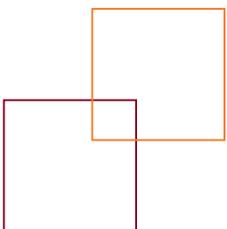

Rural Statement 2012

September 2012



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Introduction

1. Rural areas are home to one-fifth of the English population (nearly 10 million people) and make up 86% of the country, and with more than 505 thousand businesses, or 28% of England's total, they are also great places to do business. Rural England is not one place. It is made up of thousands of different communities located in widely varying parts of the country, from Cornish coastal villages to remote Cumbrian farming hamlets; and from prosperous market towns to deprived post industrial communities.
2. Rural communities are great places to live for many and, by and large, they are doing as well as if not better than the national average. However, poverty and deprivation exist in rural places and there are crucial economic, geographic and demographic factors, relating for example to distance, population sparsity, ageing, social isolation and market structure that can significantly impact on peoples lives and on whether and how their needs and circumstances are met effectively and accounted for by Government.
3. This Rural Statement is intended to underline our commitment to Rural England. It reflects our vision of successful rural businesses and thriving rural communities in a living, working countryside, and is based around three key priorities:
 - **Economic Growth** – we want rural businesses to make a sustainable contribution to national growth;
 - **Rural Engagement** – we want to engage directly with rural communities so that they can see that Government is on their side; and
 - **Quality of Life** – we want rural people to have fair access to public services and to be actively engaged in shaping the places in which they live;
4. Building upon the **Uplands Review** and **Rural Economy Growth Review** that we have previously published, it sets out what we are doing to put rural interests at the heart of Government, highlights the ways in which our policies are already benefiting rural areas, and presents further measures intended to secure a brighter future for rural people, businesses and communities.
5. This Statement focuses on Government action in England, but we acknowledge the parallels with the position of rural communities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland who face similar challenges and opportunities. Many of the policy areas affecting the needs of these communities are devolved to the administrations in these countries but where they are not, we are, of course, committed to addressing these through national Government policies and programmes. It also recognises the crucial role of Local Government, the voluntary and private sector in delivering the services that rural people depend upon every day, and the scope for communities to take local action to meet their own needs and concerns.
6. There is no magic formula to solving all of the problems faced by rural communities across England. However, by ensuring that rural circumstance is understood in national policy-making; enabling local authorities to deliver services more effectively on the ground; and empowering communities to identify and address their own local priorities, we believe that we can create the conditions for rural England to prosper and flourish.



Economic Growth – We want rural businesses to make a sustainable contribution to national growth

Economic Growth

7. We have made economic growth our top priority, and we want rural areas to contribute to and benefit from this growth. In our **Plan for Growth** we set out our objectives for generating strong, sustainable and long-term growth and for restoring the UK to being one of the best places in Europe to start, finance and grow a business.
8. We have also initiated a wide range of significant national-level policies and initiatives, designed to promote business and deliver growth in both urban and rural areas, for example by **cutting red tape, simplifying the planning system, delivering new infrastructure, improving local high streets, raising skill levels** and **supporting business**, particularly SMEs who make up a significant element of the rural economy.
9. In 2011 we undertook the **Rural Economy Growth Review** to ensure that rural needs and interests are firmly embedded in our overall growth strategy. This confirmed the substantial contribution that rural areas make to the national economy (£200bn in 2008), and resulted in a strong package of measures, worth £165m, designed to stimulate sustainable growth in the rural economy and help rural businesses to reach their full potential. We have made substantial progress on implementing these measures, including:
 - Creating five **Rural Growth Networks** – in Swindon and Wiltshire, Durham and Northumberland, Devon and Somerset, Cumbria, Coventry and Warwickshire – to help businesses in rural areas to reach their potential by breaking down barriers to economic growth such as a shortage of work premises, slow internet connection and fragmented business networks. Each Rural Growth Network, as part of the overall package, will take forward a range of activities aimed at supporting growth in rural enterprises led by women. This has been supported with £2m from the Government Equalities Office;

Case Study – Devon and Somerset Rural Growth Network Pilot

The Rural Growth Network pilot being established in Devon and Somerset will create a “ladder of business accommodation” – incubation units, work hubs and move on space – through investing in eight business hubs and several secondary sites across the two counties. The RGN will be working in partnership with two universities and a range of private sector research and development agencies to nurture new businesses and support existing businesses with high growth potential. It also plans to introduce a pilot programme to galvanise a whole community to recognise, celebrate and promote local entrepreneurship; and to run master classes to foster succession planning in rural family businesses. Early estimates of the pilot’s growth impacts are 1,359 new jobs and a £58.3m increase in GVA.

- Launching the £20 million **Farm and Forestry Improvement Scheme**, which uses Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) funding to provide small grants of between £2,500 up to £25,000 to farm, forestry and horticulture businesses;
- Launching the £60m RDPE-funded **Rural Economy Grant Scheme**, which is providing larger grants of between £25,000 and around £1m to enable a ‘game changing’ transformation of Farm, Agri-Food, Tourism and Forestry businesses and micro-enterprises in other high growth sectors;
- Launching the first phase of the £12m that will be invested in promoting tourism to the benefit of rural areas – through the **HOLIDAYS AT HOME ARE GREAT** campaign and the Regional Growth Fund Project ‘**Growing Tourism Locally**’. Both initiatives are aimed at attracting more people to rural areas and encouraging them to stay longer when they visit;

- Inviting training providers to deliver the £20m **Skills and Knowledge Transfer Programme**, a flexible and locally targetable skills training programme to enable rural business growth, due to be launched in autumn 2012; and
- Publishing a **food and drink export action plan**, and hosting an **Agri-Food summit** to raise awareness of the potential for growth in this key rural sector.

Food and Farming

10. No Government Rural Statement can ignore the crucial role of farming and food production in rural life. Farming and the wider food production sector make an important contribution to the rural economy, and farmers and land managers are responsible for managing over 70% of the countryside.
11. The Government is committed to support and develop British farming and our aim is to encourage sustainable production of the high quality produce and food that Britain is known for. Food and farming benefit directly from a number of the actions announced in the Rural Economy Growth Review, as well as from the additional funding that farmers and land managers can access through environmental stewardship. We want to ensure that the next round of the Common Agricultural Policy supports the development of a competitive industry with improved environmental performance.
12. The Government has published the initial conclusions of the **Green Food Project**, a joint initiative between Government, industry and environmental partners to reconcile how we will achieve our goals of increasing food production and improving the environment. Other initiatives include our support for the Sustainable Agriculture and Food Innovation Platform for collaborative research and development funding with the industry, our work to **reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens** on the farming industry, to put in place clearer, more honest **food labelling** and to introduce **Government Buying Standards** for Food and Catering to ensure that central government leads by example on sustainable food and catering.



Broadband and Mobile Connectivity

13. Effective, reliable and fast communications are vital for the economic prosperity and social sustainability of rural England. As well as being a key driver to growth in rural areas, access to effective broadband also has the potential to make services more accessible to rural communities. We have made a clear commitment to the UK having the best superfast broadband network in Europe by 2015, and set out an action plan to deliver this in our **2010 Broadband Strategy**.
14. We recognise that this aim cannot be realised if rural areas are left out in the cold. We have, therefore, introduced three significant and complementary investment programmes geared to improving rural access to broadband and mobile phone coverage.
 - The **Rural Broadband Programme** – £530m of Government money which, together with local match funding, aims to deliver standard (i.e. 2Mbps minimum) broadband to all rural premises and superfast to at least 90% of premises in each county. Indicative broadband funding allocations to Local Authorities were announced in August 2011.
 - **Rural Community Broadband Fund** – A £20m Fund to help ‘hard to reach’ communities get access to superfast broadband. The Fund was launched in November 2011 to provide communities with up to 50% of the cost of developing and implementing a local broadband project. Round One resulted in 16 projects, worth £5m, being developed, with a second round that closed in July 2012, the results of which will be announced in late September. 2012. The Fund will be fully evaluated, and we have previously committed to extending it subject to the outcomes of that evaluation.
 - The **Mobile Infrastructure Project** – up to £150m in capital expenditure to improve mobile coverage, announced on 3 October 2011. This could yield important benefits in rural areas. Project objectives were announced in the March 2012 Budget – to target 60,000 premises in UK ‘not spots’, and improve coverage along an initial ten road routes. Procurement began in spring 2012, and delivery is expected to be completed by 2015.

Case Study – Community Broadband

Over recent years there have been a number of community broadband initiatives, such as the Cybermoor scheme in Alston, Cumbria, which has brought high-speed broadband to one of the most remote communities in England. The technology landscape has moved on significantly since the early days of community broadband and there is an increasingly wide range of opportunities available to communities. As with Cybermoor, community engagement is key to developing a successful community scheme. Government has identified five broad models (**Community Broadband Toolkit**) demonstrating a series of ways communities can get involved in the development of broadband projects. Each model requires a gradual increase in community commitment to match the difficulty and expense of serving customers in ever more remote areas, and they range from a simple demand aggregation tool to models where customers improve on standard solutions and are able to design – and even build and run – solutions tailored to their own requirements.

15. We are also working with the **Go ON UK** campaign to help maximise the benefits of the internet for individuals and organisations in rural communities, and with leading Local Authorities to develop an effective approach to demand stimulation. This will be offered to other local authorities as broadband is rolled out in their areas.

16. In addition to these initiatives, we will ensure that all Government policies designed to promote business and support economic growth, benefit rural communities. Furthermore, **we are now**:
- disseminating the lessons learned from the Rural Growth Network pilots (when available) to Local Enterprise Partnerships, encouraging them to adopt the approaches and initiatives that are found to work. We will use the evidence gathered through the monitoring and evaluation process to determine whether or not to launch a second tranche;
 - funding a national Wheels to Work co-ordinator for 2012/13. This will enable young people in rural areas without sufficient public transport to travel by motorbike to work and training;
 - researching the degree to which rural businesses are accessing national employer skills programmes and government business support programmes. We will identify options for improving take-up if evidence is found of rural businesses disproportionately not accessing programmes that might benefit them economically;
 - working with Go On UK and its partners to improve digital skills across the rural population, its businesses, and charities, to enable them to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by broadband access;
 - working across Government to support increased levels of flexible working; allowing people to prioritise working at, or near, their home – bringing increased benefits to the rural economy.



Rural Engagement – We want to engage directly with rural communities, so that they can see that Government is on their side

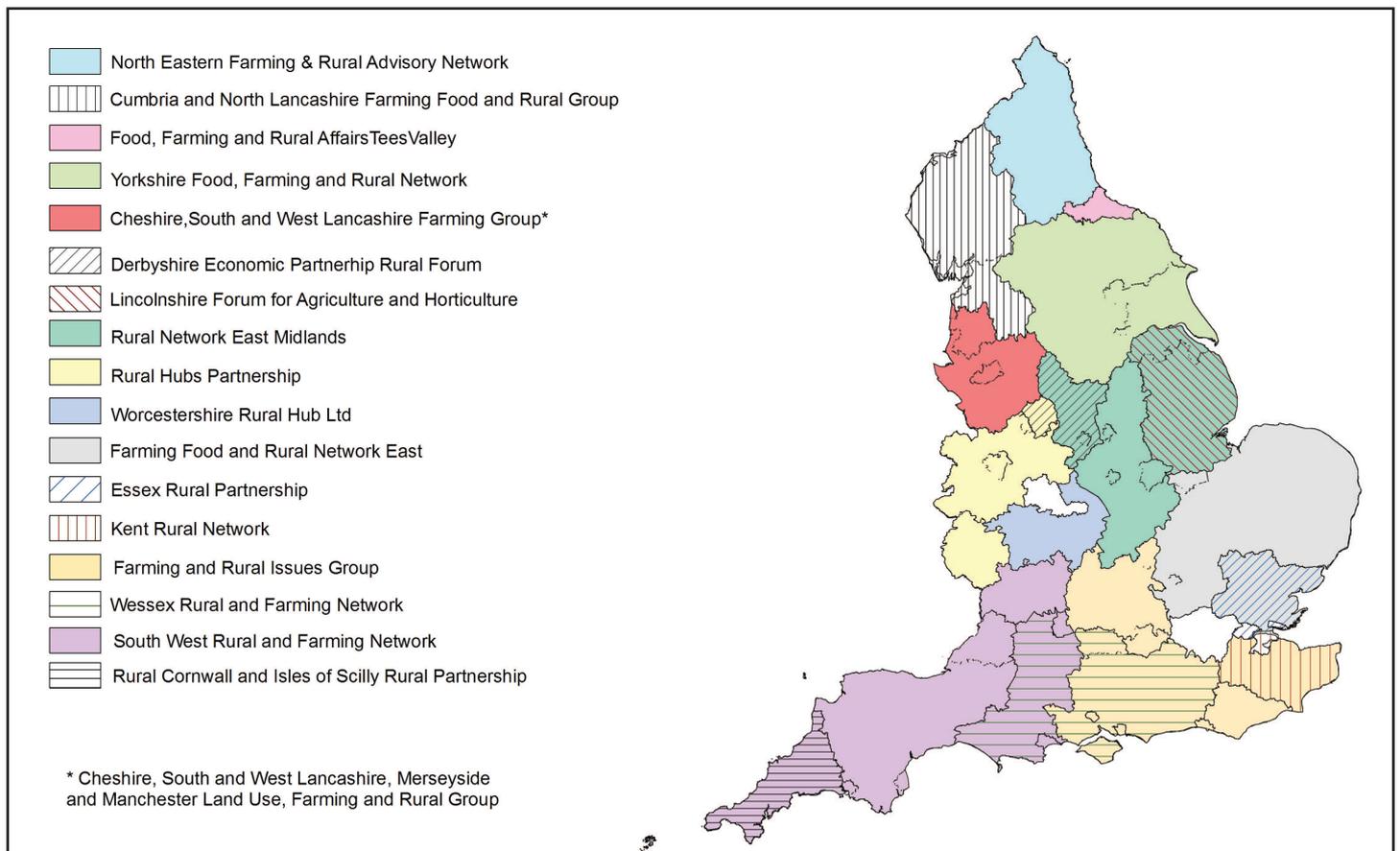
17. This Government has strong rural credentials, from the Prime Minister down. We understand the needs and interests of rural communities and we are committed to embedding these firmly in everything we do.
18. Defra is at the heart of this commitment. Most of what it does, for example in relation to farming, food, environmental protection, biodiversity, landscape management, water quality, flooding, animal health, coastal communities, the green economy, sustainable development and climate change adaptation, has a direct bearing on rural England, and on the everyday lives of the people who live there.
19. In addition, Defra is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the £3.7bn **Rural Development Programme for England**, which provides funding to improve the environment, fosters competitive and sustainable rural businesses, and thriving rural communities.
20. Defra's Ministers are the Rural Champions within Government. They take an active interest in whether and how the Government's policies impact on rural communities and businesses, and intercede where it is clear that rural interests are not being addressed fairly or effectively.
21. Within Defra, they are supported by the **Rural Communities Policy Unit** (RCPU), which was established in April 2011 to be the centre of rural expertise within Government. The RCPU's role includes, among others, three key functions: Rural Proofing, Stakeholder Engagement and Building the Rural Evidence Base.

Rural Proofing

22. **Rural Proofing** requires policy-makers to consider the rural impacts of their policies and programmes and, where necessary, to make adjustments to achieve equally effective and successful outcomes for individuals, communities and businesses in rural areas.
23. Rural Proofing does **not** require exactly the same outcome or the provision of exactly the same level of service in rural as in urban locations. This would not be practical in many cases, as the costs would be prohibitive, and in any case rural communities do not necessarily expect this. They do, however, rightly expect that all Government policies and programmes should be sufficiently flexible to apply fairly in their areas and to deliver quality services that meet their everyday needs.
24. Defra supports Rural Proofing by providing advice, guidance and support to policy officials across Government, including through published **Rural Proofing guidance** materials. This has been revised and will be published in the Autumn of 2012, along with the Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit. We have recently published a separate report produced with the Local Government Association and others, which identifies the principles underpinning best practice in **Local Level Rural Proofing**.

Rural Stakeholders

25. We recognise that two-way communication with rural stakeholders and communities is crucial to developing better policies and delivering more effective rural outcomes and services. We are, therefore, working hard to engage positively and proactively with partners, including local government networks, civil society organisations, **RDPE Local Action Groups**, business groups and stakeholder bodies, such as the **Rural Coalition** which brings together a wide range of key organisations such as the Country Land and Business Association, the National Farmers Union, the Local Government Association, the National Housing Federation, Action with Communities in Rural England and the Campaign to Protect Rural England.
26. This open approach, demonstrated by the programme of Rural Roadshows periodically undertaken by Defra Ministers, is helping to keep us in touch with the concerns and priorities of rural communities and businesses. Such contact helps us gather evidence and intelligence from our key stakeholders.
27. The new **Rural and Farming Networks** (RFNs) are central to this. There are now 17 networks across the country, bringing together people from rural communities, rural businesses and the food and farming industries, and giving them a direct line into central Government.
28. Defra Ministers are committed to making this network a success and to meeting with representatives whenever possible during rural engagements. Defra Ministers and the RFN Chairs will meet at least once a year. The first meeting took place on 17 April 2012.



Rural Research and Evidence

29. Analysis and monitoring of rural conditions is an essential function of the RCPU. It works closely with rural stakeholders to ensure Government has a clear understanding of issues affecting rural communities and businesses, and about what works in addressing them. Key themes in the RCPU's evidence plan, which has been developed in co-operation with external partners, include: the economy, housing, broadband, fuel poverty, services, transport, localism, understanding wellbeing, community cohesion and health.
30. Defra also collates and presents statistical information about the state of rural England through the **Rural Statistics Digest**, which reports on a range of indicators relating to the social and economic aspects of rural life.
31. In promoting rural interests across Government, Defra is **now**:
 - publishing a new, practical Government-wide Rural Proofing package in Autumn 2012;
 - commissioning an external review of the impact of the new Rural Proofing package, to be undertaken in Autumn 2013;
 - publishing a refreshed Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit to help inform decision makers and commissioners address rural health issues as part of the wider NHS changes, including physical and mental health issues;
 - working with external partners to promote the use of the local-level rural proofing materials, to enable sharing of good practice to inform and inspire others;
 - building strong relations between Government and rural stakeholders through maximising the impact of the Rural and Farming Network, meeting grassroots rural stakeholders through Rural Roadshows, and developing closer links between Defra and other external partners.

Quality of Life – We want rural people to have fair access to public services and to be actively engaged in shaping the places in which they live

32. In many ways, rural communities already experience a high quality of life. But poverty and deprivation exist in rural areas, social isolation is a growing concern, not least because of the greater proportion of older people living in rural communities. The cost of living in rural areas, for example the cost of housing and road fuel, can be higher than elsewhere. We also recognise that it is often the most vulnerable members of the community, such as older people and deprived families, who suffer most from the loss of local services and the high cost of living. Local solutions need to be found that are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable.
33. We understand peoples concerns in these areas and want to see everyone in rural England having fair and reasonable access to the services they need, and rural communities being able to address their own local needs through local action. It is vital that all Government policies and programmes work effectively in all of these kinds of places, as the recent **OFT report into price and choice in remote communities** which highlighted the issues facing more remote rural communities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as England.

Rural Services

34. We have made fair access to services in rural areas a key element of the **Open Public Services White Paper**, and it is one of the drivers underpinning our work to improve broadband access in rural areas. We have also introduced a wide range of policies and programmes intended to protect and improve the services that people, including those living in rural areas, receive. These include:
- Committing £1.34bn to securing the long-term future of the **Post Office Network**, and promising that no programme of closures will take place under this Government. We have ensured that over 1,000 communities that cannot support a traditional Post Office continue to be served by outreach provision, and we are introducing a new type of Post Office – Post Office Local – which will enable post office services to be sustained in smaller communities.

Case Study – Post Office Local at Crawcrook

There had been no post office in Crawcrook for over two years, and it had not been possible to locate a suitable retailer in that time. The Post Office Local model then became available, and the owner of a NISA convenience store decided to integrate the new model into his store refurbishment. The branch opened in January 2011 and has gained new customers who are benefiting from using the extended hours service. Customer and operator feedback has been extremely positive.

- Investing £10m in both 2011/12 and 2012/13 in the **Community Transport Fund** to help Local Authorities to develop locally responsive transport solutions, which will be especially relevant for rural areas.
- Encouraging local authorities, including rural councils, to promote cycling and walking, by working with community groups and others to invest in off-road networks and rights of way and to create active travel opportunities including safer cycle and walking routes between villages.
- Encouraging innovative ways of delivering **library services**, including through sharing services and back office functions; better use of digital technology; involving communities in the running of their local libraries; and working across authority boundaries. We have also recently announced that we will be producing a detailed report on the state of public library services in 2014. This report will cover rural library services.

- Placing a new health inequalities duty on Clinical Commissioning Groups to have regard to the need to reduce health inequalities in outcomes and access to NHS services in rural (and other) areas with the aim of achieving equal access for equal need, as a result of the **2012 Health and Social Care Act**.
- Investing in public health, including through a ring-fenced grant to upper tier local authorities to support a life course approach to meeting local health needs as set out in *Healthy Lives, Healthy People* (2010), the **Public Health White Paper**, including action on the physical and mental health needs of older people, who make up a higher proportion of the rural population. From April 2013, Public Health England will provide leadership and expertise to support the public health system, including local authorities.
- Taking forward the legacy and learning from the **Ageing Well** programme to support local authorities to improve their design and delivery of services for older people. We are working with the **Age Action Alliance**, where one of the eight working groups focuses on improving loneliness and isolation, and the UK Advisory Forum on Ageing to improve our understanding of older people's needs and ensure our policies address them.
- Promoting energy efficiency and encouraging greater uptake of renewable energy, including through the **Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation, Feed-In Tariffs, the Renewable Heat Premium Payment, the Renewable Heat Incentive** and the **Rural Community Renewable Energy Fund**.
- Establishing a growing number of Free Schools and Academies in rural areas which will help drive up education standards.

Case Study – Wigmore School, Hereford

Wigmore is an all through school in rural Herefordshire, bordering Shropshire and Wales. It converted to Academy status in January 2011. In addition to delivering a high standard of education, the Academy takes full advantage of its rural location. by sourcing its food as locally as possible. It believes that because farming plays an important part in the local community it is important that children understand where their food comes from and sourcing ingredients locally is one of the ways it can support its local community whilst ensuring high quality food.

Many of the local farms are run by parents of pupils, and these are now suppliers, strengthening the school's links with the local community. Older members of the community are also invited for lunch once a month. Pupils serve and eat with them reinforcing the links between the generations.

The Academy also has its own on-site nursery, which it opened in response to the closure of two local privately run nurseries.

- Exploring the scope for local communities to identify and address local priorities through the introduction of **Neighbourhood Community Budgets**.
- Supporting and encouraging social enterprise and local community action, for example through the £10m **Investment and Contract Readiness Fund** to enable social ventures to access new forms of investment and compete for public service contracts; and working with civil society partners such as **Pub Is The Hub** and the **Plunkett Foundation** who can help village shops and pubs be reborn as community-owned businesses.

Case Study – The Butchers Arms, Crosby Ravensworth

“The closure of pubs in both urban and rural areas has become a significant issue in recent years. We recognise the importance of village pubs as vital community assets. The campaign to save the **Butchers Arms** in Crosby Ravensworth, Cumbria was one of the local action initiatives identified and taken forward by the community as part of **the Government’s Big Society Vanguard** in the Eden Valley in 2010/11. Following the strenuous efforts of the local community, who raised around £300,000 through selling shares to a group of 300 people willing to invest in its future, the bar was re-opened by the Prime Minister and local MP, Rory Stewart, in August 2011. The Butchers Arms is one of the first six community pubs to be established in the UK, and provides an inspiring model for other communities.

- Developing and implementing **Rights to Provide** across the public sector, to empower employees to take over the services they deliver by forming public service mutuals. The **Mutuals Support Programme** provides a comprehensive package of support for the development of public service mutuals.
- Giving local authorities greater flexibility to decide how they use the funding they do have to support essential services and consulting on a number of technical adjustments to baseline funding levels, within the new **business rates retention scheme**, that more strongly reflect the additional cost of providing services in rural areas.



Rural Housing

35. Rural areas can be some of the most expensive places to live in the country. We recognise the social and economic importance of affordable housing, and we are promoting its provision through:
- Allocating £4.5 billion to deliver up to 170,000 affordable housing units by 2015. This includes the **Affordable Homes Programme**, through which the Homes and Communities Agency is allocating £1.8bn to deliver 80,000 new homes for Affordable Rent and Affordable Home Ownership. Approved bids for affordable homes in smaller rural communities (under 3,000 people) account for almost 10% of this programme outside London;

Case Study – Rural Neighbourhood Planning Front Runner

Much Wenlock in Shropshire is one of the first wave neighbourhood planning front runners. The Town Council, supported by community volunteers, are working on a wide-ranging neighbourhood development plan for the rural market town, covering issues from housing and employment to protecting the local environment and improving community services. The steering group held a successful launch event in November 2011 and have been engaging with the community, including a residents' survey to over 1,300 homes, as they develop their plan.

- The **National Planning Policy Framework**, which has simplified the overly complex planning processes and introduced a new, more flexible and positive approach to planning, making it more transparent for local rural communities to be involved in advancing developments that best suit their needs;
- The Housing Strategy, **Laying the Foundations**, which provides the basis for enabling communities to design and deliver what is needed for the economic, social and environmental sustainability of their local areas, including allocating £150m to bring empty homes back into use. Subsequently a further £10m was allocated to tackle clusters of empty homes, given the quality of the bids submitted;
- Introducing **Neighbourhood Planning**, which allows communities to shape new development in their local areas by coming together to prepare neighbourhood plans or development orders which are locally distinctive. They will be able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built; have their say on what those new buildings should look like; decide which green spaces should be protected; or grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see through a new Neighbourhood Development Order;
- Introducing the **Community Right to Build**, a specific form of Neighbourhood Development Order, which will enable local people to bring forward small-scale, site-specific, community-led developments. Communities will determine the type of development they want to see, including the type and tenure of any housing (including affordable housing), and any benefits from any development – such as capital or rental receipts – will remain within the community;
- Accelerating the **release of formerly used public land** with capacity for up to 100,000 homes over the Spending Review period, and making use of 'Build Now, Pay Later' terms on as much land as possible – where there is market demand and where it represents value for money and is affordable;



- Introducing the **New Homes Bonus** which will mean local people will see the benefit in building new homes;
- Promoting **Home on the Farm** scheme, which encourages farmers and local authorities to work together to secure the conversion of redundant and under-used farm buildings to deliver affordable homes for local people;

Rural Community Action

36. Rural communities are, in many ways, the embodiment of the Government's vision for the Big Society. They have a strong tradition of local people identifying their own needs and addressing these through their own locally-led action. We are keen to build on this tradition and have introduced a range of new initiatives and funding mechanisms to support communities in taking control of their own futures, including:
- Introducing the **Community Right to Challenge**, to allow voluntary and community groups, charities, parish councils, and local authority staff to bid to run a local authority service where they believe they can do so differently and better. This may be a whole service or part of a service;
 - Introducing the **Community Right to Bid** to give community groups a fairer chance to prepare and bid to buy community buildings and facilities that are important to them. This could be valued community assets such as the village shop, pub, community centre, children's centre, allotment or library, and will include private as well as public assets;

- Introducing the **Transforming Local Infrastructure Fund**, which is providing £30m to help local infrastructure bodies to modernise and improve the support they provide to civil society organisations;
- Establishing **Community Organisers**, which involves training 5,000 individuals, including many in rural areas, to co-ordinate and encourage community action in their areas;

Case Study – Village Agents – Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire Village and Community Agents provide older people with easier access to services and information. Agents are trusted members of their communities, people who can be approached for advice and support. Through training and access to appropriate information resources, the Agents provide both a short and a longer-term service for older people. The scheme began as part of the **LinkAge Plus** scheme funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. Today, 39 Village and Community Agents operate countywide, including in the towns of Cheltenham and Gloucester. Gloucestershire Rural Community Council manages the initiative, with funding provided jointly by Gloucestershire County Council and NHS Gloucestershire.

- Establishing **Big Society Capital**, the groundbreaking £600 million institution to make it easier for charities, social enterprises and community groups to access affordable finance;
 - Supporting local partnership working between the police and their partners, including local councils, as well as fire, health and criminal justice services, to work together to develop and implement strategies to protect local communities from crime and to keep people safe. In addition, the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 established elected **Police and Crime Commissioners** who will make the police directly answerable to the communities they serve, and ensure that community needs (including those of rural communities) are met as effectively as possible.
37. We will continue to explore ways in which vital public services can be protected and enhanced; to ensure that rural communities can take full advantage of new opportunities to pursue their own needs and priorities; and to identify, highlight and disseminate good practice in service delivery and local initiative.
38. In the Uplands Review, we made a commitment to ensure that our policies promoted the survival and, where possible, the expansion of rural services, including through promoting community-led action.
39. We remain committed to supporting rural community action and **are now**:
- gathering and disseminating to rural communities the lessons learned from the Neighbourhood Community Budget pilots to help them develop their own ways to design and manage their public services with local service providers;
 - gathering and showcasing examples of good practice in rural community transport projects to show what can be done and to inspire others to develop their own schemes;
 - publishing a Rural Energy Charter, alongside the launch of the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation, providing practical advice to rural households and communities on how they can take advantage of the Government's energy efficiency programmes;

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- monitoring and reviewing the provision of Post Office services, including those provided through new operating models, to determine the benefits to rural communities in 2013 in the context of the first year of the network transformation programme. Lessons learned will be disseminated among rural stakeholders;
 - using the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Public Health Outcomes Framework to help identify local physical and mental health needs and priorities, including measuring the impact of fuel poverty on health, given the higher rate of fuel poverty in rural areas;
 - commissioning the Arts Council to lead a project to identify and promote best practice principles in relation to community-run libraries;
 - undertaking a new research project to identify and publicise examples of communities using the new Neighbourhood Planning rights to deliver positive changes for towns and villages in rural areas;
 - gathering and disseminating examples of good practice by rural communities taking advantage of the new Community Rights in order to encourage others to follow suit;
 - identifying and publicising examples of best practice as the Academy Free School programme develops, to inform and inspire others;
 - gathering and disseminating the lessons learned from **Community Learning Trust Pilots** covering rural areas, so that the needs of rural learners can be reflected in the wider rollout of the initiative.
40. The Statement does not cover all of the issues of interest to rural people, businesses and communities. We have not touched, for example, on our policies for social care provision, or on the importance of heritage and culture in rural life. We have not explored the important role of the church in rural communities, the key function of market towns as social and economic hubs, or the role of rural communities in managing and preserving the natural environment. The fact that these and other issues are not featured in this Statement does not mean that they are not important, or that we are not acutely aware of the need to ensure that rural interests are addressed in these areas.
41. The range of issues and the scale of the challenges are enormous, and there is no simple solution for overcoming them. This Statement sets out a positive new agenda for Rural England, a contract with rural areas, so they can hold us to account on our promise to grow the rural economy and support thriving rural communities.



