

£110m fund to level up rural communities unveiled

Rural businesses such as farms, wedding venues and pubs will benefit from up to £110 million of funding being allocated today to support countryside communities across England.

The funding will be invested in projects which will boost productivity and create rural job opportunities. These could include farm businesses looking to diversify by opening a farm shop, wedding venue or tourism facilities or improvements to village halls, pubs and other rural hubs for community uses.

Investment will be based on local priorities and support investment in projects such as grants for:

- converting farm buildings to other business uses
- rural tourism, such as investments in visitor accommodation
- capital grants for provision of gigabit-capable digital infrastructure at hubs such as village halls, pubs and post offices for community use
- capital grants to develop, restore or refurbish local natural, cultural and heritage assets and sites
- creation of new footpaths and cycle paths, particularly in areas of health need, or capital grants to enable people to develop volunteering and social action projects locally

The Rural England Prosperity Fund worth up to £110 million will be delivered by eligible local authorities and give local leaders a greater say in investment than they previously had under EU schemes. It will be in addition to the £2.6 billion allocated via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to support levelling up across the UK. The fund will be part of the UKSPF and is a rural top-up for eligible local authorities.

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Greg Clark MP said:

This major investment in rural businesses will help us boost the countryside economy and close the rural productivity gap.

It's our mission to spread opportunity across the whole of the UK and this funding will help us do just that.

Lord Benyon, Minister for Rural Affairs, said:

We are addressing the rural productivity gap, levelling-up opportunities and outcomes, and looking after the rural areas and countryside that so many of us are proud to call home.

The Rural England Prosperity Fund worth up to £110 million

recognises the unique strengths and challenges of rural communities, and will support them to invest and grow their economies in line with local priorities.

Rural areas contribute hugely to the life of our nation economically, socially and culturally. 85% of England's land mass is rural, rural areas are home to 9.6 million people (17% of England's population) and the rural economy is worth £260 billion to the economy (15% of England's output).

Published today, the 'Delivering for Rural England' report describes how rural interests will be at the heart of the government's approach to levelling up to ensure the 12 levelling-up missions deliver for these communities.

The report summarises the considerable progress that has been made in supporting rural areas, for example in improving connectivity with 30% of rural premises now having access to gigabit-capable connections compared with 19% in January 2021.

As well as the ongoing work to recruit 20,000 more police officers across the whole country and make our streets safer, the government has also taken steps through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act to tackle crimes prevalent in rural communities such as illegal hare coursing. The new measures came into force on 1 August and strengthen penalties for those caught hare coursing who will now face an unlimited fine and up to six months in prison.

The report sets out how the government is working to close the productivity gap for rural areas, which has fallen from 90% of the England average in 2001 to 83% in 2019. Funding announced today through the Rural England Prosperity Fund, together with the government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), Food Strategy and the Agricultural Transition Plan, is set to unlock billions of investment in rural communities over the coming years.

Rural proofing – the process by which government ensures the needs of rural communities are met in government policy-making – has also been supported with the development of new guidance and training for civil servants. Work will also continue in developing the role that the Levelling Up Advisory Council can play in offering specific insights into the design and delivery of levelling up in rural areas.

- The second rural proofing report 'Delivering for Rural England' can be found on GOV.UK.
- Further details on the Rural England Prosperity Fund can be found in the England Prosperity Fund: prospectus on GOV.UK.
- The Rural England Prosperity Fund is integrated into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which supports productivity and prosperity in places that need it most. Rural England Prosperity Fund funding is available from April 2023 to March 2025.
- For eligible local authorities, the Rural England Prosperity Fund is a rural top-up to UKSPF allocations. It supports activities that

specifically address the challenges rural communities face. It is complementary to funding used to support rural areas under the UKSPF.

- The REPF succeeds EU funding from LEADER and the Growth Programme which were part of the Rural Development Programme for England.
- Funding has already been provided to devolved governments to support rural communities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as part of the agreed replacement to the Common Agricultural Policy. UK Government is incorporating England's share of funding to support rural economies into the UKSPF to better streamline and simplify the spending landscape.