



The
countryside
charity

A beautiful and thriving countryside for all:

our manifesto for the next government



An era-defining election

The countryside is vital for our country's future. The climate and nature crises pose an existential threat to our countryside and have enormous implications for how we use land across the nation. The next government will make decisions that will shape our countryside for decades to come.

The next government will be faced with tackling the climate emergency, ecological collapse, high costs of living, widening inequality in the housing market, and ensuring food and energy security.

These urgent challenges create competing pressures on land, and we need the countryside to offer multiple solutions. We also need the beauty, space to breathe, and freedom of the great outdoors that only our countryside and its landscapes can offer to everyone.

We want to make sure that thriving rural communities and resolving the pressures on our countryside are front and centre in the political agenda.

We call on all political parties to recognise the value of the countryside and its essential role in answering our nation's challenges.

What we want to see

We want to see political parties commit to support common-sense and practical policies that would help secure a thriving countryside for generations to come.

1. Fix the broken housing market in rural communities
2. Recognise the importance of the countryside next door
3. Start the rooftop renewables revolution
4. Reform the planning system to serve both people and planet

1. Fix the broken housing market in 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, depriving towns, cities and rural communities of genuinely affordable homes.

In the countryside, the situation is acute due to particularly low wages, poor public transport and a proliferation of second homes and short-term lets. This crisis of affordability in housing is tearing the soul out of rural communities, with many people

unable to afford to live in the communities they grew up in.

We can't rely on a market-led approach where the big housing developers exploit the system to dodge their commitments to deliver affordable and social rent homes. Instead, the government, local authorities, and community-led housebuilders should get more involved to ensure we start building the right homes in the right places.

We're calling on the next government to:

- **Redefine 'affordable' in line with local incomes not market rates**
Change the policy definition of 'affordable' so that new homes for sale or rent are directly linked to average local incomes.
- **Set new targets for new social and genuinely affordable housing**
Amend national planning policy to ensure that much more social and genuinely affordable housing is delivered in new developments and enable greater delivery of small-scale affordable housing developments – 'rural exception sites' – on the edge of villages.
- **Abolish hope value to get more social housing built**
Increase the viability of social housing provision by local authorities and community-led builders by reducing the market value of land to match its existing use value rather than reflecting the prospect of potential development for the open market.
- **Tackle short-term lets in rural hotspots**
Introduce a second home register, alongside the proposed short-term lets register, combined with planning controls to regulate the provision of short-term lets and powers to levy extra council tax on second homes.

2. Recognise the importance of the countryside next door

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

Too often our countryside next door, including Green Belts, is seen as a block to new development rather than somewhere important for wildlife and farming and as open space for people to enjoy. This does not have to be the case.

We must protect and invest in our countryside next door as a key solution to the climate and nature crises, and as irreplaceable space where people across the nation can connect with nature, green spaces and cultural heritage.

We're calling on the next government to:

- **Champion and enhance Green Belt land**
Safeguard England's 14 areas of Green Belt, create new ones in south Hampshire and Norwich, and update the purposes of Green Belt policy to embrace its role in tackling the climate and nature crises.
- **Create new woodlands and wetlands near urban areas**
Create 350,000 hectares of new woodland and wetland near urban areas, for example by targeting Environmental Land Management scheme funding as well as other funding options such as biodiversity net gain.
- **Create a new generation of regional and country parks**
Increase the area inside and 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.
- **Increase access to the countryside next door**
Create new trails to open-up countryside around towns, encourage access for marginalised groups, increase rewards for farmers and landowners who expand rights of way around urban areas, and improve the provision of rural bus services.

3. Start the rooftop renewables revolution

To protect nature and our treasured landscapes, we should be using more rooftops and fewer fields to revolutionise how we use the sun to meet energy needs.

We need to rapidly decarbonise our energy system to significantly reduce our impact on the climate and we have a duty to make the best possible use of our finite land. Solar energy is a critical part of the solution, but we are missing opportunities to generate huge amounts of cheap, low-carbon electricity on rooftops in every part of the country.

The countryside has a vital role to play in producing our food, improving our wellbeing and reversing our declining biodiversity. By prioritising roof-space, we ensure that land is used most effectively.

With the right incentives and regulations, 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.

We're calling on the next government to:

- **Set a target for 60% of solar to be on rooftops**
Set a new government target for at least 60% of new solar energy generation to be delivered through rooftop solar installations, increasing this target over time.
- **Make rooftop solar the norm on new buildings**
Make solar PV or thermal panels a standard requirement for all suitable new build housing, commercial buildings, and car parks to secure planning permission, while accelerating investment in local grid capacity to accommodate increased generation from rooftop solar.
- **Make rooftop solar more affordable for people and communities**
Increase the Smart Export Guarantee for low-income households and community-led schemes selling electricity from rooftop solar installations.
- **Set a 'roof first' solar policy**
Employ a 'roof first' approach for determining ground-mounted solar applications, which prioritises use of suitable brownfield land, avoids productive farmland, and makes greenfield solar permissions more exceptional.

4. Reform the planning system to serve both people and planet

Our planning system needs fresh thinking.

The urgent and intersecting housing, climate, and nature crises are too often siloed and the competing demands on our land are seen as working against each other. On top of this, the wishes of local communities are too frequently ignored. We will only be able to reconcile these competing demands and reduce the increasing pressure on our countryside with a clear plan for what to put where.

That's why we need a long-term, cross-departmental vision for how we manage and use land across England and a planning system that works with local communities to deliver this vision and prevent climate and ecological collapse.

We're calling on the next government to:

- **Develop a long-term vision for land use across England**
Develop a new, cross-departmental 'land use strategy' which would inform both national and local planning and land management policies and decisions. This would aim for greener land use, better countryside management and more community involvement and help to deliver national environmental targets including net zero.
- **Integrate targets for the environment and nature into planning policy**
Integrate environmental sustainability and nature restoration targets into the planning system to guarantee genuinely sustainable development every time in every place. This would require all Local Plans to set net zero and environmental targets.
- **Prioritise urban regeneration to reduce pressure on the countryside**
Encourage local authorities to prioritise urban regeneration in policy and require developers to use suitable urban brownfield sites – which recycle previously developed sites – before greenfield land.
- **Make community voices count in what-goes-where decisions**
Enhance community involvement in the planning system through improved use of local plans and expanding neighbourhood planning and requirements on developers to consult the local community before submitting large planning applications.



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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