



The
countryside
charity

A beautiful and thriving countryside for all:

our manifesto for the next government



An era-defining election

The next government will be faced with climate breakdown, ecological collapse and a broken housing market. Tackling these problems will mean making decisions that will shape the countryside for decades to come.

To meet these challenges, we must stop pitting the needs of the countryside against the demands of our cities. We will only meet our climate targets if the planning system empowers communities to insist on the highest environmental standards for future development. We will only deliver nature's recovery if we enhance the biodiversity of the countryside surrounding our towns and cities. We will only fix the housing crisis if we ensure a genuinely affordable home and thriving life is possible in every part of the country.

CPRE, the countryside charity, calls on all political parties to recognise the value of the countryside and its essential role in answering the nation's challenges by supporting the common sense and practical policies set out below.

1. A planning system for people, planet and nature

The next Prime Minister will have to take decisions to overcome multiple, interlinked challenges. The cost of living, food security, energy, housing – each of critical importance.

Above all, tackling the climate and nature crises, which pose an existential threat to our countryside, will have enormous implications for land use across the nation.

We will only be able to balance these competing demands and save our countryside for future generations with a clear plan for what to put where.

That's why we need a planning system with democracy at its heart, and which prioritises outcomes that prevent climate and ecological collapse.

To deliver a planning system that serves people, planet and nature we're calling on the next government to:

- **Develop a land use strategy which sets a positive long-term vision for land use across England.** The strategy should integrate national and local policymaking and decision-taking to inform and incentivise greener land use decisions and deliver national environmental targets including net-zero.
- **Ensure genuinely sustainable development** by aligning national policy with the land use strategy, ensuring that key environmental targets, such as the expansion of our hedgerow network by 40% by 2050, are translated into planning policy.
- **Require developers to use suitable urban brownfield sites before greenfield sites** and encourage local authorities to set policies prioritising urban regeneration.
- **Strengthen national planning policy** to enhance meaningful community involvement and consent for new housing and energy developments.
- **Require all local plans to recognise the vital role of the countryside** in climate change mitigation and adaptation by including protection of the countryside for carbon sequestration, food production, health and well-being, and water retention.

2. Fixing the broken housing system for rural communities

A healthy home is the foundation for a decent life.

But over the years our broken housing system has changed a home from a human right into an investment product, depriving towns, cities and rural communities of genuinely affordable homes.

In the countryside, the situation is particularly acute and many people are now unable to afford to live in the communities that they grew up in.

To fix the broken housing system, we are calling on the next government to:

- **Abolish hope value and amend national policy** to expect much more affordable and social housing in new developments, thereby reducing the market value of land and increasing the viability of social housing provision by local authorities.
- **Redefine ‘affordable housing’** so that new homes for sale or rent are directly linked to average local incomes.
- **Support rural communities wishing to use neighbourhood planning or rural exception sites** to deliver small-scale affordable housing developments on the edge of villages in line with locally-assessed need.
- **Introduce a second home and short-term lets register**, with planning controls to regulate the provision of short-term lets and powers to levy extra council tax on second homes.
- **Secure higher quality housing** by more forcefully advising local authorities and the Planning Inspectorate to reject schemes that do not live up to design aspirations set out in the National Design Code and those adopted locally.

3. Enhancing the countryside next door

The countryside surrounding our towns and cities provides millions with health and happiness, but it has the potential to deliver much more.

We must invest in this countryside next door as a key solution to the climate and nature crises, and an irreplaceable space where people across the nation can enjoy fresh air and the great outdoors.

To ensure that the countryside next door lives up to all it can be, we are calling on the next government to:

- **Continue planning policies that safeguard England’s 14 areas of Green Belt, and update the purposes of Green Belt policy** to embrace its role in tackling the climate and nature crises.
- **Enable local authorities to promote and designate new areas of Green Belt around towns and cities** in a wider set of circumstances than current policy allows.
- **Double the amount of Green Belt farmland covered by Environmental Land Management schemes**, and target this funding to create 350,000 hectares of new woodland and wetland near urban areas.
- **Increase the area around towns, cities and beyond where people can enjoy the benefits of being in nature** by designating a new generation of regional and country parks.
- **Improve access to the countryside next door** by increasing rewards for farmers and landowners expanding rights of way around urban areas, and enhancing the provision of rural bus services.

4. Rooftop renewables – a common sense revolution

To protect nature and our treasured landscapes, we have a duty to make the best possible use of our finite land.

But our outdated and expensive energy system is using up more and more of the space we need for food, wellbeing, and wildlife across our countryside.

Meanwhile, we are missing opportunities to generate huge amounts of cheap, low-carbon electricity on rooftops in every part of the country.

With the right initiatives, the rooftops of warehouses and car parks across the nation could act like clean power stations, cutting carbon emissions, slashing energy bills and protecting our countryside.

To deliver a common sense rooftop solar revolution we are calling on the next government to:

- **Set a new government target for at least 60% of solar energy** to be delivered through rooftop solar installations, with the aim of increasing this percentage over time.
- **Make solar PV or thermal panels a standard requirement** for all suitable new build housing, commercial buildings and car parks to secure planning permission.
- **Work with Ofgem to accelerate investment in local grid capacity** to better accommodate increased generation from rooftop solar.
- **Upgrade the Smart Export Guarantee** to provide higher minimum tariffs for low-income households and community-led schemes selling electricity from rooftop solar installations, thereby reducing payback periods, and improving investment viability.
- **Set a sequential ‘roof first’ approach for determining ground-mounted solar applications**, which prioritises use of suitable brownfield land, avoids land used by active, viable and sustainable farm businesses, and makes greenfield solar permissions more exceptional and time-limited.

About us

CPRE is the countryside charity that campaigns to promote, enhance and protect the countryside for everyone’s benefit, wherever they live.

With a local CPRE in every county, we work with communities, businesses and government, nationally and locally, to find

positive and lasting ways to help the countryside thrive – today and for generations to come.

If you would like to find out more about CPRE’s parliamentary work, or arrange a meeting, please contact our external affairs team on ExternalAffairs@cpre.org.uk.

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