



Fair Deal for the Countryside

There are serious problems for people who live in the countryside. Local schools, hospitals and post offices are under pressure and many face closure. Houses are too expensive, there are hardly any buses to get around and supermarkets are giving farmers a raw deal. This simply isn't fair. Liberal Democrats are proud that we represent a large part of rural Britain. We believe a fair society is one where people can afford to work and live in the countryside, to be a place where the services we all depend on are accessible for everyone. We will provide more affordable homes for local people; cut taxes for village shops and pubs to help them get through the recession; keep post offices open; give local people a say on bus fares and routes in their area; and stop big food companies bullying farmers.

Keep local Post Offices and save rural shops and pubs. We will keep Post Offices open in rural areas where they're the lynchpin of community life, ending the Labour and Conservative closure programme. And in villages where there's only one shop or pub, we'll cut business rates to keep them open.

Improve local bus services. There aren't enough buses for people to get around, especially older 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.

Affordable homes for all. We will provide more homes for local people by increasing councils' powers over second homes and promoting schemes for affordable homes like equity mortgages and 'Home on the Farm' which encourage farmers to convert existing buildings into affordable housing. Local councils will be given the power to identify the needs of the community so that more affordable housing is built in the areas which really need it.

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 an independent regulator of Britain's food market.

Reform CAP payments to target support for farmers. We will introduce a minimum level for the Single Farm Payment 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. That will free money for extra support for hill farmers and cheap loans to help farmers invest in environmentally friendly biogas digesters.