

**Countryside  
Alliance**



# CHAMPIONING OUR COUNTRYSIDE

MANIFESTO  
FOR WALES  
2021



# Contents

2

Introduction

3

Thriving rural communities

5

Growing the rural economy

7

Managing our countryside

8

Harvesting our countryside



# Introduction

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Wales is a country with breathtaking countryside, world class food and drink producers, and more castles per square mile than any other country in the world. Our countryside underpins our tourism sector, is a place of recreation, a larder and, just as importantly, a place of work for many. All this means that we ask a great deal from our natural resources.

The last couple of years has brought about a sea change, with bold ambitions for a green recovery, a commitment to tackle climate change, and the Covid-19 pandemic has been instrumental in the swiftest societal change in a century. With many of us now working from home, it has highlighted the demands placed on our broadband and mobile phone infrastructure. People across the length and breadth of Wales have taken to growing their own food, emphasising the increasing demand from consumers for low food miles and for knowing the origin of the food they eat. The countryside has become a magnet for people to escape the monotony of recent times and connecting to the countryside is proven to improve people's health and well-being. Rural Wales is a national asset and should be treated as such.

A green recovery is only possible with the continued contribution and commitment of our farmers, gamekeepers and riverkeepers. Their work needs to be understood, appreciated and championed by future Members of the Senedd to enable them to continue to operate sustainably with the resources already available and to meet the challenges the post-Covid recovery period will present to Wales.

## Thriving rural communities

One in three people live in rural Wales and it is important that those communities have a vibrant and sustainable future. To ensure this they must have the support of the Welsh Government with policies that do something for the countryside rather than to the countryside. This is why the Countryside Alliance believes that all policies in Wales must be rural proofed so that the needs of rural communities are not overlooked and put at a disadvantage compared to their urban neighbours.

Residents of rural towns and villages across Wales often do not have access to the most basic services, goods and amenities. They often have to travel longer distances for healthcare, financial services and shops and pay a premium for basic essentials such as fuel, both for heating and transport. Furthermore, there is a growing concern that rural crime is having a detrimental impact on communities in Wales. One in four rural crimes were not even reported to the police. We have a situation where rural communities feel failed by those who are supposed to protect them and that rural crimes, such as agricultural machinery theft, livestock rustling and fly-tipping, are just not taken seriously by the police. Good rural policing is about far more than numbers of police officers on the ground, it is about working with communities to tackle these growing problems.

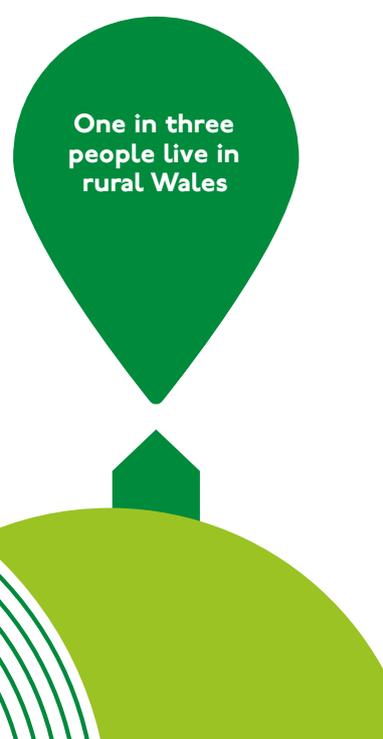
### Rural crimes to tackle in order of priority<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> According to CA Rural Crime Survey 2020

As we move beyond the impacts of Covid-19 rural communities will need funding to bounce back and secure the future of successful community led projects that have been put at risk by the pandemic. Many vulnerable people have been cut off socially and the return to normal life will only be successful if communities are adequately supported. The pandemic has also underlined the importance of broadband and digital connectivity. While Wales has had a relatively successful roll out programme of providing broadband coverage, the quality of that coverage in terms of reliability and speed, varies wildly across the country. Whilst the emphasis has been on providing broadband, poor mobile phone signal continues to be a challenge, with little progress having been made.

The pandemic has highlighted the needs of rural communities but also the importance of those communities to the Welsh economy and the health and prosperity of Wales.



One in three  
people live in  
rural Wales

## The Countryside Alliance calls on the next Welsh Government to:

- ◆ Ensure policies are rural proofed, so that rural communities are not disadvantaged by a one size fits all policy.
- ◆ Work with the police, local authorities, and other public bodies, to ensure that rural crime is taken seriously and the impact it has on rural communities is understood and tackled.
- ◆ Re-assess the current broadband and mobile phone connectivity across Wales, identifying the areas that have little or no coverage and to prioritise connecting them digitally.

## Growing the rural economy

The fabulous blue flag beaches, historical landmarks and buildings, landscapes to explore, along with first class food and accommodation, make Wales the perfect destination for staycations and for visitors from across the world. It is therefore no wonder that Wales is hugely dependent on tourism, especially in rural areas where the natural environment is the star attraction. It is imperative that the new Welsh Government supports this important industry and allows it to flourish.

Being able to access the outdoors has been proven to improve people's health and wellbeing, and public health boards, and the health sector as a whole, would benefit greatly from engaging with land managers to unlock the potential of rural Wales to improve the health of the nation and thus contributing to the rural economy. There is an obvious need for greater engagement with the outdoors through education for all ages, as the pandemic has highlighted.

Access reform has been on the agenda in Wales for some time, and there is increasing pressure on landowners to provide more land and water for outdoor recreation. However, this must be done on a voluntary and reward-based basis, and incorporated into any future agricultural support scheme, that replaces the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). It is essential the next Welsh Government recognises that any new access rights must be developed with the understanding that the Welsh countryside is a place of work, as well as home, to those that live and work there. Fundamentally, increasing rights of access must respect the rights of communities and not be detrimental to rural businesses or the environment.



**Shooting in Wales contributes £75 million to the rural economy and provides custom to the rural pubs and hotels in the quieter winter months**

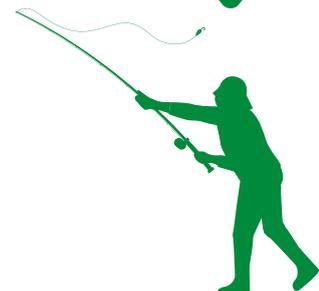


There also needs to be proper recognition of the economic importance of country pursuits to the Welsh economy, especially as these benefits are 365 days a year and therefore a unique contributor to any tourism strategy and local economies. Shooting in Wales contributes £75 million to the rural economy and provides custom to the rural pubs and hotels in the quieter winter months. Angling participation in Wales has seen an increase in the number of people who fish. Sales of rod licences were higher by the end of October 2020 than they were in October 2019, and the benefits of angling to health and wellbeing are widely demonstrated.

### The Countryside Alliance calls on the next Welsh Government to:

- ◆ Ensure any access reform respects existing rights and is sympathetic to the environment.
- ◆ Guarantee that any replacement for CAP supports food production, as well as rewarding farmers and land managers for the many social and environmental goods they deliver.
- ◆ Implement a country sports tourism strategy to bolster tourism, especially in the winter months.

Sales of rod licences were higher by the end of October 2020 than they were in October 2019



# Managing our countryside

The Welsh countryside has been managed over many centuries. The aim of wildlife management should be to maintain healthy and balanced populations of wild animals 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 vulnerable populations, biodiversity, habitat conservation and the production of food.

Wildlife management is best achieved by a combination of methods undertaken by farmers, gamekeepers, and other land managers, with their divergent interests, and using the appropriate methods in their particular circumstances. There is no conflict between animal welfare and proper wildlife management.

Those who favour and promote the animal rights agenda, as opposed to animal welfare, often advocate approaches which are not supported by evidence and therefore hinder management, to the detriment of both wildlife and the environment. The Welsh Government must base its policies on principle and evidence, and resist the pressure from petitions and polls, based on ideology, rather than what is best for wildlife based on objective evidence.



The Countryside Alliance calls on the next Welsh Government to:

- ◆ Ensure there is a consistent, evidence based and principled approach to wildlife management and habitat protection across all species.
- ◆ Recognise and support the importance of wildlife management and the value of hunting, shooting and fishing to the Welsh rural economy.
- ◆ Develop environmental and wildlife management policies, working with stakeholders and practitioners, such as farmers and gamekeepers, for the benefit of Wales's flora and fauna.

# Harvesting our countryside

Our farmers and food producers not only produce world class products enjoyed at home and abroad but they are also responsible for managing and enhancing our beautiful countryside.

Leaving the European Union has brought its challenges, but also opportunities, and we need a Welsh Government that is not only going to champion our farmers but also work with them over the coming years of transition to ensure they can compete on a global scale.

In particular, the food and drink sector in Wales is particularly innovative and benefits from the strong geographical identification of products. Produce such as Gower Gold, Caws Cenarth, and Halen Mon illustrate the need for the sector to be integrated into a Welsh tourism strategy. There is huge potential for food trails taking people on a sumptuous journey around Wales. We must build on “brand Wales” and forge that link between food production and tourism.

2020 saw a huge surge in the sales of vegetable and fruit seeds as people confined to home found the desire to grow their own. Butchers and farm shops also saw a large increase in sales as the public turned to them for their local weekly shop, keen to purchase produce grown locally and to some of the highest standards in the world.



There is also a growing demand to harvest wild game from the countryside giving farmers and land managers motivation, and often the finances needed, to maintain fragile and flourishing habitats across Wales by managing the land for the benefit of game shooting.

We must do all we can to expand the game meat sector in Wales and the next Welsh Government needs to invest in the resources needed to encourage game meat processing centres, enabling Welsh game to compete with the rest of the UK.



The Countryside Alliance calls on the next Welsh Government to:

- ◆ Build on “brand Wales” and continue to invest in promoting world class Welsh produce around the globe.
- ◆ Develop a sumptuous food journey around Wales incorporating food production and hospitality into a strong food tourism specific strategy.
- ◆ Promote Welsh wild game along with other meat products and develop a marketing strategy for all wild game demonstrating the conservation and economic benefits associated with game management.

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