

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

**Scottish Parliament
Election Manifesto 2016**



Digital Communications

Communications infrastructure is vital for economic and social activity, but while urban areas generally have good mobile phone and broadband coverage, many parts of rural Scotland have no, or very limited, access to the digital world.

Government schemes such as BDUK which target areas with no coverage, are particularly important as there is a limited commercial case for investment in service in many rural areas. However, 69% of premises in rural Scotland still do not have superfast broadband and Scotland has the most mobile phone 'not-spots' in the UK.

Scotland's creative industries account for 3% of employment (63,000 jobs in total) and 4% of the GDP. They rely on good digital connectivity. The Scottish Government needs to ensure rural Scotland is connected to help these businesses go from strength to strength.

The Scottish Countryside Alliance calls for:

- Clearer planning law for mobile infrastructure, to ensure it is easier and quicker to build new sites, upgrade existing infrastructure and allow infrastructure to be built that best meets the local need.
- Dark fibre access (un-used fibre capacity) to be opened up to all broadband suppliers. This would allow competitors to effectively and competitively 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.

Key Facts



Food and Farming

Scotland has some of the highest animal welfare and husbandry standards in the world. Our food and drink producers provide quality products that form an important part of the Scottish export market. However, public procurement of Scottish food and drink should be higher. Consumers are keen to buy local produce but are often tempted to buy cheaper alternatives. More needs to be done to encourage the domestic market to buy Scottish.

The agricultural sector underpins much of our tourism industry, whether providing land and water for enjoyment, food for the table, or accommodation from which to explore the countryside. We must champion our farmers and celebrate their contribution to the Scottish landscape and economy. This will not only benefit the industry, but increase visitor numbers and stimulate the wider rural economy.

Educating people, particularly the young, about the countryside is vital. It is surprising how many people do not understand farming or land management practices and the vital role they play in maintaining the countryside we know and love.

The Scottish Countryside Alliance calls for:

- Public bodies to be audited annually on how much Scottish food and drink they purchase.
- The marketing and promotion of specialist food products such as game and whisky to be closely integrated into a tourism strategy and promoted online through an interactive produce map.
- Better promotion of, and support for, farming and food production to demonstrate the world class welfare standards adhered to by Scottish farmers and to educate the market.

Key Facts

In 2014, over **15.5 million** overnight tourism trips were made in Scotland, for which visitor expenditure totalled **£4.8 billion**



Rural Communities

Rural communities are a key part of the fabric of the Scottish countryside. They are home to and a place of work for nearly a million people.

The Scottish Government's Help to Buy Scheme has had a significant impact in the new build housing sector. The new Open Market Equity Scheme (OMES), launched January 2016, could also enable rural people to buy homes in the communities in which they work and have been brought up. Whilst we are encouraged by the Scottish Government's financial commitment to the OMES, it is somewhat disappointing that it is less than the funds committed to build new homes under the Help to Buy scheme.

With an increasingly ageing population, lack of access to services, whether it is due to limited public transport or lack of broadband, can lead to increased rural isolation.

Due to their remoteness, rural communities are also often the target of crime, including fly tipping and other environmental crimes. The closure, or restricted opening times, of recycling centres due to local authority cut backs has had a negative effect on responsible waste disposal.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

- The rural proofing of all policies to prevent increasing isolation of rural communities.
- Increased funding for the Open Market Shared Equity scheme.
- Better public facilities to encourage people to dispose of their waste responsibly and to ensure fly tippers are prosecuted to deter others.

Key Facts

1 in 5
people in Scotland
lives in a rural area

Rural property prices in Scotland have doubled in the past decade, according to analysis from the Bank of Scotland

Average price of
an urban house
£134,726

Average price of
a rural house
£158,923

Almost **250 million**
visible items are littered each
year and there are at least 61,000
incidents of fly tipping. Tackling
these problems costs at least
£53 million
each year

Rural Services

Many residents of rural towns and villages across Scotland do not have access to basic services, goods and amenities. They have to travel longer distances for healthcare, petrol, financial services and shops; and pay a premium for essentials, such as fuel for heating and transport.

Banks are closing in rural towns across Scotland yet not all major banks provide business services via the Post Office counter, making everyday cash banking difficult.

A shortage of GPs and the centralisation of hospital services could see people living in rural areas put at a severe disadvantage, particularly when an ambulance is required. We believe it is time for innovative policies that enable communities to have access to healthcare wherever they live.

Crime is a key issue for rural communities and policing them presents unique challenges, yet those communities feel that policing is often focussed on their urban neighbours. This feeling has increased since the merging of the Scottish police forces in 2013, leading to the closure of many rural police stations. Rural crime ranges from theft of agricultural machinery, vehicles, tools, livestock and fuel, through to fire raising, housebreaking and vandalism. Residents and businesses in the countryside often pay more per head of population for policing and they deserve equal treatment to their urban counterparts.

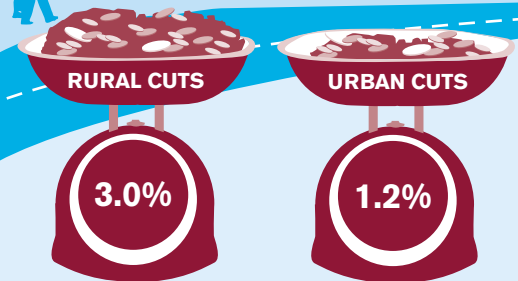
The Scottish Countryside Alliance calls for:

- Business banking services to be offered by all major banks via the Post Office.
- Education in, and the promotion of, tele-medicine to reduce the burden on rural practices and lower waiting times to see a GP.
- Funding formulas to be reviewed to ensure rural communities receive equal funding to their urban counterparts.

Key Facts

The state-backed Royal Bank of Scotland has already **closed 23 branches** in Scotland and plans to shut another 20

24 of the bank branches closed in 2014 were the last in their community



Provisional budget allocations to local authorities in 2015-16 will see the three most rural Scottish councils' funding cut by 3.0% on average, compared to 1.2% for the three most urban ones

1/5 of police stations across Scotland have closed or reduced their hours since 2007. The majority of the closures have occurred in rural areas



Countryside Management

Our countryside underpins tourism, is a place of recreation, a larder and, as importantly, a workplace that requires management to protect vulnerable habitats. The Scottish Government Land Reform strategy would fundamentally change the relationship between the people of Scotland and the land.

The rural landscape has been shaped by man for centuries and needs ongoing management. The aim of wildlife management is to maintain healthy and balanced populations of wild animals at levels which are environmentally sustainable and acceptable to farmers, landowners and the overall balance of other wildlife. A lack of management threatens vulnerable populations, biodiversity, habitat conservation and food production.

Species and habitat management should be based on sound evidence and a consistent approach across species. The review of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 and Land Reform proposals should recognise that management is best achieved by practices undertaken according to local circumstances by farmers, gamekeepers, landowners, naturalists and huntsmen.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

- Greater effort to ensure shooting and all it encompasses is enhanced by better regulation and not restricted by unnecessary bureaucracy.
- Proper engagement by government and its agencies with those engaged in the management of the wider countryside and sound evidence-based policy.
- Greater engagement with the outdoors through education, to create a better understanding of how and why the countryside is managed.

Key Facts

Shooting is worth

£200 MILLION

to the economy in Scotland and provides the equivalent of 8,800 full time jobs

Shooting influences the management of around 4.5 million hectares of land and delivers local and national conservation projects

Angling tourism is worth more than

£120 MILLION

a year to the Scottish economy and provides the equivalent of 2,600 full time jobs



COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

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