

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP

7 September 2022

Dear Prime Minister

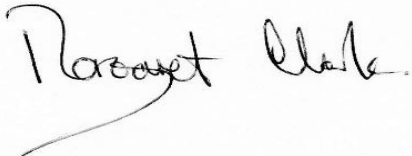
On behalf of the Rural Coalition, may I congratulate you on your appointment as Prime Minister. We are very much looking forward to working with you and your Government to address the challenges facing rural communities and businesses in England and to unlock their potential to contribute to the nation's future success.

You will know from your own experience in your constituency and elsewhere that, whilst many of the issues facing rural areas are the same as those for the country as a whole, circumstances in rural areas may differ and require differing approaches. It is critical, therefore, that policies and the means of implementing them are rurally sensitive. As you will no doubt be aware, the Rural Coalition is an alliance of thirteen national organisations who share a vision of a living, working countryside and work together in common cause. Through their national and local networks, our members bring a wealth of experience and expertise of the key economic and social issues affecting rural areas both now and in the future and knowledge of how they can be addressed in the most effective and appropriate ways. As a contribution to the recent leadership contest, we wrote to you setting out a number of key questions which we believe are fundamental to the future prosperity and wellbeing of rural communities and businesses. (I attach a copy of our letter and the questions for information.) We would now welcome the positive opportunity to work with you to develop and implement solutions to these important issues.

Meanwhile, the immediate challenge of the cost of living is a major concern for those in rural areas, as elsewhere, but, as you will recognise, the impact and nature of the challenge may affect rural dwellers and businesses differently, for example those properties off-grid or remote from key services. We know you will be looking at ways of tackling these issues across the country, but we would urge you to ensure that any measures introduced are properly rural-proofed from the outset. We should, of course, be pleased to offer any advice or help to enable this to happen.

We look forward to a positive and constructive relationship with you and your Ministers as we seek to ensure that rural areas of England play their full part in the country's future prosperity.

Yours sincerely



Margaret Clark CBE
Chair, Rural Coalition

Members of the Rural Coalition: Action with Communities in Rural England, CPRE – The Countryside Charity, Country Land and Business Association, The Arthur Rank Centre, National Association of Local Councils, National Centre for Rural Health and Care, National Farmers Union, National Housing Federation, Plunkett Foundation, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Royal Town Planning Institute, Rural Services Network, Town and Country Planning Association.

President: Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans

Rural Coalition letter Re Unlocking the Potential of Rural Areas (28.07.22)

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP

28 July 2022

Dear Ms Truss

Unlocking the Potential of Rural Areas: questions for the Conservative Party Leadership candidates

You will know from your own, very rural, constituency, that rural communities and businesses face many challenges, from the rising cost of living to the move to Net Zero. The issues are not peculiar to rural people, but the circumstances of rural places – isolation, distance from markets and services, competition for housing – can exacerbate problems and require solutions tailored to local needs. In England, rural areas are home to 9.3 million people, about 17 % of the population, with predominantly rural areas home to some 545,000 registered businesses. Rural areas make an important contribution to the nation's economic and social wellbeing, but many are held back by historical and underlying problems; low wages; limited opportunities (including to skills and post 16 education); older populations: poor access to services (including health); higher costs of living (including for Council Tax); and lack of affordable housing based on local earnings.

The Rural Coalition is an alliance of thirteen national organisations who subscribe to a vision for a living and working countryside in England. Each member brings its own perspective but given many shared values, we seek to be more influential by joining in common cause. The Coalition is anxious to ensure that the needs and circumstances of rural areas, and the

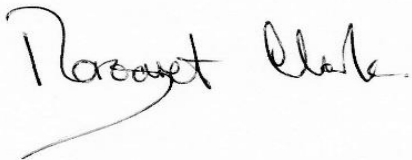
people and businesses within them, should not be overlooked in the debate about the future leadership of the country. We are, therefore, inviting you, and your fellow candidate, to consider the key issues of importance to the future of our rural areas.

I attach a note of some specific questions which we believe need to be addressed and on which we should welcome your reflections and response. I appreciate that there will be many calls on your time over the next few weeks but these are important areas of concern to the Coalition and its members and their networks in every constituency covering rural areas throughout England. We hope, therefore, that you will be able to address the points raised.

We fully recognise that the nation as a whole is facing immense demands and challenges. Our primary concern is to ensure that rural issues will not be sidelined or overlooked but will receive proper attention and equitable treatment in the future.

I am writing in similar terms to your fellow candidate, Mr Sunak. For clarity, the Coalition will be making the letters and questions available to its members and more widely.

Yours sincerely



Margaret Clark CBE
Chair, Rural Coalition

July 2022

Questions for the Conservative leadership candidates from the Rural Coalition

1. Evidence shows that urban-focussed policies and delivery frequently overlook or marginalise the needs and circumstances of rural communities and businesses.
Question: How will you ensure that rural proofing of proposals before they are finalised is fully embedded and becomes a reality across government?
2. Rural areas receive over 35% less per head in local government funding and residents pay some 20% more in Council Tax for fewer services; the cost of providing essential public services is 67% funded by Council Tax payers in rural areas compared to 55% in urban areas.
Question: How will you address the disparities in funding between urban and rural areas and introduce a fairer funding regime for both funding formulae and other funding streams?

3. Housing in rural areas is unaffordable for those on local wages or low incomes, both for purchase and rent, which undermines the economic and social viability of rural communities.

Question: How will you bring about an appropriate and meaningful increase in the supply of housing, affordable on local earnings in rural areas, safeguarded for future generations?

4. Rural economies go beyond farming and the visitor economy and many are diverse and innovative but they are hampered by lack of access to skilled labour, training, finance and suitable premises and appropriate support.

Question: How will you unlock the potential of rural economies and enable rural businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive?

5. The transition to net zero presents an opportunity in rural areas but also a challenge, particularly for those places with restricted infrastructure, especially energy, broadband and mobile coverage.

Question: How will you ensure a 'just' transition to net zero and improve infrastructure to ensure that rural residents and businesses are not unfairly penalised?

6. Rural people have limited access to services others take for granted, such as health and social care, post-16 education, banking and other facilities, exacerbated by poor or non-existent public transport.

Question: How will you address the challenges of providing equity of access to services for rural people and improve local transport to make it more flexible and sensitive to local needs?

7. Rural communities have demonstrated resilience and ability to help themselves through local parish councils, community ownership of key assets and local support networks. But they depend on a limited cadre of volunteers and suffer problems of capacity.

Question: How will you provide support for the social infrastructure needed to enable rural communities to make the best use of local resources and networks?

8. There are many competing claims on rural areas and their role in the nation's future wellbeing is fragmented and unclear.

Question: Will you commit to setting out a comprehensive strategy or vision for rural areas which will set out ways to unlock their potential to contribute to the future prosperity of the nation?