



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Rural Planning Review:

Call for Evidence



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# Introduction

1. The Government is committed to raising the nation's productivity, and the rural economy is an important part of that plan. The Rural Productivity Plan<sup>1</sup> - *Towards a one nation economy: A 10 point plan for boosting productivity in rural areas* – was published on 20 August 2015. It sets out commitments to help boost rural productivity and ensure rural areas play their part in the economy. It recognises the importance of rural areas to the national economy, and the contribution that improved productivity would make to those areas. The Rural Productivity Plan complements the Chancellor's broader productivity plan<sup>2</sup>, *Fixing the foundations: Creating a more prosperous nation*, published on 10 July 2015.
2. The Rural Productivity Plan commits Government to 'review the planning and regulatory constraints facing rural businesses and measures that can be taken to address them, including how improved permitted development rights in rural areas can support new homes, jobs and innovation'. In conjunction with the Productivity Plan, it also commits Government to 'review the current threshold for agricultural buildings to convert to residential buildings'. The Rural Planning Review Call for Evidence takes forward the planning elements of these two commitments.
3. This Call for Evidence is published jointly by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. It seeks evidence on how the planning system can better support rural life and invites ideas about how the planning system could further support sustainable rural life and businesses. Contributions are invited from all interested parties. The evidence provided will inform further thinking on delivering the commitment to support rural productivity.
4. The other planning commitments in the Rural Productivity Plan are being taken forward in parallel with this Review, with some contained in the Housing and Planning Bill. These include: further action to ensure planning decisions are taken on time; introduction of permission in principle for minor developments; improved neighbourhood plan making and allocation of land for new homes, including use of rural exception sites to deliver Starter Homes; and, introduction of a dispute resolution mechanism for section 106 agreements.
5. We published *Regulation and Innovation: developing Defra's innovation plan*, which takes forward the commitment to review the regulatory constraints facing rural businesses. Details of this review can be found at <https://defra.dialogue-app.com/regulatory-barriers-to-and-enablers-of-innovation>.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/454866/10-point-plan-rural-productivity-pb14335.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/454866/10-point-plan-rural-productivity-pb14335.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/443898/Productivity\\_Plan\\_web.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/443898/Productivity_Plan_web.pdf)

# Setting the scene

## The rural economy

6. England's rural areas make a substantial and vitally important contribution to the economy, accounting for around £210 billion, or 16%, of England's total output. Taken as a whole, the structure of economies in rural areas is now reasonably similar to that of urban areas. Manufacturing represents 13% of GVA in predominantly rural local authority areas compared with 8% in predominantly urban areas. The service sector is also significant across rural areas with business services, for example, representing 10% of rural output.
7. Rural areas host around half a million businesses, over 25% of all registered businesses in England. Many of the businesses operating in rural areas are small or medium sized enterprises. Economic activity in rural areas is increasingly diverse, with significant manufacturing and services sectors, alongside more traditional farming. Knowledge-based and creative industries are also growing rapidly.
8. Rural areas in England are home to 17.6% of England's total population and 15% of jobs. Many people in the rural economy are involved in agriculture, either directly or indirectly. High tech and manufacturing industries also provide jobs in rural areas. Home-working is more prevalent in rural than in urban areas, and tends to involve higher skilled, higher wage roles, making use of technology to connect them to customers and the wider economy. Tourism also provides significant employment. We are seeing net internal migration from urban to rural areas, including of highly skilled people attracted by the excellent quality of life on offer.
9. Enabling rural businesses to grow and diversify helps rural communities to thrive. Businesses provide employment for local people, helping them to stay in their communities and sustaining local services, such as schools, pubs and shops. We need to ensure the planning system is responsive to managing the changing demands on the rural landscape and supports the growth of the rural economy.

## Agricultural sector

10. There is a trend towards adding greater value to activities taking place within the agricultural sector, facilitated in part by improved information communications. Adding value to farm businesses has been a factor in broadening the rural economy to encompass a greater variety of businesses in manufacturing, food processing, the service sector, retail, power supply and tourism. Farmers have an important role, not only in producing food, but also in maintaining the landscape that we recognise and enjoy as the English countryside, and which draws people to rural areas. They can provide services to support the tourist industry including Bed and Breakfast, the creation of new tourist attractions and the provision of local produce to restaurants and farm shops.
11. Climate change, pressures on the environment and the need to be increasingly efficient financially have had an impact. Farmers have responded by developing more self-sufficient and sustainable agricultural practices. Farmers are adapting their businesses

to be more efficient and flexible, including diversifying into other areas to provide more reliable and constant income streams, to supplement agriculture. The industry is developing uses for secondary products, promoting the use of renewables and making use of on-farm reservoirs.

12. The farming industry is successfully adapting to increasing consumer demand for produce the whole year round, such as through improved storage methods and the increased use of polytunnels. These enable growers to lengthen their growing and supply seasons and to increase the range of crops grown.
13. Changes and improvements in technology have enabled food producers to increase the mechanisation of their sector, intensifying output and increasing the use of new machinery and high tech products, such as GPS systems to control vehicle movements. All of which impact on farm business accommodation and infrastructure needs.
14. Better connectivity has led to farmers and landowners diversifying into renewable energy, such as wind turbines, solar panels and anaerobic digesters, producing energy for themselves and to sell, to provide an additional income stream. Farmers also utilise their buildings to provide storage facilities or office space for local businesses, providing much needed business accommodation.
15. All these developments in the rural economy and agricultural business place new demands on the planning system. We want to understand what those demands are and where there may be opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the system to make it more responsive to developing businesses in rural areas.

## Overview of the planning system

16. The planning system provides an important control on the use of land, balancing the rights of the individual landowner with those of the community. Decisions on planning applications are made on the basis of neighbourhood plans and Local Plans. If an individual intends to develop their property, by building, extending or altering an existing building, or changing the use of their land, they need to obtain planning permission. However, there are also circumstances where planning permission for development may be granted through national permitted development rights, sometimes with a light touch prior approval process to consider a limited but important range of planning issues, which may include flood risk evaluation. Nationally, 88% of planning applications are currently granted.
17. Since 2010, the planning system has undergone significant reform. The planning application and planning appeals processes have been streamlined, reducing the bureaucratic burden on businesses. This was recognised in the Government Response<sup>3</sup> to the MacDonald Report<sup>4</sup> from May 2011 - *Striking a balance: reducing burdens; increasing responsibility; earning recognition. A report on better regulation in*

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/69506/pb13717-farmregulationtaskforce-response.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69506/pb13717-farmregulationtaskforce-response.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/69201/pb13527-farm-reg-task-report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69201/pb13527-farm-reg-task-report.pdf)

*farming and food businesses*. Reducing planning regulation across all sectors remains one of our strategic objectives.

18. In March 2012 we published our National Planning Policy Framework<sup>5</sup>, which reduced national planning policy from 1,300 pages to 50. The National Planning Policy Framework clearly sets out how planning can be used as a tool to support a prosperous rural economy<sup>6</sup>. It supports sustainable growth and the expansion of all types of business and enterprise, using new and existing buildings; promoting diversification of agricultural businesses; supporting sustainable rural tourism; and, promoting the retention of local services and facilities.
19. The National Planning Policy Framework is supplemented by planning guidance<sup>7</sup>, published in March 2014. We have also introduced stronger performance measures for local planning authorities. All these measures enable more planning decisions to be made more quickly, and appropriate development to take place sooner.
20. As part of our work to streamline the planning system, we have extended permitted development rights so that more types of development can take place without the requirement for a full planning application. These are set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015<sup>8</sup>. Permitted development rights cover a wide range of development types, including agriculture, change of use and business extensions. Some permitted development rights do not apply in some protected areas.
21. We would be interested in hearing about experiences of the planning system in rural areas, both from those who have applied for planning permission and those who make use of permitted development rights. We are also interested in how the permitted development rights in Part 6 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 are being used. We would also like to hear about experiences of the planning system in developing farm shops, polytunnels and on-farm reservoirs.

## **Use of agricultural buildings for residential purposes**

22. The need to increase housing supply is a national challenge and a particular issue in rural areas where stock is limited and house prices relatively high. The government wants to increase housing availability in rural areas, to enable villages to thrive, whilst protecting the Green Belt and countryside. Complementing the wider work on rural housing provision, such as the use of rural exception sites for starter homes, we are reviewing the current threshold for agricultural buildings to convert to residential buildings.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/policy/>

<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 28 <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/policy/achieving-sustainable-development/delivering-sustainable-development/3-supporting-a-prosperous-rural-economy/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/596/contents/made>

23. The permitted development rights allowing change of use from agricultural to residential were introduced in April 2014. They are set out in Part 3 Class Q<sup>9</sup> of Schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. Part 3 Class Q allows for a change of use from a building last used for agricultural or in agricultural use on 20 March 2013, or has been in agricultural use for at least 10 years, to change to residential use. The current thresholds limit change of use to a maximum of 450m<sup>2</sup> of floorspace and up to three additional dwellings across the farm. Operational works are also allowed. Prior approval is required from the local planning authority so that they can consider transport and highways impacts, noise impacts, contamination risks, flood risks, location and siting, and design or external appearance of the building.
24. The government published guidance<sup>10</sup> in March 2015, clarifying the grounds for granting prior approval. The planning statistics have shown that the approval rate has increased to around two thirds<sup>11</sup> of applications since the guidance was introduced. These rights are popular and well used.

## Call for Evidence

25. We are seeking evidence on the effectiveness of the current planning system for businesses in the rural context and asking what improvements could be made to the planning system to support rural businesses to flourish.
26. We want to hear from anyone involved, either directly or indirectly, in development in rural areas. In particular, we are interested in hearing from rural businesses about their experiences of:
- the planning application process
  - using permitted development rights, such as agricultural, business extensions and change of use.
27. We are also reviewing the current thresholds for agricultural buildings to convert to residential buildings and would like to hear views on how these could better support the delivery of new homes.
28. We would welcome evidence of where the planning system is working well and where it could be improved. Where issues are identified by organisations, respondents should indicate whether these are one-off cases or whether they are widespread problems. We are particularly interested in hearing about issues which specifically relate to planning in the rural context and which would not be of concern to users of the planning system in urban areas, such as development which has a different impact in a rural setting.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/596/schedule/2/part/3/crossheading/class-q-agricultural-buildings-to-dwellinghouses/made>

<sup>10</sup> <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/when-is-permission-required/what-are-permitted-development-rights/permitted-development-rights-for-the-change-of-use-of-agricultural-buildings/>

<sup>11</sup> Table PDR 2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-planning-application-statistics>



29. This Call for Evidence does not cover improved mobile coverage and telecommunications provision, an issue being taken forward separately following a Call for Evidence in Summer 2015. The broader provision of housing supply, aside from changing the use of agricultural buildings to residential, is also excluded because of extensive work elsewhere, including a consultation launched on 7 December 2015 on proposed changes to national planning policy in regard to the provision of housing.
30. Respondents are asked to complete one of three complementary sets of questions. Rural businesses or businesses that operate in rural areas, as individual users of the planning system, are asked to answer the set of questions in Annex A, about their experiences of the planning system. Respondents from local planning authorities are asked to share their views by completing the questions in Annex B. The third set of questions, in Annex C, is for everyone else, including representational organisations, planning consultants, members of the public and other interested parties, to submit their perspective of planning in rural areas.

## Timescales and contacts

31. We request that evidence is submitted by 21 April 2016. We may not consider evidence received after this date. The Government will consider the evidence provided and use it to inform its decisions on future improvements to the planning system. Any changes will be implemented through appropriate amendments to policy, guidance or legislation.
32. Wherever possible we ask that evidence is entered on Survey Monkey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RBDXGFD>.
33. Alternatively, by email to [RuralPlanningReview@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:RuralPlanningReview@communities.gsi.gov.uk) or by post to Rural Planning Review, Department for Communities and Local Government, 3/NE, Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF.
34. The Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs are jointly leading the Rural Planning Review.
35. This Call for Evidence has been sent to the interested parties listed below. We would particularly welcome evidence from and engagement with these parties.

Action with Communities in Rural England  
Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport  
British Institute of Agricultural Consultants  
British Property Federation  
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England  
Central Association of Agricultural Valuers  
Chief Economic Development Officers' Society  
Country Land and Business Association  
Countryside Alliance  
County Councils Network  
Environment Agency  
Federation of Master Builders

Federation of Small Businesses  
Friends of the Earth  
Historic England  
Historic Houses Association  
House Builders Federation  
Institute of Economic Development  
Landscape Institute  
Local Government Association  
London Councils  
National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty  
National Association of Local Councils  
National Farmers Union  
National Parks England  
National Trust  
Natural England  
Planning authorities in England  
Planning Officers' Society  
Town and Country Planning Association  
Royal Town Planning Institute  
Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors  
Rural Services Network  
Small Farms Association  
Tenant Farmers Association  
Tourism Alliance

# Annex A: Questions for individual users of the planning system

## Contact / background details

Question 1 Name, business / organisation name, address / contact details

Question 2 Name of your local planning authority

Question 3 Is your business in a protected area (National Park, the Broads, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, conservation area or World Heritage Site)?

Yes	No	[Go to Question 5]
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Question 4 Name of protected area

Question 5 What type of business are you? Please tick all that apply.

Arable farmer	Food processing	
Livestock farmer	B&B	
Dairy farmer	Pub with rooms	
Poultry farmer	Hotel	
Mixed farmer (specify)	Retail	
Horticulture	Café / restaurant	
Other farmer (specify)	Pub	
Agricultural supplies / machinery	Transport hire	
Industry	Storage	
Manufacturing	Office	
Research laboratory	Domestic food and goods supplier	
Light engineering / mechanical	Energy production	
Visitor attraction	Outdoor activity	
Professional services	Forestry	
Other entertainment / recreation (specify)	Other services (specify)	
Housebuilder	Education	
Other construction	Other (specify)	

Question 6 Has your business changed / diversified in the past 5 years?

Yes	No	[Go to Question 8]
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Question 7 How has your business changed / diversified in the past 5 years?

## Use of the planning system

Question 8 Have you carried out any development<sup>12</sup> in the past 5 years?

Yes	No	[Go to Question 10]
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Question 9 Please detail what development you have carried out in the past 5 years

Question 10 Have you submitted any planning applications, prior approval applications or lawful development certificates in the past 5 years?

Yes	No	[Go to Question 12]
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Question 11 What was the outcome of your planning application(s), prior approval application(s) and lawful development certificate applications?

Question 12 Have you used the permitted development rights contained in Part 6<sup>13</sup> (agricultural and forestry) of the General Permitted Development Order?

Yes	No	[Go to Question 14]
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Question 13 What development did you carry out under which classes of Part 6 (agricultural and forestry) permitted development rights?

Question 14 Have you carried out any development involving a farm shop, polytunnel or on-farm reservoir in the past 5 years?

Yes	No	[Go to Question 16]
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Question 15 What were your experiences of the planning system in developing a farm shop, polytunnel and / or on-farm reservoir?

Question 16 Are the thresholds and conditions of the current permitted development rights appropriate?

Yes	[Go to Question 18]	No	
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Question 17 If not, what should the thresholds be?

Question 18 Where do you source your planning advice?

	Tick all that apply	Specify
Planning consultant		
Local planning authority		
Government guidance		
Other		

<sup>12</sup> Development includes new structures, altering or extending existing structures, change of use, mining operations

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/596/schedule/2/part/6/made>

Question 19 In developing your business, have you ever not submitted a planning application because:

You assumed it would be refused	
Your pre-application discussions suggested it would be refused	
You felt the process was too costly to risk a refusal	
You were not sure the development proposal suited the setting	
You understood that other similar applications had been turned down	
You did not want to take time out from running your business	
You thought it would be too complicated	
You decided to submit a less ambitious planning application instead	
Other	

**Use of agricultural buildings for residential purposes**

Question 20 Are the current permitted development thresholds and conditions allowing change of use from agricultural to residential appropriate?

Yes		No	
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Question 21 What improvements could be made to the existing permitted development right allowing change of use from agricultural to residential?

**Other comments**

Question 22 Please let us know if you have any other comments on planning in rural areas.

# Annex B: Questions for local planning authorities

Question 1 Name, role, LPA, address / contact details

Question 2 Is your response on behalf of an organisation or is it a personal response?

Organisational		Personal	
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Question 3 What type of local planning authority are you?

Type of local planning authority	Tick
District	
County	
Unitary	
London Borough	
National Park	

Question 4 What type of development comes forward in rural areas?

Question 5 What type of planning applications do you receive from rural areas?

Question 6 What development occurs under permitted development rights in rural areas?

Question 7 What types of permitted development take place under Part 6<sup>14</sup> (agricultural and forestry) in your area?

Question 8 Are you involved in the development of farm shops, polytunnels or on-farm reservoirs?

Yes		No	[Go to Question 10]
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Question 9 What was your involvement in the development of farm shops, polytunnels and / or on-farm reservoirs?

Question 10 Is there other development which would benefit from permitted development rights?

Yes		No	[Go to Question 12]
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Question 11 Please detail what other development would benefit from permitted development rights.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/596/schedule/2/part/6/made>

Question 12 Do planning applications in rural areas require any additional expertise consideration of rural and / or agricultural issues?

Yes	No	[Go to Question 15]
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Question 13 What additional expertise on rural or agricultural issues do you require?

Question 14 Where do you source your additional expertise on rural or agricultural issues?

	Tick whatever applies	Specify
In-house		
Outsource		
Contractor		
Agent		
Other		

Question 15 What is your source of best practice in rural planning issues?

Question 16 How does your local plan support rural productivity? Are there new rural issues emerging in your area which are not dealt with in your local plan?

Question 17 How do you engage with and provide support for different business sectors in rural areas on planning issues?

### Use of agricultural buildings for residential purposes

Question 18 Are the current thresholds and conditions allowing change of use from agricultural to residential appropriate?

Yes	No	
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Question 19 What improvements could be made to the existing permitted development right allowing change of use from agricultural to residential?

### Other comments

Question 20 Please let us know if you have any other comments on planning in rural areas.

# Annex C: Questions for organisations, interested parties and others

Question 1 Name, role, organisation name, address / contact details

Question 2 Is your response on behalf of an organisation or is it a personal response?

Organisational	<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Question 3 What type of organisation / person are you?

Type of organisation	Tick
Professional / representational organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non Governmental Organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
National campaigning body	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planning consultant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voluntary / charity sector	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community / residents group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member of the public	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 4 What type of development are you involved in in rural areas?

Question 5 What types of permitted development take place under Part 6<sup>15</sup> (agricultural and forestry) that you are aware of?

Question 6 Have you been involved in the development of a farm shop, polytunnel or on-farm reservoir?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	[Go to Question 8]
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Question 7 What were your experiences of the planning system in developing a farm shop, polytunnel and / or on-farm reservoir?

Question 8 Is there other development which would benefit from permitted development rights?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	[Go to Question 10]
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Question 9 Please detail what other development would benefit from permitted development rights.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/596/schedule/2/part/6/made>



Question 10 In your view, what planning issues need to be considered for development in rural areas?

Question 11 In your view, are these issues given appropriate consideration in the planning process?

Yes	[Go to Question 13]	No	
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Question 12 If not, how can these issues be given appropriate consideration in the planning process?

Question 13 Please detail any local planning authority best practice which you would like to highlight.

### **Use of agricultural buildings for residential purposes**

Question 14 Are the current thresholds and conditions allowing change of use from agricultural to residential appropriate?

Yes		No	
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Question 15 What improvements could be made to the existing permitted development right allowing change of use from agricultural to residential?

### **Other comments**

Question 16 Please let us know if you have any other comments on planning in rural areas.