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**RURAL RENEWAL**

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# **Rural Renewal**

## **JEREMY CORBYN**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

With the influx of new members and supporters, we have the potential to build vibrant local parties in rural areas where for too long our party has not been visible enough, despite the best efforts of dedicated local activists.

So what should be our campaigning message to rural voters? There's only one way to find out and that's to ask. We consulted thousands of members and supporters in rural areas, and 1,650 responded over little more than a weekend – showing the real appetite of our members and supporters to get involved with policy.

Housing was the biggest priority – just as it is in many urban areas too. Transport links are a major problem, with a lack of services causing social exclusion, and local council cuts taking their toll too. The top three issues were:

1. Housing
2. Improving infrastructure like broadband and transport,
3. Increasing support farming and fishing industries

People not only told us their priority issues, but their solutions too. As a party we need to embrace this approach, be more open, inclusive and democratic. We will make better policy that way.

I was born in rural Wiltshire and grew up in Shropshire where I first took part in Labour politics. Labour must become as much a party in the communities like the one in which I was born as it is for people in inner city constituencies like the one I represent.

Too often the old machine politics writes off “the Tory shires”, abandoning communities struggling with issues such as housing costs, public service cuts and social exclusion just as those in inner cities are. If Labour doesn't offer those communities solutions, no one else will.

There shouldn't be any no-go areas for Labour. We can win anywhere if we engage people in finding the answers to the issues they face. Let us be confident that together we can rebuild our party right across Britain.

If you have further ideas, on these or any other issues, please don't hesitate to contact the campaign.

**Jeremy Corbyn MP**

## THE RURAL ECONOMY

### Farming

Farming is at heart of the rural economy, and its benefits are felt outside the countryside, throughout Britain. However, it is clear that there are problems for British farmers which is impacting the lives of thousands in rural communities, including the half a million people who work in agriculture across the UK.

This has been made starkly apparent with this summer's protests by dairy farmers. It is simply not right that any worker should have to sell their product for less than it costs them to produce them, and this is acutely felt by dairy farmers.

A combination of a small number of very large milk processors operating as suppliers to retailers, supermarkets operating a 'price war' forcing down the cost of milk, and milk co-ops losing their power has resulted in thousands of dairy farmers finding it harder and harder to make ends meet, let alone make a profit.

It is welcome that supermarkets like Morrison's have put in place brands that allowed customers to support the British dairy farmers, but more needs to be done. Under our leadership, we will work with all parties to ensure that customers are offered a price they can afford for their milk, but not at the expense of farmers whose very livelihoods depend on it. This will include investigating regulating supermarkets to prevent below cost selling.

We will also always ensure that both British farmers and British taxpayers get a fair deal out of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and that people and businesses in rural communities see the full benefit of the rural development policy. As it stands, taxation from Europe's citizens is subsidising the incomes of some of the continent's wealthiest landowners, including our own. Subsidies need to go to farmers engaging in the most ecological sustainable practices, not those with the largest landholdings.

### Fishing

UK fishing is under threat in many coastal communities. Just as the CAP has benefited landowners over the farming industry as a whole, the Common Fisheries Policy also needs substantial reform. Over two-fifths of England's fishing quota is held by foreign-controlled businesses, and much of the catch is landed abroad too.

The UK government is in a strong position to act as fishing quotas are supposed to be allocated based on environmental, economic and social criteria. Yet too much of the fishing quota is in the hands of the industrial scale fleet, with the job creating small scale sector, which provides 65% of employment at sea in England and Wales, increasing struggling to survive.

In many coastal and rural communities cuts to flood defences not only threaten farming and fishing industries but whole communities. As is true with healthcare, prevention is cheaper than cure, and cuts to flood defences are a false economy.

## Wages

The wage gap between urban and rural workers is on average £4,500 and this has risen by £1,000 in the last five years. This has not been helped by the ideological decision by the government to scrap the Agricultural Wages Board (AWB), which for decades has ensured agricultural workers are paid fairly.

***“Low wages mean that a lot of locals are unable to afford to stay in the villages where they grew up”***

*Respondent*

Following the lead of the Labour Welsh Assembly government, we will bring back the AWB to ensure that workers are paid fairly in what are often very difficult working conditions.

We also need to strengthen the enforcement resources of the gangmasters licensing authority and of the minimum wage to ensure that agricultural wages are not undercut.

## Businesses and job creation

Two-thirds of all people employed by SMEs are rural employees. Our pledges not to raise taxes for small businesses, and increase spending on training will not only help small businesses grow, helping our economy in turn, but will also help create well paid, high skilled, good quality jobs in rural communities throughout our country.

Our rural small businesses also face huge pressures to compete with their bigger and better connected rivals in urban areas. The government has failed to deliver on its 2010 promise of having the best superfast broadband network in Europe by 2015. While 83% of premises can currently access superfast broadband, in rural areas coverage is only 37%. The government must regulate providers with a universal service obligation – as exists in postal deliveries – to ensure that rural communities are not left behind.

***“Access to rural broadband is very important as is providing support to small rural businesses especially post offices, pubs and petrol stations who hold communities together”***

*Respondent*

In the long-term we need government action to ensure we have a world class digital infrastructure reaching every part of country. The German and French governments are investing heavily and the UK again risks being left behind. That’s why I have proposed establishing a national investment bank to secure the infrastructure: digital, energy and transport that will underpin broad-based growth in all sectors of industry and in every region and nation of the UK.

## RURAL LIFE

### Getting around

Rural bus networks have been decimated over the last five years. The Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) was first cut by 20% in 2012 and is now facing further cuts which the Rural Service Network has described as potentially “devastating” to rural communities. This is coupled with local authority cuts of over 50% in some areas to bus networks resulting in hundreds of rural bus services being cut.

***“Transport is a major issue in rural areas. With so little public transport, people without cars (or those who have cars but have to watch the petrol costs) are essentially isolated and cut off from a whole variety of services. This particularly affects the young and the elderly - leading to health and social problems.”***

*Respondent*

Rural bus cuts have devastating effects to communities, particularly affecting the ability of young people to find work and increasing isolation of older people. They also have negative effect on the environment, forcing people to use cars for journeys they previously would have used a bus for, increasing emissions and pollution. We must look at ensuring local authorities have effective resources to regulate and provide bus services to ensure residents are supported and the environment is protected.

The reopening of rural railway lines and more effective utilisation of existing ones will also help improve the connectivity and improve the lives of these communities.

### Housing

Lack of affordable housing is not just an issue in urban areas, but is becoming a bigger and bigger problem in our villages and market towns. The lack of investment in homes, as well as a huge increase of second-home ownership, has meant that these areas have seen house prices increase hugely so that in 90% of rural areas they are now nine times the average salary. This means existing residents are finding it harder and harder to buy, meaning businesses and services do not have the labour force or consumer base they require.

***“Houses are purchased as ‘investment properties’ and sometimes left empty. This not only drives the younger generation away but creates so called ghost villages with mostly empty properties through the winter months meaning that local shops/pubs/bus services/schools are unable to continue in those communities”***

*Respondent*

We must make sure that new house building happens across the country, and give local authorities the powers to borrow to invest in council housing to build the housing necessary to ensure strong, stable mixed communities.

## Communities

Though small and medium size businesses are major employers in rural communities, essential rural community institutions such as post offices and pubs have been decimated, with hundreds closing every year in rural areas. These are the result of botched privatisations and rising prices. This has meant that places that were once the heart of villages and market towns up and down the UK are no longer there, degrading community cohesion and increasing the isolation of some of the most vulnerable older people in our country.

***“Local authority budget cuts meaning cuts to services such as libraries, as well as old people’s luncheon clubs, children’s centres, etc. Without these facilities communities are very isolated and many people very lonely.”***

*Respondent*

In order to maintain local high streets and clusters of shops and businesses, we should give local authorities the power to control rent increases to stop local businesses being priced out.

The cuts to adult social care budgets – removing £4.6 billion since 2011 – disproportionately hit rural communities where older people may be more isolated and where the costs of providing services is higher due to the lower density of population.

