

# *Rural Futures*

Policy Paper 52





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# ***Summary***

Liberal Democrats believe that rural areas are assets that should be enhanced and protected through a coherent rural policy, appropriate to the needs of rural communities in the different regions of the UK. Since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales in 1999 many aspects of rural policy have been devolved, subsequently the majority of proposals in this paper will apply to England only. Where this is not the case a note regarding the applicability is made.

This paper proposes policy in the areas of rural services, rural tourism, rural small businesses, agriculture, landscape protection and water conservation and flood defence.

## **Rural Services**

The primary goal of this section is to safeguard and improve rural services. Therefore the following proposals are made:

- Decentralise decision-making in public services to the regional and local levels.
- Direct additional support to small village schools and encourage the clustering of schools to share management tasks and specialist resources.
- Support the development of peripatetic health provision by all appropriate health professionals holding local surgeries and making home visits.
- Promote community based policing, including the introduction of community police offices in village halls.
- Create a rural transport regeneration fund to improve community transport schemes and provide alternatives to private car use.
- Give local authorities greater freedom to invest in new housing.

## **Rural Tourism**

Tourism is now the largest single industry in the countryside. The policies in this section are aimed at exploiting the full economic potential of this industry. We therefore propose to:

- Give the English Tourism Council the full range of statutory powers and functions currently accorded to the other state tourist boards.
- Give the English Tourist Council and the Regional Boards proper marketing ability.
- Encourage Local Tourism Associations to set up and to introduce a levy scheme to fund investment in facilities and environmental protection.

## Rural Small Businesses

Small businesses are often the lifeblood of rural communities, providing employment and essential services. Liberal Democrats are determined to promote the successful development of small businesses in rural areas and therefore propose:

- Making planning decisions at an appropriate level so as to recognise the need to support new businesses.
- Establishing regional investment banks to give better help for small businesses at local level.
- Encouraging the setting up of groups of small businesses to combine on a cooperative basis to bulk purchase services and support. *(Federal)*
- Ensuring the rollout of broadband technology and extending the DTI on line grant scheme, e-SME, to rural businesses to help expand their markets. *(Federal)*

## Agriculture

Liberal Democrats believe that the implementation of integrated policies will ensure sustainable, flourishing farming and land use for strong local communities and a healthy, unpolluted, safe and biodiverse environment for those who live in and visit the countryside. It is therefore proposed to:

- Phase out production and export subsidies and replace them with support for social and public goods through enhanced transfer of funds to the CAP Pillar II. *(Federal)*
- Minimise and simplify red tape and ensure that every farmer has access to a Farm Business Advisor.
- Support local accreditation schemes.
- Improve the income of farmers by bringing a higher share of food retail price back to the primary producer by via the setting up of cooperatives. *(Federal)*

## Protection of the Landscape

To protect the landscape, reduce pollution and improve biodiversity and food quality we propose to:

- Make full use of the mechanisms available to achieve UK-wide adoption of agri-environment measures. *(Federal)*
- Call for a National Pesticide Reduction Strategy.
- Adopt the precautionary principle regarding the application of GM technology.
- Designate new National Parks in the South Downs and the New Forest.

## Water Conservation and Flood Defence

Water affects the rural economy and quality of life in many crucial respects, including water resources, flood and coastal defence, fisheries, navigation, ecosystems, tourism and leisure. Liberal Democrats therefore propose to:

- Introduce a Water Bill to implement fully the EU Water Framework Directive. (*Federal*)
- Encourage all domestic and industrial users to reduce water consumption.
- Promote the adoption of integrated catchment management, treating the water and related land management issues together on a whole river system basis.
- Set up English National Task Forces to create integrated flood management plans.
- Give responsibility for flood and coastal management to Regional Assemblies.

# *Introduction*

1.0.1 Successive governments have neither understood the potential of rural areas nor the nature of sustainability. This double failure has led them to regard rural Britain variously as a drain on resources, a problem to be solved or a potential museum where nostalgia for 'olde England' can be indulged.

1.0.2 Liberal Democrats believe that the future for rural areas is a tremendous asset whose value should be enhanced and protected. We believe they have a valuable contribution to make to sustainable development in the UK. It is also essential to address social, economic and environmental rural policy coherently and according to the expressed needs of the communities in different regions. Stark examples of Conservative and Labour failure to do this can be seen in the short-term top-down measures that attempt to plaster over problems rather than address them. An example is the 'exceptions site' policy for affordable housing which has seen developments all too often banished to the very edge of settlements rather than integrated within them. A further example is the rural bus grant that has sent big, almost empty buses, hurtling down country lanes rather than allowing local authorities the time to develop a network of appropriate small, multi-purpose, community bus services.

1.0.3 Environmental protection has concentrated on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National

Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), ignoring the fact that much of the rest of the countryside is still losing its biodiversity, for example farmland bird decline, and suffering from other problems such as soil erosion and damage to fauna. Government land use policy has failed to recognise that the critical 21<sup>st</sup> century issue is climate change. The contribution rural areas can make to carbon sequestration and energy crop production remains to be recognised in policy changes.

1.0.4 Liberal Democrats will work with nature to find ways of managing land and water that create habitats at the same time as realising other benefits whether energy creation, flood management or food production. The issues around GM Crops are unlikely to be resolved satisfactorily in a short time scale and the precautionary principle will need to be applied in order to minimise risk either to the biodiversity of the environment or to conventional crops.

1.0.5 2001 marked a very low point in the rural economy BSE, a body blow to rural communities was followed by a growing crisis in farmers' incomes caused by the failure of government to address the issue of running a sterling economy whilst farmers farmed in euros. The crisis has been deepened by the failure of successive governments to claim agrimonetary compensation.

1.0.6 The mismanagement of the Foot and Mouth crisis turned the crisis into a rural disaster. The result was that by 2002 even the current government had begun to understand the interlinking of tourism, the rural economy and agriculture. Liberal Democrats believe a Public Inquiry into Foot and Mouth would have enabled lessons to be learned by Whitehall and Westminster as well as agencies and individuals. The disaster has been a cause for re-examination of what our agriculture is for and how we should support it.

1.0.7 Long-held Liberal Democrat beliefs - that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) needs drastic reform; that new entrants must be encouraged and farmers who wish to retire be enabled to do so; that the food chain is too long; and local economies are really important - have been reflected in many of the post Foot and Mouth strategies published by various agencies and in the Report of the Commission on the Future of Food and Farming (Curry Report).

1.0.8 Liberal Democrats believe that vibrant rural economies must be encouraged and nurtured. The importance of SMEs to rural economies needs adequate recognition and policies that recognise this. They are diverse and have enough potential to retain young energy and enthusiasm.

1.0.9 Liberal Democrats believe that the rural SMEs have the right to expect a decent investment by government in training and skill development and IT infrastructure must be a priority to overcome the

difficulties of remoteness. Rural jobs must not equate with seasonal, low-paid inferior work. One symptom of this problem is that the economic future is seen to be based in urban areas and the fabric of rural communities is becoming threadbare.

1.0.10 Rural areas may be defined by their small settlement size, their sparsity of population and the pattern of their economy. Regional differences are such that Liberal Democrats believe many issues are best decided at a regional or sub-regional level and a uniform national rural policy would be unhelpful. Major differences between the demand for housing in the south and west and the depopulation of the remote north are obvious. The more subtle cultural differences (such as those that make carnivals an essential part of Somerset town life in the autumn and sheep fairs in the Yorkshire Dales) are important to recognise too.

1.0.11 Liberal Democrats believe that the governance of rural areas has been forced to remain static and inappropriate. Regional government could play an important part in re-invigorating local government if central government powers were devolved to it and, in turn, it devolves further powers to tiers of local government.

1.0.12 This paper complements our urban policy because Liberal Democrats recognise that healthy cities are as essential as thriving rural areas and only by achieving complementary and linked policies

will the UK develop a high quality of life that is sustainable for all.

# Rural Services

## 2.0 Summary

2.0.1 The guarantee of equitable access to high-quality local services is a fundamental part of maintaining quality of life for people living in rural areas. However, both public and private services in many rural areas are coming under increasing pressure, and many communities have experienced the disappearance of key services such as schools, post offices and shops. There are four challenges to be faced in safeguarding and improving the future of rural services. The first is to guarantee that rural residents have equal access to quality public services as those living in towns and cities. The second is to support locally based services, which often form a core part of community life. The third is to empower communities to take greater control of their own futures and support the provision of vital services. Finally, we must ensure that services are available to all members of rural communities, and that the needs and interests of all groups are addressed and respected in a revitalised countryside.

## 2.1 Delivering Public Services in Rural Areas

2.1.1 Access to high quality public services should be an entitlement of all citizens, including those living in remote rural areas. However, the equitable delivery of these services is

increasingly threatened by commercial pressures and constraints on public spending, especially where additional costs are created by remoteness and sparse population densities. We will seek to overcome these disadvantages through improved needs-based allocation of central funding, peripatetic provision, the use of information technologies and the decentralisation of decision-making. We will aim to:

- Reassess the means by which funding is allocated to rural areas for public services such as health, policing and education, to ensure that account is taken of extra costs in provision and of the special needs of a more sparsely spread population.
- Seek to decentralise decision-making in public services from Westminster to the regional and local levels where a greater sensitivity to rural need can be exercised.
- Instruct regulatory bodies for utility industries to protect the interests of rural consumers by prohibiting significant differences in pricing regimes or service levels based on geographical location.
- Maintain the Universal Service Agreement for the Royal Mail with nationally uniform stamp prices and door-to-door postal delivery. (*Federal*)

## 2.2 Education

2.2.1 We will take action to support rural schools and increase opportunities for education and training, including aiming to:

- Direct financial support to small village primary and secondary schools and encourage the clustering of schools to share management tasks and specialist resources.
- Support the development of dedicated nursery facilities in rural communities, relieving pressure on infant classes.
- Promote the provision of adequate home-to-school transport by guaranteeing that the planning and funding of this service remains a key role of Local Education Authorities and promoting the multiple use of locally-owned vehicle pools which can meet rigorous safety and environmental standards.
- Promote the use of shared teaching arrangements and IT and videoconferencing technologies to enable rural secondary schools to broaden curriculum provision and help small rural sixth forms to adapt to the demands of a wider post-16 curriculum.
- Enable more pupils in rural areas to stay on in post-16 education by publicly funding all tuition for 16-24 year olds working towards Level 3 qualifications. We would also enable them to access an income-contingent loan for

maintenance and expenses which will help to offset transport costs involved in travelling to further education colleges.

- Support schemes to establish new centres for higher education in rural regions, promote the franchising of Higher Education modules to rural Further Education colleges and encourage the expansion of distance learning and internet-based schemes.
- Review the funding formulae for continuing education provision to reduce dependence on course completions and reward diversity and geographical spread.
- Encourage training programmes in skills linked to new agricultural crops (e.g. fuel crops) and farming practices, and new technologies (e.g. servicing community IT schemes), through regionally based initiatives.

## 2.3 Health

2.3.1 As a commitment to the entitlement of rural citizens to access good quality health services, and to promote healthy living within rural communities, we will aim to:

- Support the development of peripatetic health provision by GPs, district nurses, dentists, pharmacists, chiropodists, physiotherapists and other health professionals holding local surgeries, making home

- visits and using community hospitals and outreach clinics.
- Increase the supply of health professionals.
  - Allow public sectors employers to pay the rate they need to attract people to work in their areas. This would be funded through local taxation.
  - Promote the use of IT and video-link technologies both to enable smaller rural hospitals to access live the advice and expertise of specialists in larger hospitals, and to allow patients to use community IT points (with appropriate privacy) to access health databases and consult medical specialists via videophone.
  - Provide adequate and appropriate patient transport.
  - Introduce a right to assistance with travel and overnight accommodation for patients and their families who have to travel long distances for specialist treatment in urban centres.
  - Support measures to increase access to evidence-based, cost effective alternative health practitioners in rural areas.
  - Support community-based participative health promotion exercises aimed at

encouraging peer-group health education.

- Extend drugs and alcohol abuse prevention programmes to rural areas.
- Support further research on stress-related illness in rural areas and ensure that appropriate counselling is available.
- Pilot healthy lifestyles through teaching in schools connecting nutrition and healthy eating with the standards and methods of food production.

### **Case Study:**

#### **Participative Health Promotion Wales**

The Sustainable Healthcare Action Research Programme (SHARP) funded by the National Assembly for Wales is aimed at developing locally based, participative health promotion. One project in the programme is working with young people in rural Powys to raise awareness of a range of health issues and encourage older teenagers to become involved in the health education of younger teenagers.

## **Case Study:**

### **Healthy Living Centres**

Community organisations across the county have shown interest in the concept of Healthy Living Centres (HLC). Yeovil have been successful in attracting funds from the New Opportunities Fund, whilst Chard, Wincanton, Keyford & Frome are awaiting to hear the outcome of their applications.

Similar concepts underpin each of the HLC projects although detailed services are tailored to meet the needs of each local community involved. All of the developments involve partnership working between community groups, voluntary organisations, district and county councils and local health service providers. They aim to offer a 'one-stop shop' approach, overcoming rural isolation as individuals access a wide range of services and information on a single visit to their local town.

The HLC applications for the most rural areas also involve outreach services for local villages.

Services offered range from community cafes, green gyms promoting physical activity, information on welfare rights, promotion of community education and supporting employment for people with mental health problems.

## **2.4 Policing and Legal Services**

2.4.1 To combat crime and the fear of crime in rural areas, and to ensure that rural citizens have access to an equitable justice system, we will aim to:

- Promote community-based policing including the identification of named officers for each community and the inclusion of community police offices in village halls.
- Supplement regular police officer numbers by recruiting retained officers to carry out day-to-day police duties, and create a category of retained local police officers to undertake community policing jobs.
- Reform existing Crime Reduction Partnerships into locally democratically accountable Crime Reduction Boards, with stronger powers over the local Crime Reduction Strategy – this will give local people a greater say over police priorities, and mitigate the tendency to focus police resources towards urban centres.
- Support the setting-up of locally funded neighbourhood warden schemes in rural communities. The warden would be paid an attendance allowance and be accountable to the local council.

- Install secure cycle storage in village centres and railway stations, to encourage sustainable transport and cut crime.
- Support farm, horse and neighbourhood watch schemes, particularly to combat the growing problem of farm animal poaching.
- Give Regional Governments the role of encouraging greater co-ordination between police forces to tackle the mobility of criminals between urban and rural areas.
- Oppose any further closures of Magistrates, County and Civil Courts as these can pose huge access problems for many people.
- Instigate a review of the geographical distribution of magistrates' courts, including consideration of options for increasing accessibility, such as the use of video-links and of temporary courtrooms, with appropriate facilities for defendants, victims, witnesses and police, in small towns and villages without permanent facilities.

and provide alternatives to private car use.

- Support community transport initiatives, including dial-a-ride, taxi buses, post buses and school buses, by widening eligibility for the existing fuel duty rebate tied into the emission standards of the vehicle. This will be funded in part by for the abolition of fuel duty rebate for commercial tour buses.
- Boost usage of public transport in rural areas by extending free off-peak local travel on buses (including across county and unitary boundaries) to pensioners and people with disabilities, and half price travel at all times on local buses for under 19s in full-time education. For communities with less than two bus services per day, support will be given to extending the validity of concessionary passes to community transport and taxi services.
- Integrate public transport with co-ordinated timetables and secure, cheap parking, including cycle parks, at rail and coach stations.
- Create Quiet Lanes which will reduce vehicle speeds and make communities safer by giving greater priority to pedestrians and cyclists.
- Invest in the development of infrastructure for cycling, including cycle paths and parks; encourage wider community use of alternatives to road travel, including

## 2.5 Public Transport

2.5.1 Lack of accessibility is one of the most severe problems faced by many rural people. To help rural residents travel to access services and employment opportunities, we will aim to:

- Create a rural transport regeneration fund to improve community transport schemes

privately-owned light railways and waterways; and promote the greater use of cycling in rural areas by introducing a presumption in favour of cycling provision in local planning.

rural community life, but they are rapidly disappearing from many villages. We believe that action to protect and support these facilities is best undertaken by rural communities themselves. To encourage the further development of community self-help we will aim to:

### **Case Study:**

#### **Cornwall Concessionary Fares Scheme**

The Cornwall concessionary fares scheme is operated by a partnership of all the District Councils and the County Council Passenger Transport Unit. The scheme includes pensioners, disabled people and for some categories of disablement, an accompanying person.

The (free) passes entitle eligible passengers to half-price travel on any bus service in Cornwall, and also on through bus services and national coaches to Plymouth (Devon), and from North Cornwall to Exeter (Devon). This gives essential access to a major urban centre. The distances are long; from Penzance to Plymouth is 80 miles; Exeter is some 35 miles from the Cornwall/Devon boundary.

- Promote the establishment of Community Development Trusts to enable communities to assume ownership of basic services such as shops, pubs and petrol stations. These would be Non-Profit Distributing Organisations, similar to the Public Benefit Companies advocated in policy paper 53 *Quality, Innovation, Choice*.
- Make more funds available for the regeneration of deprived rural areas through a streamlined Single Regeneration Grant funding mechanism.
- Provide grants through regional and local agencies to support the creation of 'community hubs' which can perform a range of functions, such as grocery store, post office and library, from a single facility. Village pubs are often well placed to provide such a focal point.
- Extend business rate relief to any small-scale commercial enterprise which is the only commercial activity in a village and hamlet and which is prepared to host a community access point to IT facilities and government information.

## **2.6 Helping Rural Communities to Help Themselves**

2.6.1 Basic services such as shops and pubs are traditionally a focus of

- Support the establishment of community banks, credit unions and LETS schemes, and introduce a micro-enterprise loan fund, modelled on the highly successful Fundusz Mikro in Poland, as described in policy paper 45 *Local Economies, Local Choice*.
- Support initiatives to encourage consumers to buy local products, including local 'branding' schemes.

helped to revitalise many communities. However, the competitive nature of these programmes often benefits communities with articulate, affluent, middle class residents. To help communities which have been less successful in bidding for funds, we will:

- Monitor the distribution of community regeneration funds and appoint animateurs to work with communities which have been consistently unsuccessful in accessing funding.
- Introduce training schemes for 'community leaders' covering aspects of team building, strategic planning, business development, budgeting, application writing, and communication and presentation skills, modelled on programmes pioneered in the USA and Australia.
- Encourage volunteering by setting-up a network of mutual volunteering exchanges or time banks through which people could exchange time spent volunteering with help for themselves, or discounts on public transport and sports facilities.

### **Case Study:**

#### **Community Development Trusts Kielder, Northumberland**

In Kielder the threat posed to local services by the decline of the staple industry of forestry was compounded by the long distances villagers had to travel to the nearest towns. In response villages formed a Community Development Trust which took over the running of the village shop and petrol station and has converted part of the village school into hostel accommodation and a small library.

2.6.2 Funding from the EU, the Lottery and other sources has already

## **Case Study:**

### **Training for Community Leaders Queensland, Australia.**

The 'Building Rural Leaders' programme is aimed at developing the leadership skills of rural citizens in Queensland. Participants follow six modules over a nine month period, covering issues of rural change, leadership styles, communication skills, personal growth, team building, strategic planning, creative thinking, business development, and media and presentation skills. Financial assistance is available for participants from the Queensland Provincial Government.

## **2.7 Serving the Whole Rural Community**

2.7.1 Rural communities are now made up of very diverse mixtures of people, all of whom should have the same entitlement to good quality services. The decline of local services has hit certain groups particularly hard, worsening situations of poverty and deprivation, whilst other groups have needs for specific service provision. To ensure that rural services are open to all, and to help particularly vulnerable or marginalized groups participate fully in rural communities, we will aim to:

- Introduce a new fund specifically to support

initiatives to promote community integration.

- Develop targeted initiatives to offset isolation and promote mental well-being among groups including new parents, the recently bereaved and people who have ceased driving. Initiatives might include special transport arrangements and more voluntary help schemes.
- Provide support for the development of good quality childcare in rural areas to enable parents to participate more fully in the labour market and in community life.
- Campaign for local authorities to draw up 'rural youth strategies' in consultation in with youth councils, schools and youth groups, including the identification of priorities for developing new facilities for young people in rural communities.
- Commission research to study the incidence of racial and homophobic crime and harassment in rural areas and to propose appropriate action.

## **2.8 Poverty and Deprivation**

2.8.1 Poverty and deprivation may be less visible in rural areas than in cities, but for the people affected the experience can be equally severe. To attack rural poverty and deprivation we will aim to:

- Use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map deprived areas.
- Develop better indicators of rural deprivation, which can be used at a local level to help areas access government support and to provide a basis for the planning of additional support to individuals and families in need.
- Address the problem of low-income rural economies by seeking to increase the disposable income of less affluent rural households through changes to the tax system, including removing the lowest paid from taxation, easing access to all available state benefits (for example, by providing advice on benefit entitlements through community information points), and encouraging the establishment and use of credit unions.
- Encourage the provision of more employment opportunities for young people in rural communities through the new entrants to farming scheme and sensitive development of opportunities in IT and small-scale craft production, linked to training through local colleges or by distance learning.
- Take action to address fuel poverty based on initiatives that improve home insulation and promote sustainable energy use.

## 2.9 Housing

2.9.1 Finding affordable housing in many rural areas has become an extreme problem of overcoming limited availability, high property prices and poor quality stock. We recognise the extreme lack of affordable social housing in rural areas, to address the rural housing problem we will aim to:

- Give local authorities freedom to invest in new social housing.
- Strengthen PPG 3 in order to speed up the identification of exception sites and ensure they are developed to meet need identified by local communities in their village and town appraisals.
- Equalise VAT on new house building and renovation work to reduce the cost of converting and refurbishing disused rural dwellings thereby encouraging the provision of more housing stock.
- Allow local authorities the discretion to re-classify tied or disused agricultural buildings as housing for 'local use' to increase options available to local people.
- Promote and extend 'Homebuy' schemes to help key workers including teachers and nurses, and other locally-determined categories, to purchase housing in rural areas with high property prices.
- Give local authorities the power to end the 50% council

tax rebate on second homes and use the proceeds locally to support improvements in social housing stock. Local authorities will be empowered to use these proceeds to buy back 'second homes' as they become available in order to expand social housing provision.

- Campaign for the owners of second homes to rent out their properties rather than leaving them standing empty.
- Campaign to encourage public and private landlords to bring empty houses back into use.
- Campaign for local authorities to outline specific proposals for combating rural homelessness as part of statutory local homelessness strategies, including the provision of appropriate shelter and hostel accommodation.
- Reform planning guidance to promote the development of environmentally low impact housing and efficient use of local multiple storey buildings.
- Regionalise Housing Corporations.

## **Case Study:**

### **The Affordability Share – South Shropshire District Council**

As part of its strategy to provide affordable housing South Shropshire District Council will allow developments to take place as 'exceptions' to the general policy of no development outside seven main towns and villages in the District. The exceptions policies can be used where the proposals can be demonstrated to meet the needs of local people and are conditioned to remain affordable on first and all subsequent 'disposals.'

To ensure that this condition is met the Council has introduced the affordability share provision. This means that the owners of the property will transfer a 1% share of the equity of the property to the Council or a body nominated by the Council. This will mean that the Council's consent (or that of its nominee) will be required before a property is disposed of, or transferred, by the owners. The consent will not be withheld as long as the terms of the original agreement relating to local housing need are being complied with.

### **Case Study:**

#### **Private Sector Leasing Scheme - Kerrier District Council**

The Council leases houses from private landlords, using these properties to house homeless families. The scheme benefits all three parties.

Homeless families are not housed in bed and breakfast accommodation, with its lack of privacy, shared facilities and high cost.

Landlords have a guaranteed income for 12 months, and vacant possession at the end of that time, because the Council is sub-letting the property under license.

The Council pays the market rent, which is less than the bed and breakfast cost, and can claim 95% subsidy on Housing Benefit. The initial target of 20 homes in 12 months has been exceeded and 50 families have been housed. Three neighbouring councils have adopted the scheme.

### **Case Study:**

#### **Support for Young People in Finland**

The Finnish Government introduced a policy to help young people buy their first home. The policy has 3 elements:

**The ASP scheme** is a savings and loan scheme which anyone between the ages of 18 and 30, not owning their own home, can enter. There is a minimum saving of 15% of the acquisition price of the property and a minimum saving period of 2 years. The interest paid is tax free. The loan is interest subsidised by the state during the first 6 years and benefits from mortgage interest deduction.

**Right of occupancy housing** is a housing tenure form falling between owner occupancy and renting. Residents buy into the scheme by paying a specified percentage of the value of their home as well as a monthly charge based on the cost recovery principle.

**Social right-to-buy** is a scheme whereby a household pays a share of the accepted building costs and price of the plot to the developer and acquires thereby the right to buy the whole dwelling later. The household live as tenants in the property until they choose whether to purchase the property for a prefixed price. The property can only be purchased after the household have been resident for 5 years, the option remains until they have been in the property for 12 years.

## 2.10 Governing Rural Communities

2.10.1 Stronger town and parish councils could play a key role in helping to support and maintain high quality services in rural communities. However, the potential of councils is currently limited by restricted powers and a shortage of candidates willing to stand for election to councils. To help empower town and parish councils, and increase participation, we will aim to:

- Support measures to transfer greater powers to Town and Parish Councils and to increase the number of councils eligible to benefit from these measures.
- Increase the threshold on section 137 fundraising which permit Parish Councils to raise monies for the benefit of their communities, and give Parish Councils a power of general competence.
- Abolish the divisive and misleading classification of parishes as ‘vibrant’, ‘active’ and ‘sleeping’.
- Campaign for District and Unitary Councils to cover all costs related to the administration of elections to Parish and Town Councils in their areas, except for Parish and Town Councils with an annual budgeted income of more than £500,000
- Encourage Parish and Town Councils to periodically consult with their local population about the

appropriateness of the time and place of council meetings.

- Empower Parish and Town Councils to reimburse members of expenses for loss of earnings, childcare fees or relief care for dependent adults, incurred by attendance at council meetings.
- Lower to 16 the statutory minimum age for members of local councils and for qualification to vote in local government elections.

2.10.2 Revitalised parish councils will give a voice to rural communities whose interests have too often gone unheard. This is a problem at every level of government. To help increase the effectiveness of the rural voice, we will:

- Review and rationalise the number of government agencies and partnerships involved in rural governance, wherever possible enhancing the role of elected local councils.
- Introduce training for Parish Councillors and other community representatives in partnerships to enable them to more effectively represent community interests.
- Campaign for elected regional assemblies in England, as they are created, to designate a specified ‘rural minister’ and give them a role in the strategic management of regional divisions of the Countryside Agency.
- Investigate initiatives to make voting easier for citizens in

isolated rural households  
including electronic voting,  
alternative ways of verifying  
postal votes, and provision for  
early voting.

# Rural Businesses

## 3.0 Summary

Four themes emerge across all sectors of the rural economy, which together can revitalize rural England:

- **Decentralising power** to give more **local** funding and decision-making. This includes establishment of regional government, regional development banks, and greater local planning power. In tourism it means devolved and better-funded English and Regional Tourist Boards, plus the setting up of Local Tourism associations.
- **Providing strong local infrastructure**, be it supporting rolling out of Broadband technology, development of alternative transport modes, provision of training and support for business or maintaining good rural services.
- **Encouraging cooperatives** to harness the power of the fragmented nature of rural business. In farming, cooperatives, to get a greater share of the final retail-selling price, partnerships to enable Broadband technology rollout, and small businesses cooperation for better purchasing and sharing support services.
- **Sustainable rural development**, be it making farmers more responsible for landscape conservation, or ensuring that the growth of tourism does not destroy the very landscapes that it depends on.

## 3.1 The Rural Economy

3.1.1 For many people the word 'rural' is synonymous with farming. The reality is that agriculture is now a much smaller component of the rural economy than it used to be. Tourism is now the biggest single industry, with earnings for the rural economy seven times that of agriculture. A range of other industries, generally small businesses, together makes up over half of rural income and employment.

3.1.2 The depopulation, which plagues rural France, is not a problem in most parts of England, although it continues in some areas and in others there is a drift from the rural areas into the market town. In rural areas as a whole population growth runs at twice the national average. But there are sharp divisions. 'Greying' is taking place, as young people leave and retirees move in. Wealthy commuters contrast with the low wages that characterise both agriculture and tourism.

3.1.3 Foot and mouth devastated the rural economy in 2001, particularly in the inextricably linked farming and tourism, with many businesses now struggling to survive.

## 3.2 The Future of Agriculture

3.2.1 Subsidies are not just paid to British farmers but to virtually all countries in the EU and the world with which we compete. For most products our subsidy levels are actually below EU averages.

3.2.2 Removal of production subsidies through radical reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is likely to be a long and slow process. Strategically there are two major reasons for keeping the UK farming industry: to secure a basic food supply in the event of international disaster, and to maintain the social infrastructure and landscape of the countryside.

3.2.3 In the short term, because of the current problems of low returns much of agriculture, including efficient businesses, will require additional help now to survive.

3.2.4 The key issue is how to improve the income of farmers, given that the producer has little control over the retail price. Currently farmers get around 10% of the final retail price of food. A small increase in this percentage, or extra subsidy, has a dramatic effect on profitability.

## 3.3 Recommended Policy

3.3.1 Recognise that as a result of Foot and Mouth farmers require additional financial help to survive in the short term. Consider innovative ways of raising extra cash to support farming in the short term, such as a one off levy on supermarket profits to be recycled back to the farmers' income. (*Federal*)

3.3.2 Encourage farmers in landscape improvement and conservation schemes, by diverting some subsidy (modulation). Given the short term financial problems of farming, ensure this is genuine extra money to support the transition, rather than robbing Peter to pay Paul. We would also provide support for transition to organic production, which is currently undersupplied from the UK. (*Federal*)

3.3.3 Many older farmers and tenant farmers with small farms have no alternative at present to eking out a poor existence, trapped on their holdings for want of a graceful exit. We should provide retirement funds to help them leave the land. This could save subsidy in the longer term. We would link this to a young entrants scheme to encourage innovative energetic individuals and families into the business.

3.3.4 For the longer term, support moves to reform the CAP, particularly the removal of production subsidies. Any move to freer trade should be a genuine level playing field and not open the door to, in

particular, cheap American imports.  
(Federal)

3.3.5 The current strength of the pound makes food imports cheaper and reduces the value of EU support payments. Early entry to the Euro at a more competitive rate would make UK farmers more competitive. In the meantime we need to ensure that all compensatory amounts under the current EU rules are claimed. We should also investigate a mechanism for tying our support payments to the Euro as a temporary measure.

3.3.6 Bring a higher share of food retail price back to the primary producer via the setting up of cooperatives.

### **Case Study:**

#### **Cooperatives**

In Wales a cooperative grouping was formed to supply quality lamb to a nominated abattoir for Waitrose. After over 3 years operation this has brought a bonus over open –market price of up to 25p per kilo.

Welsh Meat Co. has recently formed with a grant from the Welsh Development Agency, at the instigation of the National Assembly for Wales has been matched by the farmer/shareholders. The aim is to add value to the meat through skilled butchering and processing carried out in their own specially built plant.

3.3.7 Change the competition laws to allow larger scale co-operatives in order to gain a better price for primary producers. (The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) outlawed the successful Milk Marque scheme for dairy farmers).

### **Case Study:**

#### **Milk Marketing Boards**

The Milk Marketing Boards were set up in the 1930s to improve the income of milk producers by giving them more market power. On dissolution of these boards, Milk Marque was set up, handling half the milk of the former England and Wales boards. Its market share was above 40% and constant complaining from the Dairy Industry Federation to the regulators led to an OFT enquiry in 1998/9 which led to Milk Marque being broken up into three regional co-ops.

Producers and the NFU argued that the local domestic market was not the right one against which to judge the monopoly scale, as all milk marketing organisations now operate on a world map, and most EU milk co-ops were at a higher figure, *some as* high as 80 or 90% of their domestic markets. Indeed, the most commercial of these co-ops are now forming international relationships, some in this country. Milk Marque has become a test case of whether the British Government will indeed allow producers to combine together at a sufficient scale to be effective in the face of supermarkets and the global environment.

3.3.8 Renegotiate, strengthen and enforce a 'code of practice' between supermarkets and their suppliers, with suitable sanctions, to ensure fair-trading.

3.3.9 Encourage the setting up of more Farmers Markets, with 'seed corn' loans where appropriate, where selling direct gives them a bigger proportion of the retail price.

3.3.10 Encourage via ICT training direct selling of local produce over the Internet.

3.3.11 Through more flexible planning rules, giving quicker local decision making, and through grant-aided schemes, encourage further diversification opportunities, particularly for smaller businesses.

## **3.4 Exploiting the Full Economic Potential of Tourism**

3.4.1 Tourism is now the largest single industry in the countryside. In rural areas domestic tourism far exceeds the contribution of overseas visitors. For example, in Cumbria domestic visitors spend 15 times as much as those from abroad. Rural tourism is worth nearly £14 billion a year, including £9 billion from day visits by UK residents and £4 billion from trips of one night or more. (*State of the Countryside Report 2002*)

3.4.2 Activity tourism including cycling, walking and climbing, is steadily increasing. It is estimated that walkers make up a quarter of rural tourism.

3.4.3 Leisure activities also include 'Cultural Tourism'- local festivals and associated arts and craft, theatre and local food produce have contributed substantially to tourism growth in rural areas.

### **Case Study:**

#### **Hay-on-Wye**

Hay-on -Wye was almost untouched by tourism until its emergence in the early 80s as the second hand and specialist book centre of the UK. It now boasts dozens of bookshops and a highly acclaimed annual literature festival.

3.4.4 Environmentally, alternatives to car transport both to and within rural areas are required to combat increasing pollution and congestion, particularly at peak times.

3.4.5 Although tourism is a growing industry, it is characterised by a large number of small, low margin businesses, and is therefore very fragmented in terms of the marketing muscle it can deliver. It is faced with strong competition from overseas holidays which offer better value, particularly for the main longer holidays, (which has led to a decline in many seaside resorts) but increasingly also for short breaks. Government policy on supporting tourism has been London-centric, focussed on international visitors to the detriment of domestic rural tourism.

## 3.5 Heritage and Culture in Rural Areas

3.5.1 The UK has a remarkably rich heritage of historic castles, country houses, cathedrals, churches and excavated and reconstructed archaeological sites from prehistory through to the modern times. Not only do these offer a major attraction to millions of overseas and British tourists each year but they also often provide an educational resource to local communities and make a significant contribution to local employment. Liberal Democrats welcome the achievements of national organizations such as English Heritage and the National Trust as well as many hundreds of local authority and private conservation schemes that have invested in and opened up access to local buildings and sites. But there are still many worthy projects seeking funding support and Liberal Democrats are particularly keen to see even greater priority given by the Heritage Fund and other funding agencies to projects in rural areas where dependency on tourism and the need for new employment opportunities are so essential.

3.5.2 We refer elsewhere (see the Hay-on-Wye case study) to the significance of the emergence of arts festivals in rural areas to the local economy. Of the more than one hundred major arts festivals which take place annually in the UK, a very high percentage are located in County and market towns in rural areas and provide a once a year opportunity for

both the local community and visitors to share in celebrating the best of our cultural traditions across the arts. From the longest established Three Choirs music festival through to Brecon Jazz and the Glastonbury Festival, communities which, for most of the year, are often deprived of mainstream high quality arts performance are able to experience the best which is on offer. Liberal Democrats especially welcome the multicultural element of many of these festivals which brings experiences to the lives of ordinary people which are not readily available to them in their day to day lives.

3.5.3 However, many rural communities are seriously disadvantaged when it comes to arts provision on a year round basis. The Millennium Fund made a major contribution to the building of new, and refurbishment of many existing, village halls, and the Arts Lottery Fund has continued to provide both capital and revenue support for local arts activity. However, there has been a significant decline in the availability of grant aid for national and regional touring theatre, music and dance. While new arts centres such as the Courtyard in Hereford have provided a well-balanced mix of professional and amateur arts activity, there are many parts of the country which are seriously deprived of such facilities. Even where such facilities exist, their accessibility is all too often limited as a result of poor public transport provision. The need for greater investment in rural arts provision and for joined up thinking in terms of public transport and the wider community use of schools, village

halls, and other public buildings at planning and development stage is essential. Liberal Democrats urge the recently re-organised Arts Council of England, in close co-operation with the relevant local authorities, to carry out an urgent audit of the needs of rural areas. As is argued generally in this paper, Liberal Democrats also believe that the establishment of Regional Government for England is a necessary step towards identifying and exploiting regional cultural differences and to enhancing the overall cultural facilities in each region. Liberal Democrats regard the recent centralization of the Arts Council and the reduction in the powers of the Regional Arts Boards as a backward step which is likely to work against the democratic process and the will of local communities.

### **3.6 Recommended Policy**

3.6.1 To ensure focus on domestic tourism, (75% of rural tourism), the English Tourism Council, should be given the full range of statutory powers and functions currently accorded to the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish Tourist Boards. It should receive a significant marketing budget, designed in particular at generating off peak business, and should coordinate the marketing and infrastructure work of the Regional Development Agencies and Regional Tourist Boards, to maximize the effectiveness of spending.

#### **Case Study:**

#### **Cumbria Tourist Board**

Already government funding to support marketing activity post Foot and Mouth is showing considerable success. Marketing evaluation carried out by the Cumbria Tourist Board shows that in 2001 a £1 million marketing campaign generated £70 million of expenditure in Cumbria.

3.6.2 Encourage Local Tourism Associations to set up. Interested businesses would take a vote on a levy scheme for funding, the result being mandatory on those in the associations. These bodies would have a remit allowing promotion, investment in facilities, and in environmental protection.

#### **Case Study:**

#### **Florida**

The state of Florida has a strong State Tourism Association funded by a small sales tax on accommodation bills. This has funded promotional campaigns and the building of cultural facilities.

3.6.3 To help maintain and enhance the quality of the local environment, aim to support the following measures:

- Schemes for alternative modes of transport within rural areas e.g. integrated pick up/ drop off services from hotels to rail stations and airports.
- Setting up of new, and expansion of existing cycling routes.
- Seasonal car parking charges to encourage spreading the peak and growing off-season visits. Experiments on this could be carried out in National Parks.
- Consumer funded schemes to help the local rural environment via a small levy added to accommodation bills.

### **Case Study:**

#### **Exmoor Visitor Payback Scheme**

Popular areas of Exmoor were suffering from erosion of the paths. Exmoor National Park Authority and the National Trust, together with the businesses running visitor attractions and hotels, formed the Exmoor Paths Partnership. The businesses raised a levy from visitors to pay for work on the paths. This enabled the Partnership to raise further funds, notably from Europe, as they had matching private funding. The result was a programme of over £350,000, which also pioneered a sustainable programme whereby materials used for path repair and improvement were sourced from the immediate area. The programme resulted in permanent employment of three people and still continues.

3.6.4 ICT funding to ensure that Tourist Information Centres are all online thus making it easier to find and book accommodation (The Government have just provided £3.6 million to the English Tourism Council to make this happen).

### **3.7 Helping Small Businesses**

3.7.1 The non-tourism/agriculture businesses contribute over half of rural income, and are also generally of small size. Small businesses are therefore the lifeblood of our local communities providing employment, and essential services to local residents. Tragically as a result of a host of problems from post office closures to Foot and Mouth many businesses have been brought to their knees, driving the heart out of local towns and villages.

3.7.2 There is a clear relationship between the provision of local services and successful business development. The provision of an effective transport system, good quality housing, education and cultural and sports facilities are essential if new business is to be attracted to rural areas, and to recruit and retain a loyal workforce. The absence of such facilities contributes to a drift away from the countryside, especially for the young, seeking a fuller life elsewhere.

3.7.3 Central government is far too remote to understand the dynamics of the contrasting regions of England. All too often resources are being squandered and misused by the under resourced and generally

unaccountable Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) .

### **Case Study:**

#### **The Somerset Village Shop Development Scheme**

Grants of between £1,500-£5,000 have been awarded to village shops selling a full range of groceries in a rural settlement of less than 3,000 people, where they are the *sole existing shop*. The applicants had to match the funds but the grant could be spent on any capital project which improved the commercial viability of the shop. Items purchased have included scales, shelving, a meat slicer and a small display freezer.

There was also a grant scheme for shops which are not the sole shop in the village. Thirty projects have successfully been completed under this scheme, with a contribution of approximately £190,000 by the County Council over the last 3 years. 'Sole existing' shops have also been able to apply for this, doubling the potential of their bids.

### **3.8 Recommended Policy**

3.8.1 Establish an elected system of regional government, and give more powers to local government, so that small businesses and the community can hold government to account at a

more local level and regional variations can be taken into account.

3.8.2 Establish regional investment banks to give better help for small business at local level. Campaign for existing banks to introduce new codes of practise to be scrutinised by competition authorities.

3.8.3 Encourage local authorities to use their powers to give business rate relief and grant additional powers to allow them to play a key role in sustaining, developing and supporting rural businesses, particularly in bidding for a larger share of EU capital.

3.8.4 Encourage the setting up of groups of small businesses to combine on a cooperative basis to bulk purchase electricity, gas and other essential services at lower prices, and to share professional legal, accountancy, marketing and training support.

### **3.9 Exploiting Information and Communication Technology in the Rural Economy**

3.9.1 Research carried out for IBM calls on the government to treat access to technology as just as important as access to transport or healthcare. The research by the think tank, Local Futures Group, says that the Internet revolution has created a new underclass of people in rural areas who are being excluded from the brave new world of teleworking, virtual shopping, and online public

services by lack of access to technology.

3.9.2 If rural businesses are to compete on a level playing field with their urban counterparts, they need broadband technology allowing faster access to more complex information. Currently BT offers this to 60% of households and businesses, mainly in major urban areas. Broadband can also be accessed by cable, wireless and satellite channels as well as fixed wire from the local exchange. It can therefore be argued that a fair market already exists. However the providers argue, that due to high cost of investment, roll out requires demand to be proved first.

3.9.3 The entrepreneurial small business culture of the countryside needs to be encouraged to embrace e-commerce as a powerful new channel to their marketplace. The need now is to offer online electronic ordering and booking across the range of sectors.

3.9.4 There are an estimated 1.5 million teleworkers in the UK but the lowest proportions appear to be in rural areas. The image of someone using new technology from their remote rural cottage remains largely a myth. ICT can enable the provision of distance training and business support. There maybe a role for the post office or any one-stop trading post as an Internet access point to a range of services.

### **3.10 Recommended Policy**

3.10.1 Promote the rollout of broadband technology, intervention is

justified by the failure of the market on the grounds of the potential for geographical exclusion.

#### **Case Study:**

##### **Cornwall**

In Cornwall, a £12.5 million pilot scheme involving BT, the European Regional Development Fund, and Business Link was launched in February 2002. The aim is to get 3000 businesses to link up to broadband.

3.10.2 There are number of ways of intervening to ensure that rural areas get this technology. The creation of 'Broadband Brokerage' through the setting up of Local Partnerships, fronted by the Local Authority, using their purchasing power, owning the community network is particularly recommended.

#### **Case Study:**

##### **East of England**

The East of England Development agency has plans to maximize demand for broadband at least cost by setting up private / public partnerships, and acting as 'brokers' to reduce access cost and create local awareness of the benefits of information technology.

3.10.3 Support the Countryside Agency's call for all market towns to

have broadband facilities by 2003, thus further enhancing the market town's role.

3.10.4 Agencies such as Business Link should appoint a rural e-commerce advisor to raise awareness of the potential of electronic trading

to rural businesses. Additionally the DTI UK on line grant scheme, called e-SME, should be extended and targeted more at rural businesses to help expand their markets. Such a scheme could also help rural post offices be set up as Internet access points.

# ***Agriculture, Land Use and the Rural Environment***

4.0 The Liberal Democrats are developing integrated policies to ensure truly sustainable and flourishing farming and land use for strong local communities, and a healthy, unpolluted, safe and biodiverse environment for those who live in and visit the countryside.

## **4.1 CAP Reform**

4.1.1 Liberal Democrats have long called for radical, structural reform of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), to protect rural standards of living without the industrialisation of agriculture, which has produced environmental destruction, economic inefficiency and the overproduction of poor-quality food.

4.1.2 In particular, Liberal Democrats call for a phasing out of production and export subsidies and their replacement with support for social and public goods such as the environment, landscape, wildlife and water supplies, and investment in rural regeneration and new enterprises through enhanced transfer of funds to the CAP Pillar II. This transfer will be with no overall reduction in the level of total public subsidy paid to farms and rural households.

4.1.3 At the same time, we will not allow the future of the countryside to be held hostage to CAP reform. We will reallocate the resources currently available and thus take major steps forward towards the holistic development of the countryside to embrace conservation, recreation, services and industry as well as agriculture.

## **4.2 Red Tape**

4.2.1 Liberal Democrats believe that the Government's role in agriculture is to provide a policy framework and to remove distortions from the market place and intervene and assist where the market fails. We will minimise and simplify red tape to allow farmers to operate as successful businesses in the framework of greater trade liberalisation.

4.2.2 We will ensure that each farmer has only one person, the Farm Business Advisor, with whom he or she will deal as representing the support offered by the various government agricultural, rural and environmental agencies. The Farm Business Advisor will develop with each farmer an optimum blend of income generating activities in agricultural production and other

commercial activities such as the growing use of the countryside for recreation and energy production, and being paid for providing public benefits such as the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, landscape, wildlife and water catchments. This service will combine business advice with official advice.

4.2.3 At the level of the decisions to be taken by each farmer, the Farm Business Advisor will unify all the different support mechanisms (and other public policy interests in agriculture such as pesticide taxes and live animal movement restrictions) to present the farmer with a clear range of choices in terms of market access, prices, subsidies for environmental schemes, and penalties such as taxes and restrictions.

### **4.3 Business Assistance**

4.3.1 Liberal Democrats will support the development of healthy and profitable farm businesses with strong links to local communities. We will aim to:

- Encourage profitable agriculture.
- Promote cooperation within the farming community, including the establishment and use of co-operatives.
- Assist growers in establishing sufficient assurance schemes;
- Develop the Red Tractor scheme as an assurance of basic standards. (The Red Tractor is the label used by the National Farmers Union to signify that food has been

produced to British Standards).

- Modulate a significant proportion of subsidy from large to small farms.

4.3.2 Liberal Democrats will support schemes to promote the local marketing of locally grown food. We support:

- Local accreditation schemes to give people the choice of purchasing products produced in their local area, such as in Somerset (raised in the 'business' section of this paper).
- Farmers' markets and other local marketing initiatives.
- Local farmers' co-operatives for marketing, distribution and other economic efficiencies.

### **4.4 Agriculture and the Environment**

4.4.1 Liberal Democrats will expand rural development schemes to provide more money for other environmental schemes including organic conversion. These measures will transform the environmental performance of our farming and will improve biodiversity, reduce pollution, siltation and run-off, improve food quality, protect the built heritage and landscape and provide more employment and training.

Liberal Democrats will:

- Make full use of the mechanisms available to achieve UK-wide adoption of agri-environment measures;

- Provide the matching funding to allow UK farming to draw down the current maximum EU 20% contribution to the CAP 'second pillar'; (*Federal*)
- Move beyond the recommendations of the Curry Commission to introduce targets of conversion to agri-environment schemes of 40% by 2015 and 100% by 2050.

4.4.2 Liberal Democrats welcome and endorse many of the recommendations of the *Curry Commission on the Future of Farming and Food*. At the same time we will further develop the reform of the foundations of the rural economy.

## 4.5 Organic Production

4.5.1 Organic farming offers healthy food to consumers, protection for wildlife and the environment, and increased income for farmers. There is considerable room for its expansion in the UK. Although the area of UK farmland devoted to organics has doubled over the past year to over 240,000 hectares, the rising retail sales of organic food, faster here than in any other European country, from £605 million in 2000 to £802 million in 2001, and projected as over £1 billion in 2002 (Soil Association: *Organic Food and Farming Report 2001*), is currently met by the import of over 70% of this produce - around 80% in the fruit and vegetable markets - which is inefficient and wasteful of 'food miles'.

4.5.2 We believe that organic production will develop and expand

of its own accord, as farmers respond as entrepreneurs to the high and expanding demand for organic produce, and therefore that many of the benefits of organic farming (higher prices, healthier and tastier food), being reaped by the producer and consumer in their transactions with each other, can be left to the market to sort out. At the same time, we believe that organic agriculture has additional benefits to the public at large beyond the parties involved, such as in favouring wildlife and the reduction of pollution, and so that organic farming does deserve continuing public support.

4.5.3 Liberal Democrats are committed to a target of 30% of farmland in, or in conversion to, organic production by 2010 and increasing the affordability and availability of organic food to consumers. This will be achieved by expanding the supply of grants to support the transition to organic production, as part of our pledge to increase agri-environment schemes, to be managed by farmers in consultation with Farm Business Advisors.

4.5.4 Liberal Democrats support the current diversity of organic certifiers, and would not support the introduction of a single 'Official' certifier. The Soil Association, even though it has a quasi-monopoly in the certification sector, is sufficiently dominant to be able to act as a counter balance to the dominant power of the supermarkets, and other smaller certifiers can also operate in particular sectors, such as poultry and fish.

## 4.6 Beneficial and Sustainable Farming

4.6.1 Liberal Democrats recognise that organic production, while providing social, economic and environmental benefits, may not be appropriate for all farms, and it would be to “make the best the enemy of the good” not to focus in addition on supporting other improvements in agricultural practices. We will therefore stimulate all farming which is sustainable, and protects human health, rural employment and the environment.

4.6.2 Liberal Democrats will therefore additionally:

- Encourage a whole farm plan approach enabled by agencies and departments to coordinate their advice and resources.
- Promote ‘low-input’ farming such as Integrated Crop Management (ICM), as promoted by LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming);
- De-restrict the cultivation of hemp from its current requirement for a Home Office licence, as a useful crop grown without synthetic inputs and a valuable component of mixed cropping systems;
- Promote other forms of ‘environmentally-friendly’ farming, as for example promoted by English Nature and the RSPB.

4.6.3 Liberal Democrats are concerned at the potential danger for humans in the use of antibiotics and would strictly regulate their use and would seek to reduce their overall use significantly.

4.6.4 Liberal Democrats are concerned at the health risks to farmers and others arising from organophosphates (OPs), and would impose a moratorium on the sale and use of all OP agricultural and horticultural pesticides until current research studies demonstrate complete safety. In the meantime all OPs in domestic products, including head lice shampoos, pet flea collars and fly sprays, should be banned.

## 4.7 Pesticides<sup>1</sup>

4.7.1 Pesticides damage the environment, harm beneficial organisms, pose threats to the health of producers, consumers, domestic animals, beneficial insects including honeybees and wildlife, and increasingly threaten underground aquifers. Pesticide use in the UK has led to over £2 billion of capital investment in water treatment capacity between 1990 and 2000. There is an annual additional cost of over £100 million. Many pesticides still on the market pose health risks to both users and consumers.

4.7.2 Liberal Democrats believe that pesticides should only be used when absolutely necessary and with the application of a precautionary approach. We welcome moves by

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<sup>1</sup> Pesticides in the context of this paper refer to herbicides and insecticides.

farmers to reduce their dependence on pesticides through the introduction of pesticide management plans on farms. We support alternative, benign approaches such as companion planting, organic methods and we believe best practice should avoid vast swathes of pesticide-dependent monocultures.

4.7.3 The Liberal Democrats call for a National Pesticide Reduction Strategy, with clear targets for reduction in usage and encourage local authorities to draw up Pesticide Reduction strategies. We will:

- Introduce legal standards for spray equipment including annual calibration of pesticide sprayers and mandatory recording of farm pesticide usage.
- Limit the approval of pesticides to five years to allow reviews of their safety.
- Preclude domestic users from the use of more dangerous pesticides, which should only be available for use by trained licensees.

4.7.4 Liberal Democrats recognise that the current voluntary code for pesticide use is not working. Therefore, in accordance with our policy that the polluter should pay, we would introduce a non-punitive Pesticide Tax as a flat value-based levy on synthetic pesticides if the measures listed above prove ineffective. This will help to 'level the playing field' between intensive and organic farming. Proceeds from it will be used to defray costs of conversion to more sustainable agriculture,

including biological pest control such as by beetle banks, and integrated pest management. (*Federal*)

## **Case Study:**

### **Southwark**

Southwark Liberal Democrats introduced a Pesticide Reduction strategy which led to all new parks, street and housing estate maintenance contracts including Pesticide Reduction conditions. This led to significant reductions in pesticide use with consequent environmental and human health benefits. The Council won for the last two years the prestigious Green Apple award for its pesticide strategy.

## **4.8 Genetic Modification**

4.8.1 Liberal Democrats will continue to call for the adoption of the Precautionary Principle (whereby it has to be demonstrated that the potential benefits outweigh the potential harms) regarding the application of genetic modification (GM) technology.

4.8.2 Liberal Democrats support the freedom of the individual to make their own choices so long as these choices do not take away the freedoms of others. This principle applies to choices over foods. While we would be happy to see both those who wish to buy GM and those who wish to buy non-GM foods free to do so. There are concerns arising from

the possibility of cross-pollination that the rights of GM producers and farmers may by default take preference over the rights of those who wish to produce or eat organic or GM-free foods. There follow two alternative approaches to handling this possible conflict of freedoms.

### **Option A**

4.8.3 Evidence emerging since 1999 has confirmed the potential for the cross pollination of some organic crops by GM pollen over significant distances, some exceeding even 5 km. This confirms that decisions regarding the precedence in law of the rights of non-GM and organic farmers over GM farmers have to be urgently addressed, as GM crops have been shown to endanger non-GM crops and therefore undermine the potential for a choice between GM and non-GM. If there is full commercial planting of GM crops, it will become impossible over the medium to long term for organic and non-GM farmers to obtain non-GM seeds that fit the regulations for seed purity. The confirmation of cross-pollination also undermines the credibility of the current process of field trials.

4.8.4 Research reported by English Nature has confirmed the existence of cross transference of herbicide resistance between different GM strains of oilseed rape, and of 'gene stacking' whereby plants combine the genetic changes induced in a number of different GM crops into one plant. Thus single plants are already emerging with resistance to three major herbicides.

### **Option A continued:**

4.8.5 Liberal Democrats support the pre-cautionary principle in relation to GM crops. In addition we support the continuation of the current Liberal Democrat policy of calling for a moratorium on the commercial releases of GM crops and call for this moratorium to be extended to field trials until such time as research can prove as far as is scientifically feasible that no cross-contamination with organic or non-GM crops will occur.

### **Option B**

4.8.3 Cross-pollination is a natural phenomenon. Therefore appropriate purity thresholds for seed have always existed to allow for cross-pollination between wild and domesticated types as well as between low yielding and high yielding crops to ensure seeds meet specific quality standards. In addition to allowing for 'off-types', it also allows for the adventitious presence of animal faeces, insect parts and other detritus. The potential for the cross pollination of some organic crops by GM pollen over significant distances has long been recognised. If there is full commercial planting of GM crops, it is feared that it will become impossible over the medium to long term for organic and other non-GM farmers to obtain seeds that fit the regulations for seed purity. Determining this will be one of the effects of the current process of field trials.

### **Option B continued:**

4.8.4 Research has confirmed the existence of cross transference of herbicide resistance between different GM strains of oilseed rape, and of 'gene stacking'. Thus plants are emerging with resistance to more than one herbicide. However this is not specific to GM plants and applies to non-GM crops as well.

4.8.5 Liberal Democrats support the continuation of the current moratorium on GM crops, lasting, as a minimum, until the current field scale evaluations have been completed, published and evaluated against the precautionary principle. In the event that, following this evaluation, the moratorium is lifted, we would require a full environmental impact assessment of any crop to be planted. We recognise the importance of research using field scale trials in providing evidence of safety, benefit, harm or hazard and call for such trials to be carried out to the highest ethical and scientific standard, for there to be complete openness about their findings and for them to be completed undisturbed by damage.

4.8.6 There is confusion over whether current EU legislation gives member states or regions the right to impose their own moratoria.

4.8.7 Liberal Democrats will campaign to ensure that EU and international legislation is framed to allow Ministers in any national or devolved Government to impose a moratorium if they so wish.

4.8.8 The EU Deliberate GM Release Directive requires the labelling of GM foods, post-release monitoring of GM commercial plants and the termination of unauthorised GM releases, but fails to tackle liability, cross pollination, use of antibiotic resistant marker genes or the status of medicinal GM plants. Proposed regulations will introduce authorisation procedures for GM animal feeds but will not require that products from animals fed on GM products should be labelled.

4.8.9 However, there is a strong case to be made that the medical potential of GM holds out significant hope for positive advances and a special case for such plants grown under licence in laboratory conditions preventing escape into the wider environment should be made. Liberal Democrats call for the development of a specific EU regime covering the licensed cultivation of GM medicinal plants, ensuring that they are not released into the general environment.

4.8.10 We re-iterate our opposition to the GM of farm animals except for medical purposes.

4.8.11 We re-iterate our opposition to the patenting of naturally occurring genes and to the use of antibiotic marker genes.

4.8.12 We reaffirm our support for labelling products which contain GM ingredients, starting with the lowest measurement scientifically possible. We also support the labelling of produce from farm animals that have been fed on GM feeds.

4.8.13 Farmers are unable to obtain insurance against claims resulting from losses due to cross pollination from other farmers' crops, environmental damage or human health consequences, leaving farmers exposed to significant legal challenges in an area with no adequate legal framework.

4.8.14 We will introduce legislation to require insurance coverage of financial liability for any negative consequences of GM releases.

4.8.15 We support the requirement in the new Deliberate Releases Directive for any unauthorised GMO releases to be terminated and oppose the proposed weakening of this provision in the new GM Food/Feed proposals.

## **4.9 Animal Transport**

4.9.1 The maintenance of strict and strictly enforced controls on the movement of live animals for slaughter and fattening is essential to the health and welfare of animals and the protection of the public from animal-borne diseases.

4.9.2 The Liberal Democrats will update the 1997 Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order to introduce strict controls on the movement of all live mammals and birds, including banning over land journeys of over 8 hours, with the exception of farms in remote areas, introducing a compulsory rest period of 7 days between all movements of over two hours, except for breeding and stud animals, and pedigree and other animals used for display, shows, racing and equestrian events, where

reasonable quarantine arrangements are in place and introducing a limit of one journey per sale agreed, counting the journey to and from market as one.

4.9.3 All inspections and other measures taken for public and animal health will be funded by a levy on slaughterhouses per unit weight of animals processed. This will replace the present payment of charges per inspection, which imposes particularly heavy burdens on small and local slaughterhouses.

## **4.10 Forestry**

4.10.1 The UK produces only 18% of its timber consumption. The Liberal Democrats support enhancing our self-reliance on timber supply, by increasing appropriate forestry production, recycling wood and using our existing resources more prudently. We also support multi-functional forestry, to contribute to the greater good in a variety of ways, including recreation and leisure, landscape quality, biodiversity, energy production, carbon sequestration, improved water quality and flood attenuation and rural economic development. Liberal Democrats support the continuing expansion of the forested area of the UK to meet these multi-functional benefits. (*Federal*)

4.10.2 The Liberal Democrats will carry out a comprehensive and radical review of the grant and funding systems. This will include replacing the provision by the current system of maximum funding support when

prices are highest and so support least needed.

4.10.3 Liberal Democrats will put forestry policy and the forest sector fiscal planning onto a 50-year rolling timescale so that the sector can develop in a sustainable way in the long term. A sustainable forestry sector needs a long-term secure basis for investment and decision-making, and should not be at the mercy of biannual spending reviews and the relative profitability of the state forest to secure the funds for its grant revenues.

## **4.11 Renewable Energy**

4.11.1 Liberal Democrats believe that our farmers and rural communities have a crucial role to play in the creation of a renewable energy economy in the UK, as a mosaic of biomass, biofuels, solar, hydro, wind, hydrogen and other technologies, to allow flexibility and robustness.

4.11.2 We will reform the agricultural advice service into a rural economic advice service to farmers/rural communities that will cover all potential sources of income including renewable energy. We will redirect regional planning advice to take account of the needs for renewable energy. We will encourage all principal councils to draw up a renewable energy strategy that enables towns and parishes to initiate local community schemes.

4.11.3 Liberal Democrats welcome many elements of the PIU Energy Review. In particular we support its recommendations that overall energy

policy should be “*the pursuit of secure and competitively priced means of meeting our energy needs, subject to the attainment of an environmentally sustainable energy system*”. We support their recommendation to set up a sustainable energy policy unit within government, for DTI to be more explicit in the guidance it gives to Ofgem on the environmental impacts of its work, and for the Treasury to consider a carbon tax to replace the Climate Change Levy, which, whilst a long term aim, will boost the prospects for bio-energy more widely. Liberal Democrats will include the facilitation of a renewable economy in the remit for Ofgem. (*Federal*)

## **4.12 Renewables Obligation (RO)**

4.12.1 The aim of the RO is to secure renewable electricity at the cheapest possible cost to the consumer, by creating an artificial market, in which developers of renewable electricity projects compete to supply the market at the lowest cost.

4.12.2 The Liberal Democrats will restructure NETA (National Energy Trading Arrangements) and the RO so that the bias against young technologies, small scale and intermittent generators is removed.

## **4.13 Hydroelectricity**

4.13.1 Liberal Democrats will review the legal restraints on the use of local watercourses for community and individual small-scale hydroelectricity schemes, to prevent the water regulators stifling the

development of a micro-hydro industry.

#### **4.14 Wind**

4.14.1 We believe that it is possible to have a modest number of wind generators in many areas, and that nearly all towns and villages, where feasible, should have a wind energy scheme. By developing schemes that have a direct investment by the local community they are less likely to face opposition. Examples such as the wind turbine in Swaffham, Norfolk illustrates that both environmental concerns and wind requirements can be accommodated. In Swaffham the wind turbine is attached to an EcoTech centre and is estimated to provide 50% of the town's electricity. Wind power does not have to mean a huge number of turbines. Single turbines on farms and estates are proving to be a good source of income and to generate enough power for the farm or estate. This should prevent a situation where many of the most beautiful areas of the countryside are filled with wind generators.

#### **4.15 Biofuel**

4.15.1 Liberal Democrats support the development of biomass and biofuels as a contribution of rural areas to energy production. Biomass is a diverse and flexible resource, being available from virtually any organic matter. Biofuels are less intensively farmed than existing arable and grass crops, create year-round rural jobs and help build strong local economies. The production of fuel provides significant opportunities for

environmental improvements, in particular the biodiversity benefits of bringing abandoned or otherwise under-managed woodlands back into production, and from growing specific low input, wildlife-friendly energy crops. Biomass installations, including Combined Heat and Power (CHP) can be located to reinforce electricity grids, saving transmission losses.

4.15.2 At present, a lack of ambition from government, combined with contradictory policies, is failing not only biomass but also the renewable energy industry in general. During the last year the Renewable Power Association has reported a 40% drop in electricity generated from green sources, this is due to the application of NETA. The Liberal Democrats will support the industry to achieve good economies of scale combined with a fair and secure energy market.

4.15.3 Road transport fuels can viably and usefully be produced on rural land. Within a short space of time this could produce at least 5% of the nation's diesel requirements on a sustainable basis and that this would lead to a significant improvement in air quality. Matched by a further 5% of fuel derived from bioethanol, this would make a very substantial contribution to a renewable transport fuel policy.

4.15.4 The British Association for Biofuels believes that some 500,000 hectares of arable land could move into biodiesel production and eventually produce 750,000 - 1m tonnes per annum, with an energy value of 36MJ/kg. Liberal Democrats

will give biofuels the same tax treatment as road gas (i.e. 7.5p per litre on an energy basis), while leaving to land managers to work out the best energy cropping pattern for their holdings among bioethanol, biodiesel and biomass.

4.15.5 The Liberal Democrats would aim to:

- Work towards obtaining 10% of transport fuels from renewable resources by 2010, using set aside land, by matching the fuel duty rates currently on offer to LPG (Low Pressure Gas) and Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). The UK Treasury funds the switching of vehicles to LPG and CNG, which are fossil fuels, albeit with air quality benefits. Biofuels do not need the large conversion costs of switching to LPG and CNG. (*Federal*)
- Aim to increase financial support for biofuel development. Serious Government support is required in order that biomass can achieve its potential and equal or in some cases better the cost competitiveness of other renewables.
- Encourage the planting of energy crops and set up processing systems, combined with actions to develop secure markets, which is essential if private investment is going to be secured and farmers have

the confidence to plant the necessary crops. (*Federal*)

- Set a target of 5 TWh/yr (equivalent to 1,000 MWe of installed electrical capacity) by 2010. This is believed to be a realistic figure by the industry, and is equivalent to the contribution that hydroelectricity currently makes to the UK energy mix.
- Encourage single solar panel use of utilities in remote areas.

## 4.16 National Parks

4.16.1 Liberal Democrats support the principle of the designation of our most precious and vulnerable landscapes as National Parks and the improvements to their legislation brought about by the Environment Act 1995. We support the designation of new National Parks in the South Downs and the New Forest.

4.16.2 The effectiveness of the single purpose independent National Park Authorities in delivering sustainability is reduced by their overly restricted powers in key areas such as housing, economic development and transport. As part of a wider review of local and regional government there is scope for delegation of more of these appropriate powers to national parks.

4.16.3 Regional and national governments in turn should operate through the national park system, including for instance DEFRA agri-environment schemes, the Forestry Commission and English Nature. For

other arms of government the Parks could operate as prime access point serving their rural areas.

4.16.4 The Liberal Democrats will aim to:

- Designate the candidate National Parks without delay.
- Encourage the National Parks to deliver policies for sustainability in their areas, and their grants should reflect this duty.
- Ensure that National Park Authorities become full participants in regional governance.
- Introduce direct elections for a proportion of Park Authority members, to ensure an appropriate balance between local, regional and national accountability, instead of the indirect elections via Parish Councils which currently apply to the English parks. We recognise that the democratic structures may need to be varied to suit local and regional conditions, and where the Park population is very small the directly elected element will encompass a wider area or represent a smaller proportion of the membership of the National Park Authority.

## 4.17 Water

4.17.1 Water affects the rural economy and quality of life in many crucial respects, including water resources and quality, flood and coastal defences, fisheries,

navigation, ecosystems, tourism and leisure. In parts of the UK, particularly the South East of England, water resources are already stretched to the limit and in periods of drought, which are expected to be more frequent, water shortage could present severe difficulties. Furthermore there is clear evidence that some rivers and wetland habitats have been over-abstracted. In some cases rivers and wetlands have dried up completely with consequent damage to ecosystems, tourism and leisure. Climate change predictions envisage rising summer temperatures, putting further pressure on water supplies, reducing river flows and increasing pollution risks.

4.17.2 Good water quality in natural sources is essential for a wide range of activities, such as fishing, boating, tourism and leisure as well as to the maintenance of attractive and healthy freshwater and marine ecosystems. It is also very important in abstraction sources for domestic and industrial supply and reduces the costs of treatment for potable and industrial uses.

4.17.3 The quality of water in natural resources such as rivers and groundwater and in potable and industrial supply has been improving markedly since the changes in regulatory control of water in 1989. The quality of bathing waters has also been improving as a result of major investment in new waste water treatment plants. Most of these changes have arisen as a consequence of European legislation and it is hoped that in the future the UK will take a greater lead in improving the

environment and developing legislation which is taken up throughout Europe, rather than continually playing 'catch-up'.

4.17.4 There is still much to be done and strong environmental regulatory pressure should continue to be applied to all dischargers. Furthermore the economic regulators need to be subject to strong Ministerial requirement to include environmental improvements, set by the environmental regulators, in their determinations of pricing.

4.17.5 There is generally good control of effluent discharge quality for point source discharges. However there is an urgent need to apply more stringent controls on diffuse discharges most of which arise from agriculture. Diffuse discharges give rise to a range of water problems such as outbreaks of toxic blue-green algae and water borne diseases.

4.17.6 Fish farming, which can make a useful contribution to local economies, has expanded rapidly in both fresh and marine waters in recent years but has caused some serious water quality and disease problems. The controls and charges on fish farming are currently being reviewed. The review must produce proposals that prevent water pollution and end the cruel treatment of fish through the promotion of good husbandry.

4.17.7 Leisure and tourism depend directly on a high quality water environment. Some leisure and tourism activities contribute to the maintenance of the water environment through local taxation

and through direct charges for some activities like fishing and boating. However the general maintenance of the water environment is a cost to local authorities, to the EA, to landowners and to voluntary bodies. There needs to be an investigation as to ways in which money for the operations to ensure a high quality water environment (including litter removal) can be raised.

4.17.8 The Liberal Democrats will introduce a Water Bill to implement the EU Water Framework Directive. This Bill will also provide an opportunity to introduce changes to abstraction licences, the charging arrangements for water services, the regulations on farming in relation to water quality and changes in water charges for those who store water for flood defence purposes.

4.17.9 The Liberal Democrats will aim to:

- Encourage all domestic users to reduce water consumption. This will include encouragement of metering where appropriate, installation of grey and rain water systems alongside potable water systems, and where possible and especially in social housing, the use of water saving toilets, showers, taps and domestic appliances.
- Work with water supply managers to reduce and control leakage.
- Encourage industry to find means of reducing water use and the adoption of zero water discharge processes.

- Continue to encourage farmers to use less water, to construct winter water storage systems to supply irrigation needs and to adopt more efficient irrigation practices than spray irrigation.
- Reduce abstraction quantities for some existing abstraction licences.
- Only as a last resort introduce new water transfer schemes.
- Ensure that the location of new housing, industry and forests, and changes in farming practice, are considered in relation to future available water supplies. Until recently it has been the practice to manage water resources, during drought conditions, for domestic and industrial water supply without much regard for the effect on other water users. If the rural economy is to be safeguarded the water users apart from households and industry will have to have an equal priority.
- Encourage all farms to have nutrient budgeting.
- Develop ways of minimising livestock access to watercourses.
- Campaign for cultivation and cropping practices to have strong regard for their consequences to surface water run-off, nutrient leaching and siltation of watercourses.
- Change sentencing guidelines to impose more severe fines on those who knowingly cause water pollution.

## 4.18 Flood and Coastal Management

4.18.1 Recent flood events have emphasised the inability of our current systems to manage flooding in a sustainable way, let alone cope with predicted climate change, which in some areas of the UK comprise 20% additional winter rainfall, fluvial 100-year flood risks occurring every 10 or 20 years and up to ½ metre per annum of sea level rise by 2050. This will exacerbate the problems already caused by upstream urbanisation, land management changes and traditional river management that just pushes flood flows on from one problem area to the next. Coastal cities like London, Liverpool, Southampton and resorts like Brighton, Bournemouth and Blackpool will have to invest heavily to sustain their existing defence standards.

4.18.2 Liberal Democrats will plan for climate change adaptation on the basis of the best available science and will treat the challenges of climate changes responsibly. We will aim to:

- Set up English National Task Forces to create integrated flood management plans, which would look at issues relating to drought and water extraction and review arrangements and funding for flood defence management and response.
- Introduce a rolling 50-year planning horizon for climate change adaptation, including a long range target of a 50% reduction in greenhouse emissions by 2040 as well as a

- commitment to a 20% reduction in CO2 emissions by 2010 (Relative to 1990 levels).
- Incorporate water management regimes as a key objective in agri-environment schemes.
  - Avoid siting vulnerable development in floodplains and consider options for rescinding planning permission where current use is inappropriate, including pollution regulation and licensing of plants.
  - Apply the 1 in 1000 risk standard for essential services like electricity sub-stations and emergency service headquarters.
  - Introduce legislation to ensure that all new developments incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) to reduce urban runoff water.
  - Reduce the sponsor ministries to one and create a single operating authority with executive power exercised at a regional and area level.
  - Give responsibility for flood and coastal management to Regional Assemblies, where they have been set up and give power to delegate further in large regions and where more local flood defence

committees or drainage boards are working well.

- Create a transparent funding mechanism mostly funded by central government, with the ability to top up funding from local taxation to finance local priorities.

## 4.19 Integration of Policy

4.19.1 The Liberal Democrats will reform the institutional framework for delivery of the new policies. The funding system is under considerable stress and the division of responsibilities between the various authorities is confusing even to experts in the field let alone the general public. Liberal Democrats will aim to:

- Promote the adoption of integrated catchment management, treating the water and related land management issues together on a whole river system basis. This is the approach that will eventually be required by the EU water framework directive; we will anticipate this by introducing integrated catchment management nationwide by 2007.

## Case Study:

### PARRETT CATCHMENT PROJECT, SOMERSET

<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/enp/rop/pcp>

The Parrett Catchment Project, set up in response to serious floods in 2000, is a multi-award winning project supported by all sections of the community and a wider cross-section of organisations. It uses an all catchment approach including better management in the way land is managed. It aims to meet the demands of increased storminess and sea level rise whilst enhancing nature conservation and farming methods, on the internationally designated Somerset Levels and Moors.

## 4.20 Waste Management

4.20.1 Policy paper 41, *Strategy for Sustainability*, is about how the UK, operating as a part of an international community, can achieve environmental sustainability. It is not the role of this section to revise all the arguments raised in *Strategy for Sustainability*, but to deal with some of the issues that particularly affect rural areas.

4.20.2 Landfill takes up large areas of land, mainly in rural areas. In the UK we are fast running out of landfill sites, and the alternative of increasing incineration currently proposed by the Government is deeply unpopular with the public and may pose unacceptable health hazards. The UK also has one

of the lowest rates in Europe for recycling with just 7% of the 27 million tonnes of household waste produced being recycled. This is despite the high levels of support by the public for recycling and the fact that recent waste composition studies have shown that over 40% of waste is recyclable and 30-40% can be composted (Friends of the Earth 1998).

4.20.3 Liberal Democrats have long been committed to minimising, re-using and recycling waste before disposal is considered. To this end *Strategy for Sustainability* committed the Party to reducing the amount of waste going to landfill to 2% of 1998 levels within 40 years. This objective is supported by the policy to gradually increase the landfill tax to encourage alternative methods of disposal, backed up by an eventual ban on all but certain exempt types of waste. In addition to this we will aim to:

- Introduce a National Recycling Programme which would place a duty on local authorities to provide every single household with a doorstep recycling service within 4-5 years. Our overall goal is for a national recycling rate of 60% of household waste recycled (or composted) by 2010, whilst placing a moratorium on further building of incinerators.
- Re-direct funds generated from the landfill tax credit scheme to local authorities for increasing recycling and other activities that promote

environmental sustainability.  
(*Federal*)

- Gradually increase the landfill tax in order to encourage recycling. (*Federal*)
- Reform the current landfill tax to include taxation of a wider range of waste disposal including incineration. (*Federal*)
- Ensure a market for recycled goods.

### **Case Study:**

#### **Bath & North East Somerset**

Bath and North East Somerset Council have become the first local authority in the UK to put Zero Waste at the heart of its policies on waste, with a long-term vision to eliminate waste altogether, rather than simply manage it.

Zero Waste aims to ensure that all products are made from materials which can be repaired, re-used or recycled, and that at the end of their product life there is no residual waste to be disposed of.

We believe there should be a full debate, within the European context, as to how far we should move towards achieving a totally Zero Waste Strategy, given the environmental costs and benefits, and will strengthen our policies in the light of this debate.

## **4.21 Quarrying**

4.21.1 The principal minerals extracted by mining in the UK are coal, gypsum, salt and potash. Quarries principally produce sand and gravel and crushed rock for construction usually described as aggregates which amount to an annual tonnage in excess of 200 million. In addition, quarries produce substantial quantities of coal, chemical grade limestone, gypsum, common clays, china clay or kaolin, ball clays and silica sand. The three counties of Somerset, Leicestershire and Derbyshire provide the majority of the stone that is quarried in the UK. Quarries are significant sources of jobs in rural areas – often they are the largest employer in remote communities.

4.21.2 Liberal Democrats recognise that people living near quarries suffer unacceptable detriment to their environment and amenities. To alleviate the environmental damage caused by quarrying we would aim to:

- Reduce the need for unnecessary quarrying by matching European best practice for 100% of recycling of construction aggregates, and an overall reduction in the use of aggregates of 40% (Green Budget 2002).
- Re-direct funds generated from the Aggregates Levy to local authorities to address the environmental costs associated with quarrying operations in their areas.
- Ensure that development of quarrying takes into account

the after-use of quarrying sites.

4.21.3 Liberal Democrats would encourage the use of rail links to quarries to avoid the need to transport aggregates by road.

4.21.4 The seabed provides about 25 million tonnes of aggregates each year. Due to pressures on the terrestrial environment, the UK marine aggregate industry has become a major supplier for the European and domestic construction industry and for coastal defence schemes. Aggregate extraction can have a significant impact on coastal defence in areas far beyond the site of extraction. Liberal Democrats support

a more coordinated and accountable approach to managing marine aggregate extraction and coastal defence. We would:

- Support the coastal planning and management tasks being undertaken by local authorities on behalf of the nation.
- Enable greater transparency and democratic accountability in decision-making on the coast.
- Develop a national strategy for the coast that clearly sets out a shared vision for England's coast for the next 50 years.

*This paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 5.4 of the Federal Constitution. Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom. The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas. If approved by Conference, this paper will form the policy of the Federal Party, except in appropriate areas where any national party policy would take precedence.*

*Many of the policy papers published by the Liberal Democrats imply modifications to existing government public expenditure priorities. We recognise that it may not be possible to achieve all these proposals in the lifetime of one Parliament. We intend to publish a costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next general election.*

## **Working Group on Rural Futures**

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*Note: Membership of the Working Group should not be taken to indicate that every member necessarily agrees with every statement or every proposal in this Paper.*

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**ISBN: 1 85187 684 7**

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Tel: 01252 408 282 Email: libdemimage@ldimage.demon.co.uk  
Printed by Contract Printing,  
1 St James Road, St James Industrial Estate, Corby, NN18 8AL.  
**Cover design by Helen Belcher.**