy and the rod  
licence raised nearly  
**£23 million** last year for  
the Environment Agency  
to use for management  
of inland water

**3 MILLION DAYS**  
HAVE BEEN SPENT  
HUNTING  
BY INDIVIDUALS  
SINCE 2004



## 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.



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