



PRESS RELEASE

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Rural advocate report: free the private sector to make rural communities thrive

The Rural Advocate Report 2010, which identifies the threat of young people being forced out of the country-side fails to recognise how the private sector could help revive rural areas.

Most of the recommendations focus on public sector intervention while it is the people who live there and property owners who often hold the key to the success of rural communities. If they were allowed to provide houses and places for people to work – two of the key ingredients – the countryside would be much more attractive and affordable for young people.

Housing

Research carried out by Smiths Gore found that almost 40% of landowners would provide sites for affordable housing if they could retain ownership of the site and have some say on who lives in the houses. A new model that allows this could unblock the provision of houses and lift the barriers on the lack of supply.

Most of the current approaches to affordable housing are too rigid and focussed on public sector provision. The Conservative's proposals for Local Housing Trusts, which allow communities to grant themselves permission for housing, is an important development.

Jobs and workspace

There needs to be a more innovative approach to creating rural jobs. A more positive approach that allows buildings to be converted for business use would be a major help. We need to be able to provide flexible, often small scale units for young people to start and grow businesses.

The current planning system is too stifling – it favours development control above economic development. For example, we know of one rural business centre that took over 10 years to obtain planning permission, much of which was unnecessary delay.

The recent change to national planning guidance, *Planning for sustainable economic growth*, emphasises the support that councils should give to economic development. This is welcome but needs to be implemented by councils as soon as possible so that new workspace can be developed.

Broadband

Many rural areas do not get broadband of suitable speed for business creating a 'digital divide' which is forcing businesses that want to work in the countryside to stay in towns. Our survey of businesses that provide rural workspace found that 39% say that they don't have fast enough broadband for businesses.

Ends

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Notes to Editors

Smiths Gore is a modern, multi-disciplinary firm of rural property consultants with offices in 25 key locations throughout the UK and associates in the USA, the Caribbean and the Far East. With over 160 years' experience of property management, rural property has traditionally formed the core of Smiths Gores' business. Smiths Gore works for many of the UK's most important landed estates, providing services in estate management; forestry; environmental sustainability; sporting and farm management; commercial property; planning and development; architecture and building surveying; sales; lettings and acquisitions; minerals and telecommunications.

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