



Liberal Democrat **policies for rural communities**





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Sadly, too many local schools, hospitals and post offices are under pressure and many face closure. House prices are expensive, driven up by second home owners while local people can't afford a home of their own, public transport is often non-existent, and supermarkets are giving farmers and shoppers a raw deal.

Liberal Democrats will bring fairness to rural communities. We will provide more affordable homes for local people; keep post offices open; give local people a say on bus fares and routes in their area; and stop big food companies bullying farmers and shoppers.

Only Liberal Democrats will bring change that works for you. Here we outline our key policies for building a fairer Britain for rural communities:

- Keep local post offices
- Improve local bus services
- Affordable homes for all
- Regulate supermarkets to ensure fair trade for farmers and a fair price for food
- A Fair Deal for British Farmers

Rural Britain deserves better, please join with us to make it happen.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nick Clegg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nick Clegg
Leader of the Liberal Democrats

keep local post offices

Liberal Democrats will keep post offices open in rural areas where they're the lynchpin of community life, ending the Labour and Conservative closure programme. We will split Post Office Ltd from Royal Mail, so that they are two separate organisations, allowing each to focus on their separate challenges. The Post Office will remain in public ownership in order to provide an essential, locally based lifeline to all communities. We will develop a PostBank and use it as a shop window for government services. The Government has focussed on providing government services online but we believe people should have a choice of ways to access public services and should have the option of speaking directly to a person. No other network offers the same level of access as the Post Office: 93.3% of people are within a mile of a post office while only 70% of households have access to the internet.

better transport

There aren't enough buses for people to get around in rural areas where services are often few and far between. This is especially hard on people who can't drive. We will give councils greater powers to regulate bus services according to rural community needs, meaning local people get a real say over routes and fares.

Liberal Democrats believe that the cost of motoring should provide an incentive to use sustainable public transport where it is available, but rural motorists shouldn't be unfairly penalised because of poor public transport. We will introduce a rural fuel discount scheme which would allow a reduced rate of fuel duty to be paid in remote rural areas, as is allowed under EU law. We will also move towards revenue-neutral road-user pricing while abolishing Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) and reducing fuel duty. This will provide an incentive to shift from car to train on journeys where a good public transport alternative exists and rural motorists will save money.

affordable homes for all

Liberal Democrats will give local councils the power to identify the needs of the community so that more affordable housing is built in the areas which really need it. We will promote schemes for affordable homes like equity mortgages and 'Home on the Farm' which encourage farmers to convert existing buildings into affordable housing.

We will give local authorities the power to set higher council tax rates for second homes and the option to require specific planning permission for new second homes, in areas where the number of such homes is threatening the viability of a community. We will also reform Capital Gains Tax to ensure that those who use second homes as speculative investments will pay tax on enhanced capital value at the same rate as on earned income, not 18% as at present.

regulate supermarkets to ensure fair trade for farmers and a fair price for food

We will stop supermarkets bullying farmers, ensuring both farmers and shoppers get a fair price for food. We'll do this by creating a legal Supermarket Code and a powerful independent regulator of Britain's food market.

We will help consumers to choose foods with the least environmental impact through clearer labelling, and work with the EU to make sure country-of-origin labels identify the source of the products, not where they are packaged.

a fair deal for British farmers

Farming is an important part of Britain's economy, and it is important to Britain's future security that we have a sustainable farming industry. Liberal Democrats will build on that strength and ensure farmers get the fair deal they deserve, able to earn a living wage and also help protect our natural environment and heritage.

We will introduce a minimum level for the Single Farm Payment and concentrate future reductions on the highest claims so that big landowners get less, and the money goes to working farmers who need it, not people who farm one field as a hobby. We will use the money freed by reform of Single Farm Payments to provide extra support for hill farmers, cheap loans to help farmers invest in environmentally-friendly biogas digesters and a new Farming Apprenticeship scheme. Organic and reduced-input foodstuffs should be encouraged.

our green and pleasant land

We live in a beautiful country, and we need to protect it better to ensure our children and grandchildren can enjoy it in the future. Liberal Democrats will abolish the Infrastructure Planning Commission and return decision-making, including housing targets, to local people. We will create a third party right of appeal in cases where planning decisions go against locally agreed plans.

We will make national parks democratically accountable, allowing a proportion of the Park boards to be elected and will create a new designation – similar to Site of Special Scientific Interest status – to protect green areas of particular importance or value to the community. We will aim to double the UK's woodland cover by 2050. And we will refund VAT to mountain rescue services to support the excellent work of this voluntary emergency service.



Liberal Democrats have championed the devolution of powers to Scotland and Wales, and many decisions made in Westminster now apply to England only. That means that policies in those nations are increasingly different from those in England – reflecting different choices, priorities and circumstances. Our Scottish and Welsh Parties make their own policy on those issues. This document sets out our priorities for a Liberal Democrat Government in Westminster.

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