

# PRESS RELEASE

## **ACRE sets out key challenges to Government in rural manifesto**

Leading rural network ACRE has called on the next Government to deliver a fair deal for rural communities in its newly launched 2015 manifesto.

The charity – the national voice for England’s rural community councils - is urging politicians to improve health, wealth and access for the millions of people who live in the countryside.

The manifesto sets out ACRE’s 12 key asks in the run-up to the General Election on May 7. The pleas are based on the intelligence it collects from its Network members, who reach 52,000 grassroots organisations.

The ACRE Network is calling for:

- An urgent review of the criteria for Non-Emergency Patient Transport to address discrimination faced by rural residents.
- The Minimum Practice Income Guarantee for rural GP surgeries to be reinstated.
- A review of the rural delivery of the Energy Companies Obligation (ECO) energy efficiency programme.
- A review of the advice and support available for communities who want to set up renewable energy schemes
- The LEADER funding programme to benefit as many communities across rural England as possible.
- A fair share for rural areas of the funding available to Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- Withdrawal of the ‘bedroom tax’ on properties in rural communities with a population under 3,000.
- A commitment to provide a proportion of affordable housing on all rural developments.
- Investment in alternative broadband solutions for communities not covered by the national rollout.

More follows

- Investment on more 'on the ground' support for rural communities to develop social enterprise solutions for the services they lack
- Investment in recruiting and training volunteers, especially younger drivers, for community transport schemes.
- A review of concessionary bus travel in rural areas to balance the needs of users and providers.

ACRE chief executive Janice Banks said: "Through our work with communities, the ACRE Network has a deep understanding of how Government policy affects the 20% of the population who live in the countryside.

"Politicians need to listen to and act upon the problems faced by rural people – from the struggles older people face to get to health appointments to the urgent need for more affordable rural housing.

"We urge the next Government to rise to the challenge and deliver a fair deal for rural communities."

Ends

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