



The  
countryside  
charity

# Our countryside: a manifesto for the next government



# CPRE's priorities for government

CPRE, the countryside charity, calls on all political parties to embrace our vision for a countryside that is thriving, accessible and that makes a significant contribution to reaching net-zero carbon by 2045. We want to see sustainable rural communities, supported by investment from business and government, where residents' voices are heard in decision-making and local needs are met.

CPRE believes that everyone has the right to enjoy a countryside that promotes a healthier economy and a happier community, and we urge all political parties to support our bold ambition to make it happen.

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## 1. Tackling the climate emergency

There can be no further delay in dramatically reducing carbon emissions. From day one, the next government must commit to implementing ambitious measures to reach net zero emissions by 2045 – at the very latest.

- **Farming and land use** – The countryside has huge potential to take carbon out of the atmosphere by restoring nature. For starters, payments to land managers should promote natural climate solutions that improve soil health and support the planting of many more trees and hedges.
- **Energy supply** – Our energy system needs to be redesigned now to meet the zero carbon target. The government should halt exploration for new sources of fossil fuels, such as fracked gas, and invest instead in community-led renewable energy.
- **Energy efficiency** – Buildings must meet high standards of energy efficiency to prepare for a net zero future and tackle fuel poverty. The government should develop and implement a strategy to reduce carbon emissions from our existing homes and invest in a programme of retrofit.



## 2. A countryside for all of us

Our countryside must be a source of wellbeing and wonder for everyone, wherever they live. The next government must improve access to green spaces for everyone, particularly for children and those from disadvantaged communities who do not currently have access.

- **Experiencing the countryside** – A love of the countryside starts early and having it in our lives benefits our health and wellbeing. The government should make sure every schoolchild spends a night under the stars in a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and include opportunities to learn about the natural world in the national curriculum.
- **Caring for the countryside** – Litter reaches even the most beautiful places in our countryside. The government should set us on the path to a litter-free future, implementing an ‘all-in’ Deposit Return Scheme that collects cans and bottles of all shapes, sizes and materials.
- **Access** – Too often, those from disadvantaged communities are unable to access the many benefits the countryside provides. The government should give additional support for tried-and-tested schemes to enable people from under-represented backgrounds to enjoy our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, including investment in public transport links.

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## 3. Planning for communities

The planning system is one of local democracy’s most powerful and effective tools. From building truly affordable homes to enhancing the countryside next door, the government must support a well-resourced planning system that empowers communities and promotes development that responds to their needs.

- **The countryside next door** – Local countryside is an invaluable resource for addressing the climate emergency and improving health and wellbeing. The government should commit to enhancing and protecting the countryside around our towns and cities, including the Green Belt.
- **Brownfield** – When countryside is built on, it is lost forever, and with it the benefits it brings. The government should commit to a ‘brownfield first’ policy to ensure that suitable previously developed land is always the first site for new development.
- **Giving councils control** – Local authorities are not adequately supported and resourced to be able to fully respond to the needs of their communities. The government should empower councils by immediately scrapping the housing delivery test, which undermines the ability of local authorities to put development in the right places.



## 4. Creating thriving rural communities

Our rural areas are full of vibrant communities that deserve every opportunity to thrive. The next government should ensure the specific challenges for these communities are addressed through meaningful investment in the rural economy.

- **Homes people can afford** – We all have the right to a home we can afford to live in, wherever we are; yet too often people are priced out of rural areas, leaving communities without the younger people and families they need to thrive. The next government should invest £12.8 billion per year to provide genuinely affordable homes, including homes for social rent, with a fair proportion allocated for rural communities.
- **Supporting rural businesses** – A thriving rural economy means a thriving countryside. The government should invest in digital infrastructure, such as high-speed broadband, in rural areas to allow communities and businesses to prosper while cutting carbon emissions by reducing the need to travel for work.
- **Public transport** – When there is only one bus a day to the nearest town, villages become isolated. The government should shift spending from new road-building to funding for reliable, affordable, low-carbon public transport in rural areas to connect all communities to health and education services, leisure facilities, and employment opportunities.

### 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 government affairs officer, David Walsh, on [davidw@cpre.org.uk](mailto:davidw@cpre.org.uk).

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