



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# The Rural Productivity Plan

Alastair Paton - Head of Rural Productivity  
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# Introduction

- The Rural Productivity Plan was published on the 20<sup>th</sup> August 2015.
- The Plan aims to unleash the potential of England's rural areas. It will help us create thriving towns and villages where generations of families can open and expand their businesses, buy a home and educate their children at first class schools.
- The plan is grouped around five areas:
  - rural areas fully connected to the wider economy
  - a highly skilled rural workforce
  - strong conditions for rural business growth
  - easier to live and work in rural areas
  - greater local control



## Extensive Fast and Reliable Broadband Services

- Government has launched a subsidised satellite broadband connection for homes and businesses in some of the most remote areas of the UK.
- Government is on track to meet its commitment to give superfast access to 90% of premises by early 2016, and is on course to meet its 95% target by the end 2017.
- We are also taking firm steps towards developing a new broadband Universal Service Obligation by 2020, with the ambition to set this at 10Mbps. The Government intends to consult on this in early spring.

# Rural areas fully connected to the wider economy

## High Quality Widely Available Mobile Communications

- The Government is looking at responses to its August 2015 Call for Evidence which proposed permitted development rights for taller mobile masts in England.
- We are continuing to work with industry to support further improvements to mobile coverage in the UK and ensure rural areas have the best possible coverage of high quality mobile services.

## Modern Transport Connections

- Late last year the Government announced funding for new routes under the Regional Air Connectivity Fund announcement including routes from Norwich, Southampton, Carlisle, Oxford and Newquay Airports.
- Expecting to consult on the Road Investment Strategy for 2020-2025 in the next few months.

# A highly skilled rural workforce

## Access to High Quality Education and Training

- The spending review announced plans to introduce a new National Funding Formula for schools from 2017.
- A consultation has been held by BIS on post-16 skills and the responses are currently being considered.

# A highly skilled rural workforce

## Expanded Apprenticeships in Rural Areas

- The Food and Drink Federation have committed to increasing the apprentices in sector from 1% to 3% by 2020.
- We plan to review evidence on what can be done to help small rural tourism businesses recruit more apprentices.

# Strong conditions for rural business growth

## Enterprise Zones in Rural Areas

- 18 new Enterprise Zones (EZ) and the expansion of 8 existing zones were announced in the Spending Review on 25th Nov 2015. 15 of the successful EZ bids were classified as rural and smaller town.



# Strong conditions for rural business growth

## Better Regulation and Improved Planning in Rural Areas and More Housing

- Online dialogue on the barriers to and enablers of innovation closed on 19<sup>th</sup> Feb. We are currently considering the responses.
- The Government's Housing and Planning Bill was introduced on the 17<sup>th</sup> Oct 2015.
- Consultation on reform of National Planning Policy Framework was published on the 7<sup>th</sup> December. It contains proposals for increasing numbers of starter homes in rural areas. Consultation closed on 22<sup>nd</sup> February.
- A Call for Evidence to review the current threshold for agricultural buildings to be converted to residential use was launched on the 11<sup>th</sup> February.

# Easier to live and work in rural areas

## Increased Availability of Affordable Childcare:

- Government announced 8 early implementers for a scheme providing 30 hours of free childcare. Early implementers are Wigan, Northumberland, York, Newham, Hertfordshire, Portsmouth, Swindon and Staffordshire.
- These early implementers will be offering 30 hours of free childcare from September 2016.



# Greater local control

## Devolution of Power

- 7 Devolution Deals have already been agreed during this Parliament, including:
  - Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly
  - Greater Manchester
  - Liverpool City Region
  - North East Combined Authority
  - Sheffield City Region
  - Tees Valley
  - West Midlands Combined Authority
- More are in the pipeline with the timetables dependent on the progress of discussions and negotiations.

# Next Steps

- Policy responsibility for the majority of the actions contained within the 10 point Rural Productivity Plan lies with other Government Departments.
- Defra is working closely with all Departments to help them deliver their commitments and ensure that rural interests are taken account of.



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