

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE



**National Assembly
for Wales
Election Manifesto 2016**

Digital Communications

Digital growth is key to driving the Welsh economy forward, which is why innovative policies are needed to meet the increasing demand for connectivity and to ensure rural communities' needs are met.

Access to high speed and reliable broadband connectivity varies wildly across Wales but it is vital to our increasingly online and economic lives. A recent report by the telecommunications regulator Ofcom showed that while there has been an increase in coverage and speeds of broadband in Wales, the proportion of premises benefitting from these connections is less than the UK as a whole.

Access to the internet via the mobile network is increasing by 66% a year, yet 33% of premises in Wales do not have 3G coverage. We need to ensure that not only do we have the infrastructure and coverage to meet this demand, but we also educate consumers and businesses about the benefits of high speed connectivity.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

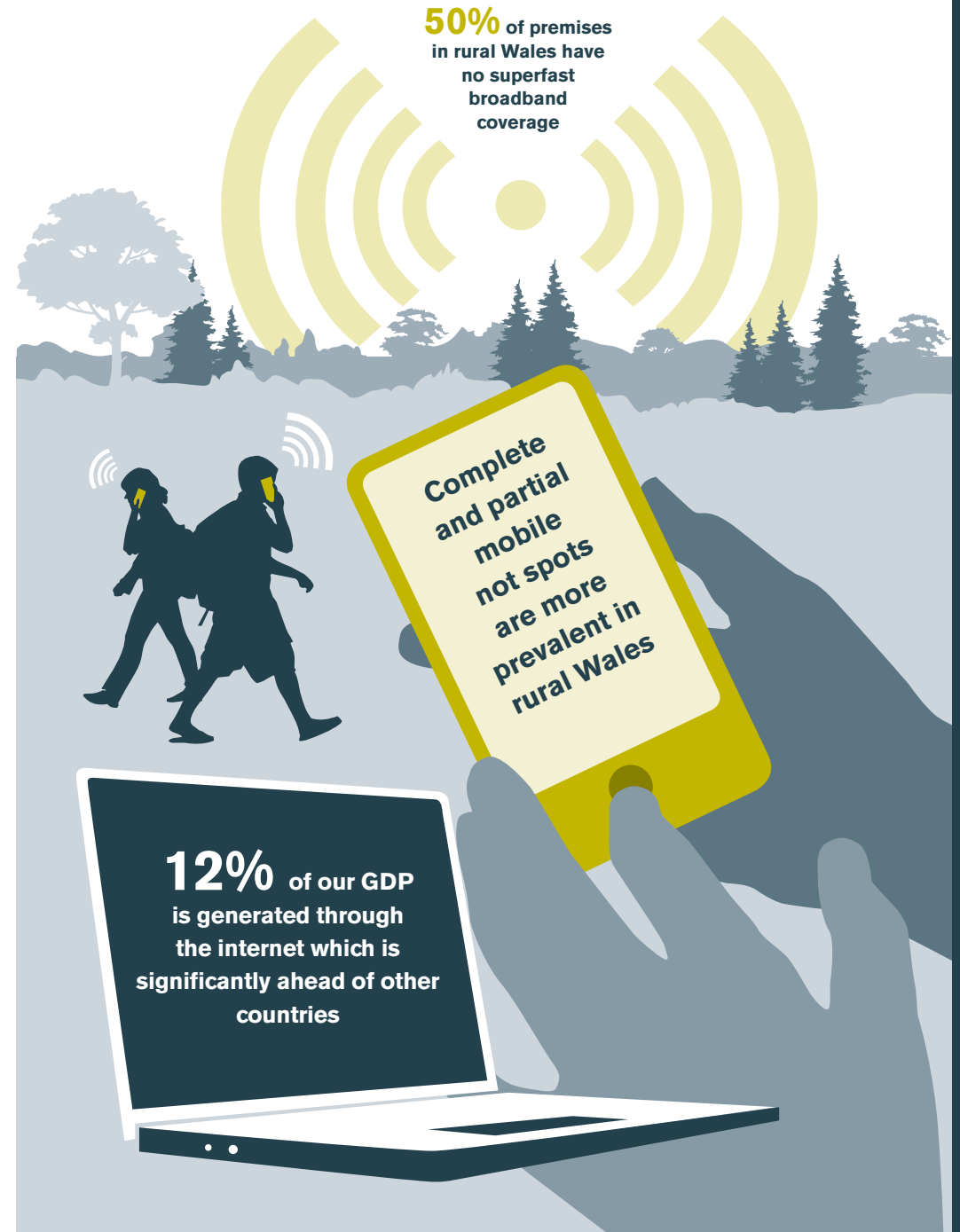
- Measures to encourage more competition for better broadband packages in the domestic and business broadband market would not only encourage take up, but also benefit the Welsh economy.
- The Assembly should promote and support alternative technologies, such as satellite and mobile broadband, which can deliver connectivity to remoter rural areas.
- The Assembly must reform planning law related to mobile infrastructure to ensure it is easier and quicker to build new sites, upgrade existing infrastructure and allow new infrastructure to be built that best suits the local area.

Key Facts

50% of premises in rural Wales have no superfast broadband coverage

Complete and partial mobile not spots are more prevalent in rural Wales

12% of our GDP is generated through the internet which is significantly ahead of other countries



Food and Farming

Food production in Wales has some of the highest animal welfare and husbandry standards in the world. Our food and drink producers provide quality products which enjoy a much deserved place in the Welsh export market. However, public procurement of Welsh food and drink should be higher. While consumers are keen to buy local produce they are often tempted to buy cheaper alternatives and more needs to be done to encourage the domestic market.

The agricultural sector underpins much of our tourism industry in Wales, 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 Welsh landscape and economy. This would not only benefit the industry, but increase visitor numbers and stimulate the wider rural economy.

Educating people, particularly the young, about food and farming and countryside management is vital. 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.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

- Public bodies to be audited annually on how much Welsh food and drink they purchase.
- The marketing and promotion of specialist food products such as game and cheese to be closely integrated into the Welsh Government Strategy for Tourism 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 Welsh farmers and to educate the market.

Key Facts

There were **10 million** overnight trips to Wales by GB residents in 2014.
The associated spend was over **£1.7 billion**

47% of people check the country of origin when shopping for meat products

Welsh food and drink production contributed

£5.7 billion to the Welsh economy in 2014

In the 'Rough Guides' top 10

Wales

has been included by 'Rough Guides' in the world's top 10 countries to visit in 2016

Rural Services

Many residents of rural towns and villages across Wales do not have access to the most basic services, goods and amenities. They 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.

High street banks are closing in rural towns across Wales yet not all the high street banks provide business banking services via the Post Office counter, making everyday cash banking difficult.

The centralisation of hospital services means that people living in rural areas are at a severe disadvantage, particularly in emergency situations. Coupled with a shortage of GPs across rural Wales it is time for innovative policies which enable communities to access healthcare wherever they live.

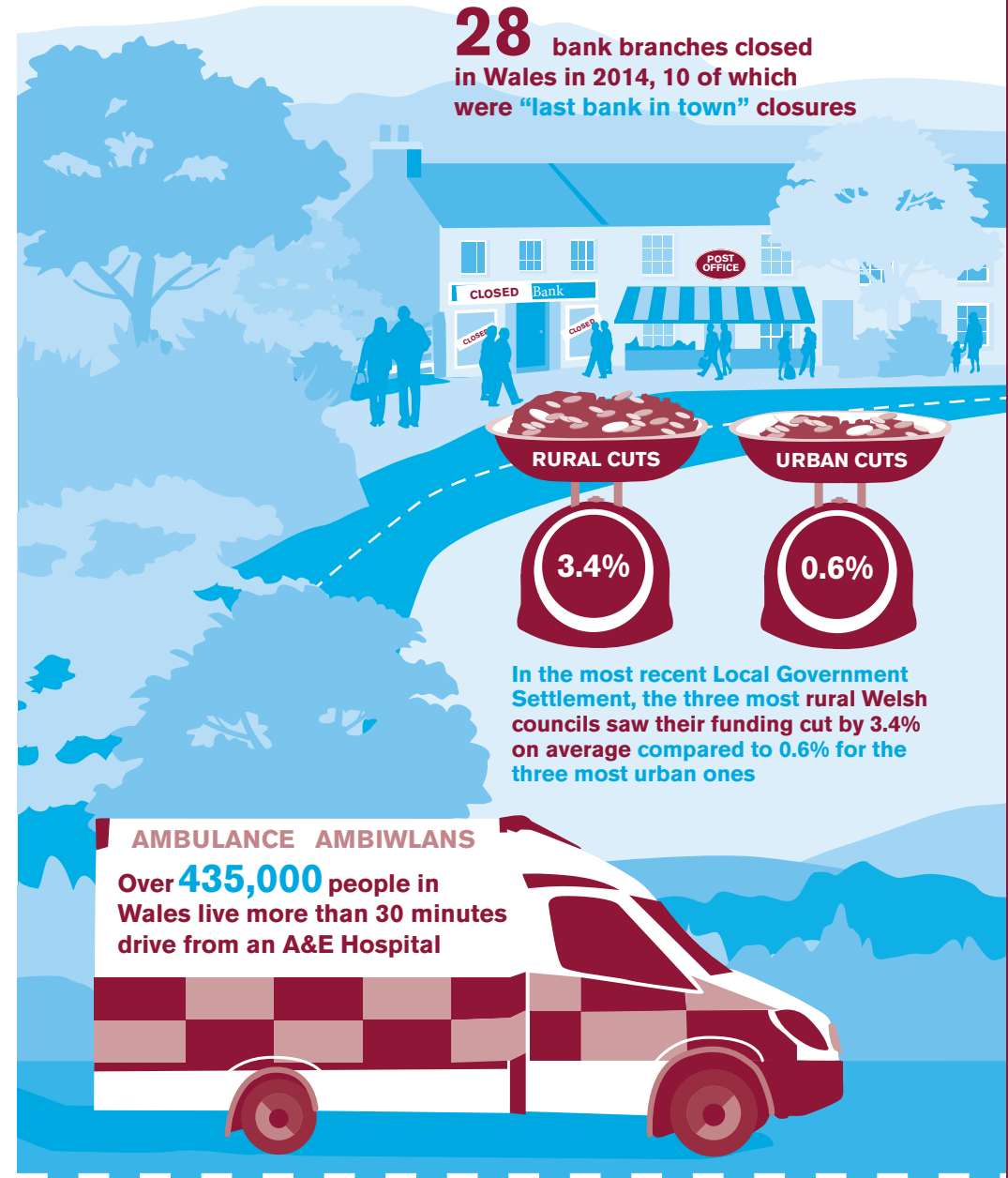
Crime is a key issue for rural communities yet those communities feel that policing is often focussed on their urban neighbours. Residents and businesses in the countryside pay as much, often more, per head of population for policing and they deserve equal treatment to their urban counterparts.

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 the waiting times to see a GP.
- Funding formulas to be reviewed to ensure rural communities receive an equal level of funding to their urban counterparts.

Key Facts

28 bank branches closed in Wales in 2014, 10 of which were “last bank in town” closures



Rural Communities

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

The shortfall in available housing to buy or rent is forcing local people out of the communities in which they work and have often been brought up in. Due to the nature of rural communities new build housing is not always appropriate which is why it is disappointing that the help to buy scheme for first time buyers only applies to new builds. This forces those wishing to remain in their home town or village to move elsewhere when only existing homes are available on the property market.

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 increasing rural isolation.

Due to their remoteness, rural communities are also often the target of crime, including fly tipping and other environmental crimes. This makes a place unattractive to residents and to visitors alike. The closure, or restricted opening times, of recycling plants 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.
- Help to buy scheme to be extended to existing builds and conversions not just new builds, in rural areas.
- Fair funding for policing, to ensure the sparsity factor is recognised which will ensure the police are able to tackle crimes in remoter communities.

Key Facts

1 in 3
people in Wales
live in a rural area

House prices in
rural Wales are 19%
more than
in urban areas

Average price of
an urban house
£145,237

Average price of
a rural house
£172,517

There are over **31,000**
fly-tipping incidents in Wales
every year, estimated to cost
tax payers around
£2 million
in clean-up costs.

Countryside Management

We ask a great deal from our natural resources. Our countryside underpins our tourism sector, is a place of recreation, a larder and as importantly a working environment. Access to the outdoors is hugely important for the health and well-being of the nation. However, access needs to be managed to protect vulnerable habitats and to take account of the fact that the countryside is also a place of work.

The rural landscape has been shaped by man over many centuries and our countryside and wildlife need ongoing management. The aim of wildlife management is 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 should be based on sound evidence and a consistent and principled approach across species. It is best achieved by a combination of methods undertaken according to best practice by farmers, gamekeepers, landowners, naturalists and huntsmen, with their divergent interests.

Countryside Alliance calls for:

- A sensible approach to improving access to land and water which respects the environment, current business activities and habitats.
- Proper engagement by government and its agencies with those engaged in the management of the 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

The value of freshwater angling tourism alone is estimated to be worth over **£100 MILLION** a year to the Welsh economy

360,000 

hectares of open country and registered common is accessible on foot together with

4,700
miles of public rights of way

Shooting is worth

£75 MILLION

to the economy in Wales and provides the equivalent of 2,400 full time jobs



COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

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