

PRESS RELEASE
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Rural areas demand support to tackle climate change

- **Group of rural council leaders setting up new Countryside Climate Network: “myth that countryside is peripheral to the economy and climate change”**
- **Call for funding packages such as £100bn infrastructure strategy to be targeted at rural as well as urban areas**
- **The voice of two thirds of country who live outside major towns and cities needs to be heard at Westminster**

A group of rural council leaders has today launched a new network to promote the voice of the countryside in the climate change debate.

In a letter published today¹ (24 June) by the new **Countryside Climate Network**, a cross-party group of 21 councils from every region in England, warn that “rural communities are at the frontline of feeling the effects of climate change” and that “the countryside offers far more than a place to plant millions of trees to offset carbon emissions.”

The group aims “to ensure that the voice of rural knowledge and experience on climate action is listened to in Westminster” and its new Chair, the leader of Cambridgeshire warns that rural areas face “unfair barriers to decarbonise” including lower budgets and funding rules which favour urban concentrations but may have less overall carbon reduction. The group wants the Government’s delayed £100bn infrastructure fund² “to support the ambitions of rural areas and the opportunities our countryside and green infrastructure can provide”.

The new network has been established by **UK100, a network of local leaders** that campaigns on climate change. The 21 councils represent 14.3 million people in total, a quarter of the population (25%) and two fifths (41%) of England by area. The letter says that “the countryside offers more than a place to plant millions of trees to combat climate change. Rural communities have always been a great source of national progress and innovation.”

The group is chaired by the **Conservative leader of Cambridgeshire Council**, Cllr Steve Count, who said:

“From Cornwall to County Durham we have decided to take a stand. We’re frustrated that climate solutions and green recovery packages haven’t found the right balance, largely missing the rural voice.

“It can be hard to meet our sustainable ambitions when urban areas have no need to fund essential bus services to remote communities or invest in broadband because the market doesn’t reach isolated areas. These examples of typical rural disadvantages add up, combined with a funding gap in rural areas twice that of our urban counterparts, means our stretched resources are diminished making the challenge of funding sustainable solutions even harder.

“We need a green recovery that works for the two thirds that live outside the most urban cities and towns.

“However, rural communities face unfair barriers in trying to decarbonise – it is harder to attract funding for projects which don’t fit traditional cost benefit analyses, which favour urban concentrations yet may have less overall carbon reduction impact.”

¹ [Published in the Telegraph. See editor’s note for full text](#)

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-51760507>

Polly Billington, Director of UK100, said: “Climate change affects every area and every person, and rural towns and villages can be more vulnerable to the impacts, such as extreme weather. Countryside councils are well placed to tackle climate change and meet the needs and ambitions of their communities for economic recovery and better health and well being, with innovative solutions along with the democratic legitimacy to deliver lasting change.”

The group points out that rural areas can be more vulnerable to extreme weather events such as the devastating floods last winter. The number of extreme weather events has doubled since 1980³.

Agriculture, land use and peatlands account for 12% of overall UK emissions⁴, while agriculture is responsible for 88% of ammonia gas emissions which combine with other pollutants to form fine Particulate Matter (PM) air pollution, which is harmful to health.⁵

At the same time, rural areas are home to many of the potential solutions to climate change with Cambridgeshire having the highest ratio of entrepreneurs nationally based in the ‘Silicon Fen’, many focussed on advanced cleantech.

Cllr Tony King, Derbyshire County Council’s Cabinet Member for Clean Growth and Regeneration, said: “By joining forces with other like-minded rural councils, we can shine a light on the unique challenges we face in comparison to our urban counterparts and push rural issues higher up the national agenda, lobbying for greater support to bring about the radical change needed to truly make a difference on climate change.”

Cllr Edwina Hannaford, Cornwall Council Cabinet Member for Climate Change said: “We look forward to collaborating with like-minded authorities to highlight the role rural regions can play in helping accelerate the UK’s transition to net zero. Cornwall is already playing a leading role in producing clean energy with around 40% of our power coming from renewables, and we are ambitious to produce much more.”

Cllr John D Clare, Council Climate Change Champion, Durham County Council said: “The opportunity to come together to share learning and experiences with other rural local authorities will enable us to tackle challenges and support each other as we work towards a common cause. Our Climate Emergency Response Plan, adopted in February 2020, sets out more than 100 projects to deliver on our carbon reduction ambitions.”

Cllr Carl Les, Leader of North Yorkshire County Council said: “We are committed to actions, not just words. As an authority, we are already acting to reduce our CO2 emissions and water consumption and minimise waste. We have taken a clear stance to protect North Yorkshire in our joint minerals and waste plan, to encourage sustainable economic growth and to take environmental and social impact into consideration alongside financial factors in our procurement. ”

Cllr Blake Pain, Lead Member for Environment and Action on Climate Change on Leicestershire Council, said: “We’re already a signatory to the UK100 pledge on achieving 100% clean energy by 2050. In Leicestershire, we want to be even more ambitious by becoming a carbon neutral organisation by 2030 and are backing this up with a

3
https://www.ae-info.org/ae/Acad_Main/Publications/Press_release/Increased%20frequency%20of%20extreme%20weather%20events#:~:text=Globally%2C%20according%20to%20the%20new%20more%20than%20doubled%20since%201980.

4 <https://www.theccc.org.uk/2020/01/23/major-shift-in-uk-land-use-needed-to-deliver-net-zero-emissions/>

5
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-help-farmers-tackle-air-pollution-in-new-clean-air-strategy#:~:text=The%20Clean%20Air%20Strategy%20will,caused%20by%20ammonia%20gas%20emissions.&text=The%20government%20has%20launched%20an,efforts%20to%20take%20air%20pollution.>

£16m investment in local projects over the next four years underlining our commitment to reducing our carbon footprint.”

Rural Solutions to Climate Change

- **Cornwall**, Cornwall is developing a new Climate Change Development Plan Document, or DPD, to help tackle the climate emergency which outlines their vision to protect the environment and supports their aim to become carbon neutral by 2030. Their outline DPD supports green energy, enhancing the environment, more efficient housing, greener travel, and community resilience. As part of their efforts, Cornwall Council are creating the **Saints Trail: 30km of cycle and walking tracks** to tackle traffic congestion and dispel the myth that cars are the only option for travel in rural areas.

- **County Durham** runs the Business Energy Efficiency Project (BEEP), which has helped over 300 SMEs to save significant sums in energy bills and has reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 1,700 tonnes.

- **Canterbury** District Council in Kent has given its support to a 'green hydrogen' plant, drawing electricity from offshore wind farms to create hydrogen that will be used to power buses.

- In **Cambridgeshire** the entire village of Swaffham Prior is planning to shift from oil to a renewable energy source. Using 130 boreholes drilled 200m below ground, the village will generate thermal energy through a district heating network – saving heating costs for householders and 47,000 tonnes of carbon emissions over 40 years.

- In **Leicestershire**, the Council has built Airfield Business Park in Market Harborough which will cut carbon emission by 79.4 tonnes per year and installed solar panels across council and public sector buildings producing, equivalent to powering 675 homes for a year.

- In **North Yorkshire**, the council has reduced its street lighting energy consumption by investing £12m in LED technology, reducing 4,000 tonnes of carbon emissions and saving the taxpayer £1.4m a year.

Facts and Figures: Rural Challenges

- **Harder for people to switch to more sustainable transport:**
 - 43% of people living in rural England live more than 1 hour away from a hospital by public transport, compared to just 7% of people in urban areas⁶ .
 - 47% of people living in rural England live more than 30 minutes away from a town centre by public transport, compared to just 5% of people in urban areas.⁷
 - In 2017/18 people living in the most rural areas travelled almost twice as far per year than those in the most urban areas.

- **Need to switch to renewable heating**
 - Around 1 million households in Great Britain use oil fired central heating. Around a quarter of households that use oil fired central heating suffer from fuel poverty, the costs of heating a house with oil are around 50% higher than for grid gas.⁸

⁶ Statistical Digest of Rural England – March 2020, p114

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/875793/03_Statistical_Digest_of_Rural_England_2020_March_edition.pdf

⁷ Statistical Digest of Rural England – March 2020, p114

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/875793/03_Statistical_Digest_of_Rural_England_2020_March_edition.pdf

⁸ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05806/SN05806.pdf>

- **Rural areas are financially disadvantaged**
 - **The rural funding gap is nearly twice what it is for urban areas (£1bn vs £1.8bn).**⁹
 - **48% less per person funding (metro vs county):** councils in London receive £482 per head, whilst metropolitan boroughs and cities receive £351 per head, compared to £182 per person in county areas.¹⁰
 - **Funding rules are not consistently applied across government.** According to the New Local Government Network think tank, DEFRA's rural proofing guidance is not consistently applied by departments to national strategies, and there are no sanctions or penalties for departments that overlook the guidance.¹¹

Ends

For more information / bids, please contact:

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Editor's Notes

Full text of letter

Sir,

Our rural communities are at the frontline of feeling the effects of climate change. The driest of springs follows a winter of floods. Damaging our food production, bringing hardship to our villages and towns. But we can also be at the forefront of climate action too.

The countryside offers far more than a place to plant millions of trees to offset carbon emissions from elsewhere. Rural communities have always been a great source of national progress and innovation. This is why we have joined forces with UK100 to launch the Countryside Climate Network.

We are a new group of ambitious Council Leaders from predominantly rural parts of the country, collectively representing over 40% of England's land area.

Our goal is to ensure that the voice of rural knowledge and experience on climate action is listened to in Westminster. We need to be an active participant in transforming our national economy into one that saves, rather than harms, our environment. We stand ready to do our bit in the national interest of securing a net zero future for the UK.

Signatories:

- Cambridgeshire County Council

Cllr Steve Count, Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council and Chair of the Countryside Climate Network

- Adur District Council

Cllr Neil Parkin, Leader of Adur District Council

- Central Bedfordshire Council

Cllr Steven Dixon, Executive Member for Transformation and External Bodies, Central Bedfordshire Council.

- Cornwall Council

⁹ CCN (County Councils Network) authorities would face an underlying funding gap of £1.8bn in 2020/21, this would increase year on year to £3.6bn in 2024/25 which is an increase of 33.5% over the 5-year period. They would face a cumulative funding gap of £13.2bn which equates to 43.2% of the overall cumulative funding gap for England over the 5-year period. Metropolitan boroughs in 2021/22 will have a funding gap of £1bn which will increase to £1.9bn in 2024/25. Over the 5-year period metropolitan boroughs will cumulatively see a funding gap of £7.5bn, which is 24.7% of the overall funding gap. <http://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/download/2776/>

¹⁰ <http://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/unfair-council-funding-holding-back-social-mobility-in-rural-counties-mps-warn/>

¹¹ For example, the [2018 Inclusive Transport Strategy](#) recognises that people with disabilities who live in urban areas are more likely to have good access to a range of accessible modes of transport compared to those in rural areas, but the strategy offers no solutions for how the Government should address the specific challenges faced by disabled people in rural areas <https://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/2020/rural-areas-are-englands-land-of-opportunity/>

Cllr Edwina Hannaford, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Neighbourhoods, Cornwall Council

- Cotswold District Council

Cllr Joe Harris, Leader of Cotswold District Council

Cllr Rachel Coxcoon, Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Forward Planning, Cotswold District Council

- Durham County Council

Cllr Simon Henig, Leader of Durham County Council

Cllr Carl Marshall, Cabinet member, Economic Regeneration, Durham County Council

Cllr John D Clare, Climate Change Champion, Durham County Council

- Derbyshire County Council

Cllr Tony King, Cabinet Member for Clean Growth & Regeneration, Derbyshire County Council

- Essex County Council

Cllr Simon Walsh, Cabinet Member for Climate Change Action, Essex County Council

- Gloucestershire County Council

Cllr Nigel Moor, Cabinet Member Environment & Planning, Gloucestershire County Council

- Hampshire County Council

Cllr Keith Mans, Leader of Hampshire County Council

- Herefordshire Unitary Authority

Cllr Ellie Chowns, Cabinet Member for Environment, Economy and Skills, Herefordshire Council

- Leicestershire County Council

Cllr Blake Pain, Lead Member for Environment and Action on Climate Change, Leicestershire County Council

- North Yorkshire County Council

Cllr Carl Les, Leader of North Yorkshire County Council

- Shropshire Unitary Authority

Cllr Dean Carroll, Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Climate Change, Shropshire Council

- Somerset County Council

Cllr David Fothergill, Leader of Somerset County Council

- South Gloucestershire Unitary Authority

Cllr Toby Savage, Leader of South Gloucestershire Council

- South Lakeland District Council

Cllr Giles Archibald, Leader of South Lakeland District Council

Cllr Dyan Jones, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Localism, South Lakeland District Council

- Suffolk County Council

Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council

Cllr Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Environment & Public Protection, Suffolk County Council

- Wiltshire Unitary Authority

Cllr Philip Whitehead, Leader of Wiltshire Council

- Worthing Borough Council

Cllr Daniel Humphreys, Leader of Worthing Borough Council

The full list of members of the Countryside Climate Network:

	Authority Type	Political Lead	Area (sq miles)¹²	Population¹³
Cambridgeshire (Chair)	County Council	Con	820	852,520
Adur	District Council	Con	16.14	61,300
Canterbury	District Council	Con	119.3	149,000 ¹⁴
Central Bedfordshire	Unitary Authority	Con	276.3	283,600 ¹⁵

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_districts_by_area and https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_counties_of_the_United_Kingdom

¹³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/971694/county-population-england/>

¹⁴ <https://www2.canterbury.gov.uk/media/561740/Canterbury-District-Equality-and-Diversity-Profile-2010.pdf>

¹⁵ https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/27/about_your_council/180/statistics_and_census_information/2

Cornwall	Unitary Authority	NOC	1,369	568,210
Durham	Unitary Authority	Lab	859	924,000
Cotswold	District Council	Lib Dem	[part of Gloucestershire]	[part of Gloucestershire]
Derbyshire	County Council	Con	1,029	1,053,320
Essex	County Council	Con	1,542	1,832,750
Gloucestershire	County Council	Con	1,225	916,200
Hampshire	County Council	Con	1,622	1,844,250
Herefordshire	Unitary Authority	NOC	840	192,107
Leicestershire	County Council	Con	804	1,053,486
North Yorkshire	County Council	Con	3,341	1,101,660
Shropshire	Unitary Authority	Con	1,346	498,073
Somerset	County Council	Con	1,640	965,420
South Gloucestershire	Unitary Authority	Con	191.9	282,644
South Lakeland	District Council	Lib Dem	592	104,532 ¹⁶
Suffolk	County Council	Con	1,489	758,560
Wiltshire	Unitary Authority	Con	1,370	720,060
Worthing	Borough Council	Con	13	104,600
TOTALS			20,504	14,266,292
England			50,301¹⁷	55,980,000

Full text of article¹⁸

‘Climate change is a rural issue - our voice must be heard at Westminster’

From the devastating floods of last winter to the driest May on record. Extreme weather events have left meteorological records and communities in tatters.

As the Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council, I’m aware we are low lying and vulnerable to sea level rise, yet we also have the highest number of entrepreneurs per capita, many focused on advanced cleantech.

As we emerge from lockdown with a renewed appreciation of our environment, this is a moment to rebuild our economy and reshape our country.

From Cornwall to County Durham we’re taking a stand. We’re frustrated climate solutions to date have largely missed the rural voice. The Government’s £100bn infrastructure fund needs to support the opportunities our countryside can provide.

¹⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates>

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England#cite_note-ONSCOUNTRYPROFILES-2

¹⁸ [Published by The Telegraph](#)

It can be hard when public transport services don't receive funding to reach remote communities or investing in broadband for isolated areas isn't economically viable. This is compounded by a rural funding gap twice that of our urban counterparts. It is harder to attract funding for projects which favour urban concentrations yet may have less overall carbon reduction impact.

That's why 21 rural councils have joined forces with UK100 to create and launch the Countryside Climate Network for local leaders who want to find solutions and achieve Net Zero. To level up and build back better.

Our rural communities can do more than just plant trees, we know first-hand how climate change impacts our land, food crop productivity, rainfall runoff, abundance of wildlife and rhythm of nature.

There are examples around the country.

Cornwall is creating the Saints Trail as part of their whole county plan: 30km of cycle and walking tracks to dispel the myth that cars are the only option for travel in rural areas.

County Durham's Business Energy Efficiency Project is helping rural businesses reduce energy bills and carbon emissions.

Canterbury's support for a 'green hydrogen' plant, will draw electricity from offshore wind farms to power clean buses.

North Yorkshire has shifted to LED street lights, saving 4,000 tonnes of emissions and £1.4m.

And closer to home, the village of Swaffham Prior demonstrates how a whole community can shift from oil to a renewable energy source. A district heating solution will cut energy bills and 47,000 tonnes of carbon emissions over 40 years.

Imagine the impact if this were replicated in the 1 million households that still use oil fired central heating?

For the nation to tackle climate change and achieve Net Zero, the countryside must be at the heart of the conversation about a green recovery.

Cllr Steve Count is the Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council and Chair of the Countryside Climate Network

About UK100

UK100 is a network of highly ambitious local government leaders, who have pledged to secure the future for their communities by shifting to 100% clean energy by 2050. This is not just good for the planet but for the people and communities they serve, be they in villages, towns or cities. Local leaders are working together to create flourishing communities, seizing the opportunities of technology to create jobs and establishing a nationwide project of renewal, focussed on local needs and ambitions.

UK100 is the only network for UK local authorities, urban, suburban and rural, focused on climate and clean energy policy. We connect local leaders to each other, to business and to national government, enabling them to showcase their achievements, learn from each other and speak collectively to accelerate the transition to clean energy.

We work closely with elected representatives, policy experts and grassroots campaigners to make the clean energy transition a reality. This involves developing solutions to challenges faced by each and all of our local leaders, whatever their geography, history or makeup, so as to influence national government and building public support for clean energy solutions. www.uk100.org