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Background - The Rural Economy and Brexit

This new Parliament will have to address many important rural issues; such as tackling rural crime, increasing the provision of affordable rural housing and ensuring universal access to high speed broadband and mobile phone signal. However, it is clear that Brexit will be front and centre of the work of the next Parliament.

Decisions that are made in relation to trade, regulations, agricultural and environmental policies, will shape the future of our countryside for many years to come. At the heart of these decisions are defining questions about the kind of landscapes we want to create, the food we want to eat, and the communities we want to develop.

A new relationship with Europe brings opportunities. We have the chance to consider which EU policies are working and which ones are not, and develop an agricultural policy that is more appropriate for farming in this country. However, there are challenges and Brexit will only be a success if the interests of rural communities are central to the decision making.

This is not simply self-interest. The countryside is vital for our food and farming industry, provides public goods and recreation for millions of people, and its landscapes are an important part of our cultural heritage and home to an astonishing range of wildlife and habitats. A successful living and working countryside is important for us all.

Legislative Commitments

Trade Bill

Purpose of the Bill

This Bill will support the UK in making a smooth exit from the EU and ensure businesses are able to benefit from trade with the rest of the world. It would also cement the UK's role as a global trading nation, whilst ensuring UK businesses are protected from unfair trading practices.

Main elements of the Bill

- It will put in place the essential and necessary legislative framework to allow the UK to operate its own independent trade policy upon exit from the EU.

Agriculture and Food

- Trade is vitally important to the success of our food and farming industry. For over 40 years the UK has been part of a single European market, which prohibits tariffs on goods travelling between the UK and other Member States. For agriculture, membership of the Single Market has meant significant protection from non-EU food imports, the creation of an internal market where competition is primarily between Member States, and unrestricted access to the EU market.
- Approximately 62 per cent of UK agricultural exports go to the EU, while approximately 70 per cent of UK agricultural imports come from the EU. Food production and the processing supply chain is complex and often involves several countries within the EU. In recognition of the importance of trade with the EU, it is vital that the UK Government seeks to maintain tariff-free access to the EU market for food and agricultural produce. Particular attention should be given to minimising disruption to existing trade relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
- Agricultural goods generally carry higher import tariffs than other commodities. If the UK Government does not establish a new trade agreement with the EU prior to leaving and adopts World Trade Organisation terms, the £12 billion worth of food and agricultural produce which the UK exports to the EU each year would face the prospect of high tariffs. This would be damaging to UK producers and EU consumers.
- Approximately 90 per cent of UK beef, sheep, and dairy exports go to the EU and high tariffs would be particularly damaging to some of our most rural areas where farming is a vital part of the local economy and community. The EU market is particularly important for certain cuts of meat and offal where there is little domestic demand and therefore exports are a significant proportion of carcass value.
- The EU is obliged by the World Trade Organisation to offer reduced (or tariff free) import opportunities to certain types of agricultural produce from outside of the EU under Tariff Rate Quotas (TRQ). There is currently a TRQ in place for lamb from New Zealand and hormone-free beef from Argentina and North America which allows an annual quota of meat to avoid the usual import tariffs. The UK Government must ensure that the TRQs for agricultural produce are not passed back to the UK unless there is a guarantee that UK farmers will continue to have tariff-free access to the EU market.
- As well as maintaining tariff-free trade with the EU, the UK Government must ensure that food and agricultural produce are central to any new trade deals with non-EU countries

to open up new export markets. We welcome the UK Government's continued efforts to open up markets in Asia. In China, the value of food and drink exports from the UK has increased by over 50 per cent from 2015 to 2016 and is now worth £439.5 million.

- A shift towards promoting export markets outside of the EU is likely to increase the need for UK agriculture to become more competitive, but there will be some farmers who will always struggle to compete on price in the global market. Farmers in the uplands, and other marginal areas, are not in fair competition with global producers who are operating in very different environments, often with fewer safety and animal welfare laws to comply with, meaning their production costs are significantly lower. This type of upland and marginal farming does, however, provide a vital public good in maintaining some of our most iconic rural landscapes and their communities. The interests of these farmers must be safeguarded in any new trade arrangements.
- Many of the countries with which new trade deals are seen as a priority, such as Australia, the USA and Brazil are also large meat exporting countries. These countries are likely to seek extensive agricultural concessions as part of any agreement with the UK and our farmers must not be used as a 'bargaining chip' in the negotiations. This is particularly important as World Trade Organisation rules do not allow the process by which something was produced to be taken into consideration when providing state support which is considered to have a distorting effect on the market.
- The ability of the UK to produce its own food must not be undermined by any new trade deals. Skills and experience in the food and farming industry have taken a long time to develop and in many cases would be hard to replace if they were lost. Securing our ability to produce food should not be mistaken for self-sufficiency as the UK will continue to import food and agricultural produce, just as it will continue to export. Food security will be achieved by ensuring fair competition for UK farmers and producers in EU and non-EU markets and this must be a priority for the UK Government.
- UK agriculture underpins our food manufacturing sector by providing over 60 per cent of the produce and raw materials involved. This is a vitally important sector, sustaining 3.8 million jobs and adding over £21 billion (GVA) to the UK economy every year. Food manufacturing is nationally important and benefits communities across the country, although it has particular importance in many rural areas. The UK's new relationship with the EU and any new trade deals with non-EU countries will be vital to the future success or otherwise of food manufacturing in this country.

Shooting and the Game Market

- Shooting and hunting benefit from trade with countries within the EU across a number of areas. As a member of the Single Market and Customs Union, this trade is currently tariff-free and avoids other frictions to trade. It is vital that the interests of people who shoot and hunt are considered as part of our new relationship with the EU.
- In particular the majority of firearms that are used in this country are imported from countries within the EU, particularly Spain and Italy. Importers currently enjoy excellent relationships with manufacturers based in countries within the EU and have few problems importing into this country. The UK Government should seek to maintain tariff-free trade with the EU in firearms, component parts, and ammunition. It is also important that imports do not face other barriers to trade, such as an increase in bureaucracy and regulation which have the potential to disrupt the supply chain and add to costs.

- Capital expenditure on firearms and ammunition in the UK is over £150 million every year and approximately 820 jobs in the UK are directly linked to the manufacture, sale or servicing of firearms alone. It is vital that these jobs and investment are supported as part of our new relationship with the EU and in any new trade deals with non-EU countries.
- Similarly, the EU is an important export market for game meat which must be recognised.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

- **Tariff-free trade with the EU in food and agricultural produce, including game. Ensure that any new trade deals with non-EU countries recognise and protect the high standards of safety and animal welfare which UK consumers expect and to which our farmers and producers adhere.**
- **The UK Government to ensure that food and agricultural produce are central to any new trade deals with non-EU countries to open up new export markets.**
- **The UK Government to ensure that the TRQs for agricultural produce are not passed back to the UK unless there is a guarantee that UK farmers will continue to have tariff-free access to the EU market.**
- **The interests of farmers in the uplands, and other marginal areas, to be safeguarded in any new trade arrangements, recognising that this type of farming provides a vital public good in maintaining some of our most iconic rural landscapes and their communities.**

Immigration Bill

Purpose of the Bill

The Bill is intended to enable the Government to end the EU's rules on free movement of EU nationals in the UK and make the migration of EU nationals and their family members subject to relevant UK law once the UK has left the EU, whilst still allowing the UK to attract the brightest and the best. The Bill is intended to ensure the UK has the flexibility to create a fair and sustainable immigration system that gives the country control over the numbers of people who come to the UK from the EU.

Main elements of the Bill

- To allow the Government to repeal EU law on immigration, primarily free movement, that will be saved and converted into UK law by the Repeal Bill.

Agricultural Workers

- As part of the Single Market, our food and farming industry benefits from the free movement of people which has provided access to labour from across Europe. People from the EU play an important role in harvesting, production and processing across the food supply chain, in both skilled and unskilled jobs.
- The UK Government must consider how our future relationship with the EU will enable people to travel to this country to work in our food and farming industry, particularly at important times of the year. UK farmers and producers employ over 80,000 seasonal workers every year, the vast majority of these people come from countries within the EU.
- There are indications that it has already become difficult to recruit people from the EU following the referendum result. The decrease in the value of sterling combined with uncertainty about the UK's future relationship with the EU has reduced the appeal of working in the UK for some people. In order to ensure that UK farmers and producers are able to attract the labour they require, it is vital that the UK Government provides clarity on travel and migration arrangements as soon as possible.
- The UK Government should also consider the reintroduction of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS), or similar scheme, which allows a person to enter a country to undertake a specific role with a specific employer for a set period of time. The UK Government removed the SAWS in 2013 following the removal of freedom of movement restrictions on people from Romania and Bulgaria. The reintroduction of the SAWS, or similar scheme, could be one way to help UK farmers and producers in the event of removal of freedom of movement after the UK leaves the EU.
- Any new travel scheme for agricultural workers should also include the requirements of other land-based industries such as forestry, shooting and game farming. Game farmers are not included in the definition of 'agriculture' in the Agriculture Act 1947, so any new scheme will need to adopt a broader definition of 'agriculture' to ensure that people from the EU can continue to work on UK game farms.

Tourism

- Tourism is vitally important for many rural areas, sustaining jobs in a number of areas from accommodation and hospitality to leisure and retail, which supports the wider rural economy. In 2015 the UK received the highest number of international visitors since records began (1961), with 36.1 million visitors, helping to generate more than £62 billion

for the UK economy. Visitors from the EU are an important part of our tourist market. In 2015 more than 60 per cent of international holiday visitors and more than 70 per cent of business visitors to the UK were from countries within the EU.

- Rural tourism in the UK benefits from visa-free travel between countries within the EU and it is important that this continues for short leisure and business trips after we leave the EU. Any additional bureaucracy or costs on travel to the UK from the EU would place the UK at a disadvantage with other European tourist destinations as far as EU nationals are concerned.
- As well as maintaining access to the European tourist market, the UK Government should take the opportunity of leaving the EU to open new tourist markets. Enhanced visa services have already increased the number of visitors from China and this is a model which the UK Government should consider adopting with other countries. This should be combined with increased funding of Visit Britain and the GREAT campaign to ensure that the UK, and in particular the countryside, is promoted globally as a tourist destination.
- Tourism specifically associated with country sports is also an important economic contributor in many rural communities, particularly in the winter months when income from other forms of tourism is often reduced. It is essential that country sports in the UK remain easily accessible to people from the EU. In 2014/15 a total of 8,810 Visitor Permits were granted in England and Wales for people to bring firearms into the UK for game or sport shooting. There are also large numbers of people who travel to EU countries for shooting, hunting and fishing. In 2014/15 a total of 15,677 European Firearms Passes were granted by police forces in England in Wales enabling UK citizens to travel to the EU.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

- **The UK Government to reintroduce the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme, or a similar scheme, which allows a person to enter a country to undertake a specific role with a specific employer for a set period of time.**
- **Our future relationship with the EU to ensure that people from countries within the EU are able to travel to the UK for the purpose of country sports tourism without an increase in bureaucracy and costs.**
- **People in the UK to retain the ability to travel with their firearms to countries within the EU without an increase in bureaucracy and costs. This should include the retention of the European Firearms Pass, or equivalent, which is the single document required for travel to countries within the EU.**
- **Arrangements with the EU to permit easy movement of working animals, such as dogs, ferrets and horses, including the retention of the EU pet travel scheme and the option to retain horse passports for owners who wish to travel with their animals to countries within the EU.**

Agriculture Bill

Purpose of the Bill

The Bill is intended to provide stability to farmers as the UK leaves the CAP and create a thriving, self-reliant farming sector that is more competitive, productive and profitable. In addition to supporting British farmers on the global market, the Bill will seek to protect the natural environment and follow the Conservative manifesto pledge to “leave the environment better than we found it”.

Main elements of the Bill

- The Bill will introduce measures to ensure that after the UK leaves the EU, and therefore the Common Agricultural Policy, there is an effective system in place to:
 - i) support UK farmers, and
 - ii) protect the natural environment.

The Value of 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 standards of safety and animal welfare. 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.
- Being part of the Single Market provides UK farmers and producers with tariff-free access to the EU market and labour, and the UK Government must ensure that these benefits are maintained after we leave the EU.
- 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 to improve food labelling to ensure that consumers have the ability and confidence to support British farmers and producers.

Support Payments

- Farmers in the UK benefit from support payments as part of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). CAP payments are currently divided into two categories which paid UK farmers a combined total of £2.8 billion in 2015. The majority of funding is provided as direct payments under Pillar 1 and additional payments are available to help farmers implement development schemes under Pillar 2. Support payments from the EU currently make up approximately 50-60 per cent of farm income in the UK.
- It is important that CAP is replaced with a fully funded UK agricultural policy to be in place and ready to be implemented before existing funding is removed. Farming in the UK has developed within the framework of CAP for the last 40 years and therefore the introduction of a new agricultural policy will need to include transitional arrangements to ensure that farm businesses in the UK are able to adjust as decisions often need to be taken years in advance. Farmers, particularly in upland and marginal areas, are often small to medium sized enterprises and a sudden change in agricultural policy would risk

the sustainability of some of these businesses which are dependent upon support payments.

- Despite efforts and incentives to improve competitiveness, there will continue to be some parts of the UK where farmers cannot survive on the profits of food production alone and this needs to be addressed in a new agricultural policy as well as continued efforts to support diversification. Farmers in the uplands and other marginal areas are limited to low intensity grazing which has small profit margins and is often more exposed to market volatility than other sectors of the industry. If farming in upland and other marginal areas were to be abandoned because of changes to support payments, there would be detrimental effects on the habitat in these areas and the species they support.
- The scope and level of funding of the new agricultural policy will be constrained by World Trade Organisation rules which state that *“the amount of payment shall be limited to the extra costs or loss of income involved in complying with government programmes.”* The principle of income foregone limits the extent to which payments can be used to support the provision of public good when there is no market for this and the UK Government will need to consider how best to provide support whilst remaining compliant with trade rules.
- The UK Government has indicated that it wants to see a more market-orientated agricultural policy with a focus on competitiveness. However this must not be done to the detriment of the environment.

Conservation and Wildlife Management

- Farmers play a vital role in conservation. Using the skills and experience of farmers is often the best way to improve biodiversity and secure the future of our vital natural resources.
- The EU has developed nature conservation policy that is comprehensive and ambitious compared with many other parts of the world. It has been a driving force for establishing and strengthening wildlife and habitat protection and this should be continued after we leave the EU.
- The UK Government and the Devolved Administrations should take the opportunity of leaving the EU to review existing levels of wildlife and habitat protection to ensure that they are fit for purpose and appropriate for the UK, as well as fulfilling our international obligations. This is an important opportunity to develop a sustainable nature conservation policy that balances the particular requirements of UK species and habitats while taking account of our economic and social requirements.
- There is abundant evidence that where land is managed for the benefit of game, other species naturally flourish and many shoots undertake conservation work for its own sake. Nearly 2 million hectares in the UK are actively managed for conservation as a result of shooting, with shoots spending £250 million each year on conservation work. As we leave the EU, it is vital that decisions about wildlife protection are not used to promote an anti-shooting agenda by changing the status of existing quarry species.
- The UK Government should continue to cooperate closely with the EU on biosecurity to help prevent and contain outbreaks of potentially damaging diseases such as avian influenza which are a significant threat to wild and reared birds.
- One of the most important areas of EU environmental policy has been water quality and the impact of EU Directives on the UK has been highly significant. The most important

change over recent decades has been on waste water treatment which has led to significant improvements in the quality of rivers and coastal waters. Many EU Directives aimed at improving water quality are also vitally important for protecting fish, their habitats, and a range of other wildlife. Many fish stocks in and around the UK are in decline, but protection of EU Directives has generally slowed this decline and in some cases, particularly urban rivers, has led to a partial rehabilitation of stocks. Water quality should remain key to the development of a national fisheries policy, covering both marine and freshwater fish, taking greater account of the interests and requirements of recreational fisheries.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

- **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.**
- **UK farmers and producers to continue to have access to the EU labour market, which may include the reintroduction of a Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme.**
- **Maintenance of environmental improvements, particularly in water quality, and develop a national fisheries policy which supports recreational fishing.**
- **Recognition of the importance of traditional management in creating and maintaining our iconic countryside landscapes and their communities, and ensure this is supported outside of the EU.**
- **Development of a comprehensive food labelling policy and the extension of mandatory country of origin labelling to lightly processed meats and some dairy products. The continuation and development of protections for regional and speciality food and drink products in order to support UK farmers and producers.**

Non-legislative Commitments

Housing

“Proposals will be brought forward to [...] help ensure more homes are built.”

- *We have not built enough homes in this country for generations. In order to fix the dysfunctional housing market, we need to build more of the right homes, in the right places, and ensure the housing market works for all parts of our community.*
- *This will help to tackle the increasing lack of affordability by bringing more properties onto the market. It will slow the rise in housing costs relative to the rise in wages, and help ordinary working people gain better access to this most basic of necessities. It will help more ordinary working families buy an affordable home and will bring the cost of renting down.*

Countryside Alliance position

- The Countryside Alliance welcomes the proposal to ensure more homes are built. The need for more housing stock is not just an issue in towns and cities as many rural areas are also suffering from a lack of housing. Population growth combined with migration from urban areas has seen the rural population grow by 800,000 in the last decade, driving up house prices and pricing many families out of the communities in which they work and in which they have often been brought up.
- Those young people unable to find homes often move to urban areas placing a further strain on affordable housing in those areas. This can also increase the distance people travel to work with the associated negative environmental impacts. The break-up of family and social networks when young people are forced to move away often leaves older people increasingly isolated and dependent on public services.
- Rural house prices are much higher, rural wages are much lower and the gap between them is widening particularly for agricultural workers. There is a premium for rural housing in all parts of the country and property prices in the countryside are, on average, £43,490 (22 per cent) higher than in urban areas. However, workers in rural areas have seen wages rise at a slower rate than the rest of England in the last decade, by 21 per cent compared to 24 per cent in the rest of the country.
- We are concerned that these factors have not been fully addressed in the Government's recent Housing and Planning Act and that the extension of Right to Buy to Housing Association properties in rural areas will further deplete affordable housing stock as there is no obligation to replace houses that are sold off.
- The proposals could be an opportunity to enable Local Authorities to work communities and Housing Associations to develop small groups of affordable housing for local people to rent or buy, where they meet criteria of local support, good design, and are affordable in perpetuity.
- We also believe the Government should implement a [number of proposals](#), consulted on by the last Labour Government, to provide incentives for landowners to bring forward land for affordable housing.
- The Countryside Alliance has also used the Government's [Rural Planning Review](#) to call for changes to permitted development rights which would mean farmers no longer have

to choose between their residential or agricultural permitted development. Under our proposals farmers will have greater flexibility on when they are able to use their Class Q rights to convert from agricultural to residential use which will help deliver sustainable housing development whilst also supporting farmers who are facing some of the most difficult trading conditions in a generation.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

- **Planning system that is efficient with planning policies that support sustainable rural life and businesses; including better use of permitted development rights.**
- **Government to implement measures to incentivise landowners to bring forward land for affordable housing.**
- **Locally led provision of affordable local housing to meet local need.**

Digital Charter

“Proposals for a new digital charter will be brought forward to ensure that the United Kingdom is the safest place to be online.”

- *We will develop a Digital Charter that will create a new framework which balances users’ and businesses’ freedom and security online. The Charter will have two core objectives: making the UK the best place to start and run a digital business and the safest place in the world to be online.*
- *We are optimistic about the opportunities on offer in the digital age, but we understand these opportunities come with new challenges and threats – to our security, privacy, emotional wellbeing, mental health and the safety of our children. We will respond to these challenges, assuring security and fairness in the new digital age and strengthening the UK’s position as one of the world’s leading digital economies.*
- *We strongly support a free and open internet. But, as in the offline world, freedoms online must be balanced with protections to ensure citizens are protected from the potential harms of the digital world. We will not shy away from tackling harmful behaviours and harmful content online – be that extremist, abusive or harmful to children. And we will make sure that technology companies do more to protect their users and improve safety online.*

Countryside Alliance position

- The Countryside Alliance welcomes the proposal for a Digital Charter which will ensure that the UK is the best place to start and run a digital business and the safest place in the world to be online.
- With the growth of social media the occasions on which those involved in lawful hunting and wildlife management have reported to malicious communications online to us have risen sharply. Following the death of well-known show jumper and hunter, earlier this year, posts appeared on social media stating things like *“hope she died painfully”* and *“ALL lives matter... apart from upper class scum/peados/animal abusers/murderers. One less stuck up twat then!”* The comments posted are sickening and no doubt grossly offensive to all who knew and loved her. Despite being reported the comments were online for several days before they were eventually removed by the social media platform.

- We are also gravely concerned about the way in which social media is being used to target legitimate businesses. On the 'Stop the Cull Facebook' page 'Rose Cottage Veterinary Practice' has been forced to remove their own Facebook page because of sustained online abuse. Comments on the page include encouraging people to leave false reviews online and take direct action against the practice.
- We believe that all social media platforms should consider the rights of all communities and individuals who face online abuse, as they do for those protected groups who experience hate speech as defined by the law and Facebook's Community Standards. There are many pages on Facebook dedicated to promoting hatred against those who engage in legal activities in the countryside.
- Which is why we believe that social media community standards need to be more robust and recognise the social media guidelines published by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) last autumn.
- Hunt members and those who undertake wildlife management have been subject to unacceptable abuse online and we believe this must stop. Nobody should be subject to violence or intimidation online. This is why we are campaigning as we believe it is important that social media platforms take these threats seriously and act accordingly by standing up to those who incite hatred and violence.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

- **Social media community standards to be brought into line with Crown Prosecutions Service (CPS) legal guidelines governing online abuse that were published last autumn.**
- **Social media platforms to respond to all complaints regarding reported comments within twenty-four hours.**
- **Those who set up pages on these platforms must be held to account for the content that appears.**