

## **Rural Communities Working Group Remit**

The FPC is commissioning a working group to update party policy and produce proposals on how to grow the rural economy, protect local services, and manage sustainable agriculture and the rural environment, reinforcing our overall liberal vision of creating opportunity for everyone regardless of background. The group is particularly directed to identify strong campaigning issues for use in rural communities. The group is also expected to consider and address Liberal Democrat principles on diversity and equalities in developing their proposals. The process should build on past policy, particularly policy papers 113, *Prosperous, Sustainable and Secure* (2013) and 52, *Rural Futures* (2002).

In the course of its work the group should consider:

- The changing nature of rural jobs and the rural economy, including protecting employment and businesses, building of physical and digital infrastructure, and exploring the economic importance of agriculture.
- The social and economic importance of the high street to small towns and villages, the challenges this will face in the coming years, and the importance of tourism and our natural and built heritage.
- How issues experienced by rural communities can be given due prominence in the institutional structures of government.
- The challenges of service provision, public goods, and necessities such as affordable housing, with a view to giving people in rural areas the same level of access to essential services as those in urban and suburban areas
- The special needs of very remote areas.
- The impact of devolution of power on rural areas, particularly with regard to the funding and investment gap between city regions and rural areas.
- The economic and environmental importance and sustainability of farming in the lowlands and uplands, the cost pressures on the dairy sector, and the welfare of farm-reared animals. This should include the development of a Liberal Democrat agenda for the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020 package, and for the negotiations for the establishment of the post-2020 CAP settlement.
- Wider rural environment considerations such as flooding and water management, diversification, forestry, national parks, hedgerows, the marine environment, and fishing.
- The wider issues of food security, food miles, and technological advances in agriculture including genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

The group will take evidence and consult widely from both within and outside the party. This evidence should inform the group's proposals, which will be presented alongside an analysis of costs and an Equalities Impact Assessment. A policy paper of no longer than 10,000 words should be produced for debate at Autumn Conference 2017. Prior to that a consultative session should be held at Spring Conference 2017, and a draft policy paper should be presented to the Federal Policy Committee by June 2017.