



Bishop of Newcastle appointed President of the Rural Coalition

The Rt Rev'd Dr Helen-Ann Hartley, Bishop of Newcastle, has been appointed President of the Rural Coalition, an alliance of twelve national organisations who work together to promote a shared vision of a living, working countryside in England. The new role underlines Bishop Helen-Ann's longstanding interest in rural affairs.

Bishop Helen-Ann succeeds the Rt Rev'd Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans, the Coalition's first President. Since his appointment in 2016, he has raised the profile of rural issues with government and nationally to ensure the rural voice is heard. He has also championed rural issues in the House of Lords, including leading a debate about the importance of a strong rural economy for the country as a whole.

The Diocese of Newcastle covers Northumberland and the City of Newcastle, from the Tyne to the Tweed, including a very rural area, giving Bishop Helen-Ann first-hand experience of the economic, social and environmental issues facing those living and working in rural England. Bishop Helen-Ann said: 'I am delighted to be taking on this important role at such a critical time. The Rural Coalition shows great strength in its partnership model, ably advocating for the challenges that our diverse rural communities face. Throughout my episcopal ministry: in the Waikato region of New Zealand's North Island, in North Yorkshire's Diocese of Leeds and now, in the Diocese of Newcastle I have sought to listen to the experiences of rural life and work. I look forward in this new role to helping give voice to the needs of these communities now that they might flourish and grow into the future as a key recognised sector in our nation's wellbeing and development for the common good of all'.

Welcoming the appointment, Margaret Clark CBE, Chair of the Rural Coalition said: "We are delighted that Bishop Helen-Ann has agreed to take on the role of President. Given her background and her interest in rural and countryside issues, we know that she will be a strong advocate for rural communities and businesses. We are enormously grateful to Bishop Alan for his support and wise counsel over the last eight years and thank him for his commitment to the Coalition's work. Bishop Helen-Ann joins us at an important time for rural England. As a recent report for the Coalition has shown, by tackling underinvestment and structural inequalities, rural areas have the potential to make a significant contribution to the nation's growth and a strong rural voice is needed to ensure that the right policy framework is in place to enable that to happen."

Ends

Notes to Editors:

1. The Right Revd Dr Helen-Ann Hartley was inaugurated as Bishop of Newcastle 22 April 2023, having been ordained into the Church of England in 2005 as deacon in the Diocese of Oxford and a priest a year later. In 2010, Bishop Helen-Ann relocated to New Zealand where, in 2013, she was elected to become the Bishop of Waikato on the country's North Island. In 2017, she was appointed as the Bishop of Ripon. Bishop

Helen-Ann was born in Edinburgh and was brought up in the Scottish Borders and in Sunderland, where her father was a priest in the Church of England. She is married to Myles, a musician from Cumbria.

2. "Reigniting Rural Futures", a report produced for the Rural Coalition by Pragmatix Advisory shows that with the right policy framework and targeted investment, the rural economy could increase productivity significantly, leading to an additional £9 billion to £19 billion per year in tax revenues. This growth would not only support rural communities but also have far-reaching benefits for the national economy, helping to fund essential public services and drive broader economic initiatives. The Treasury stands to gain substantially from an invigorated rural economy. The full report can be found at <https://acre.org.uk/rural-coalition-reigniting-rural-futures-rural-communities-capacity-to-boost-economic-growth/>

3. The Rural Coalition aims to make sure that policies and their implementation recognise and take account of the particular circumstances of rural communities and businesses and are tailored to meet their needs. Members of the Rural Coalition are:

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE); CPRE – The Countryside Charity; The Arthur Rank Centre; National Association of Local Councils; National Centre for Rural Health and Care; National Farmers Union; National Housing Federation; Plunkett UK; Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors; Royal Town Planning Institute; Rural Services Network; Town and Country Planning Association.