

Unlocking the potential of the rural economy

The countryside has vast economic, environmental and social potential. Landowners and land managers are already helping to feed the nation, and fight climate change and nature decline. Now, many are diversifying their businesses, seeking to grow the economy, create skilled new jobs and strengthen their local communities.

They cannot do all of this alone. The rural economy is 19% less productive than the national average. Closing this gap would add £43 billion to the economy. If the rural economy is to succeed then the many barriers to economic growth in the countryside must be removed.

This document is part of a series of 'missions' published by the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), which represents 26,000 landowners and rural businesses in England and Wales. These missions are designed to help policy-makers unlock the potential of the rural economy – for the good of our rural communities and the country as a whole.

Tackling Rural Crime

Mission Three


Criminal activity is a blight on the countryside. Criminals are often emboldened by the isolation of rural communities, leaving families, farmers and business owners feeling vulnerable and powerless. Police forces all too often are inadequately resourced to investigate and prevent criminal activity in the countryside.

Rural communities face the same criminal activities experienced in urban areas. There are, though, some crimes unique to the locale – hare coursing from groups linked to illegal betting markets, threatening behaviour from activist groups opposed to legitimate countryside activities, not to mention fly-tipping, livestock worrying and theft of farm machinery.

Government must empower the police, the courts and rural communities to fight crime, defending themselves, their property and their communities.

To deliver a safer countryside by tackling rural crime, government must:

1. give police the resources necessary to protect rural communities;
2. introduce greater powers for police to tackle livestock worrying;
3. name, shame, and fine litterbugs;
4. provide a Rural Crime Equipment Pack for every police force;
5. improve rural training for all 999/101 call handlers; and
6. bring an end to fly-tipping.



To deliver a safer countryside by tackling rural crime, government must take the following action.

1

Give police the resources necessary to protect rural communities

Whilst there has been some progress with the establishment of a National Rural Crime Unit, there is a lack of funding to tackle rural issues on the ground. It is often the case in rural communities that policing teams are redeployed to support larger scale urban issues as they arise, deprioritising rural emergencies. Despite covering large and sparse areas, rural crime teams have minimal ringfenced resources, which undermines the work of protecting rural communities. Rural communities deserve a minimum level of service, the details of which should be clearly set out in policy.

Action

- Develop with rural stakeholders a fixed Service Level Agreement, with appropriate and ringfenced resources, that would protect rural communities from crime.

2

Introduce greater powers for police to tackle livestock worrying

Livestock worrying – where a dog chasing or being around livestock causes injuries, death or miscarriage to the livestock – causes farmers great distress and cost. UK farm animals worth £1 million were killed or injured by dogs in 2022, a 50% increase since 2019.

Actions

- Expand the area covered by existing law, which only punishes dogs that worry livestock on agricultural fields, to include roads and paths.
- Increase powers for the police to seize dogs after particularly serious incidents. Currently, the police can only seize a dog for the purpose of identifying the owner, and it has to be returned to the owner once they have been identified.
- Give police a new power to take samples from livestock and dogs suspected of an offence in order to keep better records of repeat offenders.
- Modify powers of entry, meaning that police can enter a premises to identify and/or seize a dog or any items they believe to be evidence of an offence.

3

Name, shame, and fine litterbugs

Alongside fly-tipping, littering has long blighted rural communities. Littering is currently dealt with on-the-spot fines in the form of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs), which can range between £65 and £150.

A Keep Britain Tidy survey showed that litter has increased, with fast food-related items falling in the top ten most littered items. Research shows that drive-throughs make up 33% of out-of-town new food and beverage openings, up 22% in 2022.

Action

- Force fast food outlets to print vehicle registration plate details on their packaging to name and shame those littering and to aid the administration of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs).

4

Provide a Rural Crime Equipment Pack for every police force

Rural crime is often controlled by organised criminal gangs, and as such is undertaken by well-equipped and informed teams. Local police units are often at a disadvantage through lack of equipment. The vast differences in the equipment provided on a force-by-force basis hinder cross-county operations and effective policing.

Action

- Issue a standard Rural Crime Equipment Pack to every rural force, alongside training, to be funded centrally and reviewed annually. The minimum requirements for the standard kit have been identified through police working groups, and are as follows:
 - i. liveried 4x4 with automatic number plate recognition,
 - ii. liveried quad,
 - iii. microchip scanner,
 - iv. high power lamp,
 - v. high power torches,
 - vi. thermal spotter, and
 - vii. drone kit and training.

5

Improve rural training for all 999/101 call handlers

Rural crimes are not readily identifiable as there is no universal tag for rural offences, with some forces unable to access data sets due to the lack of recording uniformity. Universal data standards would enable joined-up policing, early awareness of trends, and identification of target areas or crime types, and inform day-to-day policing operations and objectives.

There are already examples of regional good practice such as specialist farm training, which includes serial number location, identification for agricultural machinery and monthly online drop-in awareness sessions. These are currently only local initiatives that need to be expanded and funded nationally.

Action

- Invest in data standards and specialist rural training to frontline call handlers, officers and volunteers, to equip them to both correctly identify and record cases.



Bring an end to fly-tipping

Fly-tipping causes profound damage to communities and the landscape. The fly-tipping statistics for England in 2022 report a total of 1.09 million fly-tipping incidents on public land. Some progress has been made with the appointment of a National Rural Fly-Tipping Co-ordinator as part of the newly formed National Rural Crime Unit. The abolition of DIY waste disposal charges from local authorities and the increase in Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for fly-tipping from £400 to £1,000 have led to a reduction in incidents.

However, most fly-tipping incidents take place on private land and remain a huge unrecorded issue.

The number of FPNs issued in 2021/22 increased from the previous years by 58% to 91,000, with court fines almost tripling to 1,798 and the value of court fines alone equating to £840,000.

The maximum fine for fly-tipping is five years in jail and an unlimited fine, but this is rarely enforced. This means landowners pay on average £1,000 to remove the waste, but we are aware of some instances that have cost up to £100,000. Landowners who do not pick up these costs risk facing prosecution themselves, which is grossly unfair.

Action

- Introduce guidance for local authorities to ringfence fine receipts. This would help fund enforcement and clean-up activities and therefore improve local authorities' ability to act against fly-tipping.

The CLA

The CLA is here to help. We represent our members in a collaborative way, working with policy-makers from across government and across all political traditions. To discuss this document further, or to explore how you can help us in our mission to unlock the potential of the rural economy, please contact the CLA External Affairs team via email: externalaffairs@cla.org.uk.

The CLA exists to champion, protect and enhance the rural economy, environment and way of life.

We aspire to unlock the potential of the rural economy by promoting innovative ideas to a national audience and providing practical support to members. We do this so our members can feed the nation, create jobs and prosperity, invest in communities and protect the environment for future generations.