



**HADLOW
COLLEGE**

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**HADLOW COLLEGE
AND RURAL PLC
(KENT) PRE-2017
ELECTION MANIFESTO.**

The General Election is on Thursday 8th June. The next Government – in fact everyone who sits in the House of Westminster – will be facing a huge and growing challenge yet it is one that so far has been – rarely – barely - touched upon by any of the main parties.

Simply put, the challenge relates to “rural”.

“Rural” is frequently dismissed as of ‘no consequence’.

“Rural” is misunderstood and undervalued.

Yet “Rural” is vastly and fundamentally important internationally, nationally, regionally and locally in terms of

- The Economy
- Farming and Food
- Food Security
- Climate Change
- The Environment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Homes and Infrastructure
- Education and Training
- Recreation and Leisure
- Social Wellbeing

We often hear the comment ‘Do more for the countryside’. Yes Rural does need (and deserve) special consideration but this should not mean that it is regarded as whingeing. Instead, Government must evaluate and recognise the vital contributions made by ‘RURAL’ bearing in mind that ‘the countryside’ is a valuable asset that benefits – in a variety of ways – every single person in this country.

Successive governments have comprehensively failed to recognise the fundamentally crucial part played by the RURAL sector industries – most specifically agriculture and production horticulture. The new Government must position farming and food at the very top of its agenda.

RURAL should be central to policy decisions. It is simple: without the vastly diverse and essentially important contributions made by ‘RURAL’, humankind’s survival could be threatened.

1. The Economy

‘RURAL’ deserves far greater recognition and consideration in relation to the benefits derived by the national economy. In 2015/16 there were 537,000 businesses employing 3.5 million people registered in rural areas; this accounted for 24 per cent of all registered businesses in England. There are more registered businesses per head of population in predominantly rural areas than in predominantly urban areas (excluding London).

In 2015 there were 53 registered business start-ups per 10,000 population in predominantly urban areas (excluding London) compared with 49 per 10,000 population in predominantly rural areas.

Over a long period of time governments have failed the rural industries – most specifically agriculture and commercial horticulture. The new Government must redress this situation by putting farming, food and the associated industries at the top of the agenda.

2. Farming and Food

At the current time Great Britain is approximately 60% self-sufficient.

The growth of global population combined with the detrimental aspects of climate change indicate that it is unlikely the UK will be able to continue to import food at the current rate. At the same time, national population is growing thus threatening greater imbalance. We must increase output and produce more food.

Our farmers and growers are capable of increasing production but they need helpful Government policies to assist them.

At the same time the Government must effect bilateral trade agreements, work with other countries to increase research, combat disease and expand output whilst simultaneously protecting the environment.

The UK's farmers and growers are immensely skilled but they are often hampered by unhelpful regulations and hindered by unnecessary documentation.

The Government will need to replace EU subsidies (protected by the present Government up to 2020) with a system that is simpler and fairer whilst ensuring the safeguarding of standards remains central to policy.

3. Food Security

'Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life'. (World Food Summit, 1996)

It is only by introducing comprehensively sustainable policies that the Government can ensure the UK achieves Food Security in ways that comply with the British way of life. Valuing and supporting British farmers must include a reduction of red tape and tax reforms that make it possible for them to earn a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

Demand for graduate and skilled entrants is reaching crisis point in some agriculture and horticulture sectors. The Government must be proactive about alerting young people of differing academic abilities to the wide range of secure and progressive career opportunities offered by farming and food production.

At the same time the terms and conditions agreed with Europe - and increasingly, other parts of the world - post-Brexit are fundamental factors. Government policies must maintain economic stability aligned to sustainable growth whilst also taking account of burgeoning world population, the effects of climate change and oil price fluctuations whilst simultaneously taking measures to improve energy efficiency.

4. Climate Change

Water shortages and the opposite - flooding - resulting from climate change are predicted to be two areas of particular concern in the UK and the impact in rural areas could be considerable.

The ways in which climate change adversely affects other parts of the globe will also have the potential to affect the UK's ability to import food.

Despite a lot of work being undertaken by climatologists and other scientists, climate change models are predictions – not finite information.

5. The Environment

Approximately 50% of Britain's land mass is farmed. In a very real sense, our countryside is managed by our farmers.

The EU has undertaken valuable work in regard to the implementation of environment-friendly regulations balanced by schemes and targets with monetary incentives.

The relationship between physical and social wellbeing and the environment is complex and vitally important. Research indicates the significance of access to 'the countryside' in terms of human health; the loss of biodiversity threatens human wellbeing in a variety of ways.

The Government must position the Environment at the centre of its rural policy by adapting and enhancing suitable EU policies and developing new strategic directions. The Government must take measures to control air pollution, noise pollution, light pollution and water pollution.

The Government must do more to protect vulnerable rural communities from flooding and the multiplying effects of climate change.

Ever-growing pressures on land usage threaten to unbalance the current planning system. The Government must reject tunnel-vision policies that fail to take account of the wider issues.

The multiple benefits derived from 'the countryside' must be recognised, valued and appreciated by Government and its agencies.

6. Homes and Infrastructure

'The countryside' is home to a lot of people (nearly 10 million) and a very large number of businesses. The demand for affordable homes is far exceeding supply – there is also a deficiency in social housing. Many young people whose families have lived in the countryside for generations - and whose jobs are rurally located- cannot afford to buy or rent in the private sector. The availability – and thus the price - of land is a determining factor.

Developers are being allowed to stockpile building land and the Government should consider fining them for this activity whilst at the same time rewarding the development of brownfield and other such sites, the conversion of obsolete farm and other buildings, et cetera. Housing policies should include special consideration for those who both live and work in the countryside.

7. Education and Training

The availability of appropriate education facilities in rural areas is patchy. Contra aspects include limited access to transport, inadequate careers advice, insufficient mentoring and lack of training support and job search.

The Government must introduce overarching policy that ensures young people in rural areas are prepared for – and have access to – a range of employment options. Not 'dead-end' placements that temporarily remove them from the unemployment register but fulfilling jobs that inspire career progression.

8. Recreation and Leisure

'Rural' – 'the countryside' – is the subject of constant conflicts between the needs of the people who live there, people who operate a business or work there, people who visit to enjoy recreation and leisure and the habitats of diverse species of native wildlife.

The UK's growing population renders access to the countryside increasingly – not less – important. The Government must protect Green Belts, AONBs and National Parks. Tunnel-vision decisions must not be allowed to encroach unnecessarily. The management of land and landscape has never been more vital.

9. Social Wellbeing

The demands and stresses of modern life impact on people in rural areas in similar ways to those living in urban environments but often with additional or increased hazards.

The Government must take account of the deficiencies that exist in some rural areas – most especially in relation to services and support provision – to ensure fairer social wellbeing.

Government policies must redress these inequalities, most especially those relating to life opportunities. The Government must encourage greater liaison between rural business sectors and education providers in order to create a better balance between the needs of industry and skills availability. Evidence supports the importance of targeted and fully endorsed apprenticeships.

Everyone needs food. We cannot live without food.

Our farmers and growers produce just 60% of the food we consume in this country. With helpful Government policies, this percentage can be increased.

Our farmers and growers 'manage' our countryside and it is their work that defines the beautiful landscapes that are appreciated and envied all around the world.

The countryside affords recreational benefits.

The countryside affords health benefits.

The countryside benefits wildlife – farmers voluntarily manage 677,000 hectares in order to encourage and protect biodiversity.

Hadlow College, Hadlow, Tonbridge, Kent TN11 0AL.

Group Principal and CEO: Paul Hannan.

Group Deputy Principal and CEO: Mark Lumsdon-Taylor

Hadlow College is one of the UK's leading land-based colleges (graded Outstanding by Ofsted) and offers a range of Higher and Further Education and Apprenticeship programmes in Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries Management, Countryside Management and other rural-related subjects.

Today there are just 14 land-based colleges to serve the whole of the country. The importance of their provision is inestimable - the successful operation of all land-based industries is dependent on highly qualified and skilled staff. Hadlow College is proud that the majority of students progress to enjoy substantive careers in the industry of their choice.

Rural PLC (Kent)

The Board: Chairman - Michael Bax

Human Capital Director – Mark Lumsdon-Taylor

Farming and Environment Director – Charles Tassell

Resources Director - George Jessel.

The four individuals making up the Board of Rural PLC (Kent) combine an impressive breadth of knowledge and expertise in Kent's farming, rural business, education and finance sectors.

Michael Bax, Chairman: senior partner BTF, chairman Kent Wildlife Trust and Weald of Kent Protection Society and Kent Police Crime Rural Advisory Group, a director of Kent Wool Growers and a governor of the King's School, Canterbury.

Mark Lumsdon-Taylor, Human Capital Director. Finance director The Hadlow Group, board member Kent County Agricultural Society (KCAS), executive director Betteshanger Sustainable Park and CBI councilor.

Charles Tassell, Farming and Environmental Director. Farmer, vice chair Why Farming Matters in Kent, board member KCAS, chair Kent Campaign for the Farmed Environment and past county chairman Kent NFU.

George Jessel, Resources Director. High Sheriff of Kent, Partner in fully diversified 1,200 acre family farm, Deputy Lieutenant, Kent Ambassador, Honorary Life Governor of Kent County Agricultural Society (KCAS), past chairman CLA Kent, NFU member.

Rural PLC (Kent) was founded in 2011 on the commitment to create a voice and a platform for Kent's food and farming sectors in recognition of the fact that both have the strength and scale to deliver *more* in economic and social terms.

Since its launch in 2011 Rural PLC has lobbied for a more conducive regulatory environment that encourages investment in skills, research and development and also provides more realistic assistance for farm expansion and diversification. By working cohesively, the intention is to grow, multiply and capitalize opportunities in the rural business sector.