

# Rural planning in the UK based on policy research

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**Abstract:** *After experiencing the impact of urbanisation, population migration and land loss, ecological damage and resource shortage, the UK's rural construction has developed into a global model of rural construction through legal planning, orderly rural governance, and urban-rural integration. UK is progressively revitalising the rural economy, building sustainable rural habitats and innovating rural industries while protecting ecology. By exploring the policy framework and practice cases of rural revitalisation in the UK, it is conducive to a better understanding of the trends in the development of rural revitalisation in the UK, which is of great significance for rural planning in other countries.*

**Key words:** *Rural Policy in the United Kingdom, rural planning, rural revitalization, rural institutional structure in the UK*

## 1 Introduction

The UK is a pioneer of rural construction in global, rural development is guided and regulated by policies. In the areas of agriculture, environmental resource protection, urban-rural cooperation, economic and social development in the countryside, the government has formulated a series of acts to build up the institutional structure and policy framework for the countryside, such as *the Town and Country Planning Act, the Agricultural Act and the Strategy for the British Countryside*. This paper will focus on the UK rural planning system, introducing the policy structure of the rural system, the main methods, the rural institutional structure and the challenges faced.

## 2 Overall background of rural planning in the UK

### 2.1 Historical context

Changes in social systems affecting rural planning. Rural revitalization in the UK first began with the enclosure movement at the end of the 15th century, through which the UK achieved a thorough rural land reform, changing from a feudal land ownership system to a capitalist land ownership system. UK achieved rapid urbanization through a series of practices such as the enclosure movement, the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution. A number of changes brought about by urbanisation have also brought about two phases of rural problems.

*Table 1 Two phases of problems<sup>[5]</sup>*

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries</b>	<b>The increase in the level of urbanisation The imperfect perception of rural development</b>	<b>Serious urban-rural imbalance, complex urban diseases as population expansion, traffic congestion, environmental degradation, housing constraints and difficulties in finding employment</b>
<b>In the mid-to-late twentieth century</b>	<b>The acute resource conflicts in the cities Counter-urbanisation The suburbanisation of the cities</b>	<b>A large number of urban populations migrated to rural places, which led to irreversible ecological damage in the countryside.</b>

Politically, in the mid-twentieth century, rural governance in the United Kingdom was a "top-down" model, with the state as the decision-maker in rural planning. Government-led development strategies were criticised for failing to meet the development needs of local communities, and so in the late twentieth century, UK shifted to a bottom-up model of governance that emphasised local needs and power<sup>[7]</sup>.

In terms of the rural economy, as the industrial revolution progressed, changes in industrial policy led to a perception in the UK of a lack of emphasis on agriculture, which led to a decline in the production capacity of agricultural products and trade in agricultural products being subject to trade pressures from foreign product. After the Second World War, the UK's agricultural economy was hit even harder, with the supply of agricultural products outstripping demand and the trade deficit increasing. In order to create a stable market, the government protected the rural economy mainly through market intervention methods and developed the rural economy by formulating sound policies.

## ***2.2 Rural planning policy change***

The modernisation in the UK was a process of transformation from a feudal society dominated by traditional agriculture to a capitalist society dominated by modern industry. In the process of transformation, a series of rural issues such as low agricultural level, land use, and the preservation of human and natural landscapes have emerged and pushed rural development into a complex situation. In order to achieve sustainable development in the countryside, the government began the exploration phase of rural policy, and started the practice of rural revitalisation and urban-rural integration. Table 2 shows the phasing and the characteristics of the main policies for rural development in the United Kingdom.

*Table 2 Features of policy developments over time* <sup>[5]</sup>

Stage	First	Second	Third	Fourth
<b>Agricultural development policy</b>	From the founding of the State to the 1870s <b>Peak of traditional agricultural development</b>	From the 1870s until the Second World War <b>The Government's development policy of "favouring industry over agriculture" has dealt a severe blow to agricultural development</b>	From the end of the Second World War to the 1970s <b>Government issued the Agricultural Bill to reverse the lag in agricultural development</b>	From the 1970s to the present <b>The gradual improvement in agriculture and the European and Community Agricultural Policies gave further support to the development of UK agriculture.</b>
<b>Land development</b>	Prior to the Scott Report of 1942 <b>Inadequate land management system</b>	From the 1940s to the 1980s <b>Strict land development restrictions and compensation mechanisms</b>	From the 1980s to the present <b>For a period of sustainable management, land planning has to take into account social, economic and environmental developments.</b>	
<b>Natural resource protection</b>	Before World War II <b>The policy for the protection of rural resources in the UK only remained at the theoretical level, with no specific protection methods</b>	From the end of the Second World War to the 1970s <b>A large number of policies were issued to protect the natural and human resources of the countryside, and relevant offices were set up.</b>	From the 1970s to the present <b>A strict restriction and audit system was adopted for the development of resources, development of recreational and leisure functions was carried out moderately.</b>	

### 2.3 Dominant approach to rural planning

The main approaches in the United Kingdom include integrated and coordinated development between urban and rural, and subregional division and hierarchical studies<sup>[6]</sup>. After the 1980s, urban-rural integration and coordinated development has become a core approach to governance, with the main aim of reducing the urban-rural gap, achieving balanced development, and maintaining social justice, which promotes the modernisation process and economic development of the countryside. According to the differences in the countryside, the United Kingdom has divided into different sub-regions and formulated strategies according to the actual situation. At the same time, the diversified direction of rural development reflects the concept of post-productivism to a certain extent. The post-productivist countryside mainly emphasises the shift of agricultural production towards multifunctionality. This de-agriculturalised, de-productive development model is considered by some scholars to be a transitional stage of sustainable development.

### 2.4 Particular aspects highlighted in the rural policy

The UK's rural policy focuses on the protection of cultural and ecological values of the countryside. The UK has introduced policies such as *the Countryside Protection Act for England and Wales*, *the Rural Development Programme for England* to protect the natural environment and landscape features of the countryside, while encouraging the development of economic, social and cultural activities with local characteristics. According to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in 2015, rural tourism in the UK contributed 25.7 percent of the country's tourism revenues and 44.4 percent of its employment opportunities (Du, 2022). To protect the interests of villagers, the government implements economic subsidies, price support, mortgages and other protection policies for family farms to promote the profitability of family farms, and increases the employment opportunities for villagers through the Rural Employment Scheme, so as to realise people-centred rural development.

### 3 Contemporary rural development in the UK

#### 3.1 Institutional structure

In response to rural development in the 1940s, when there was a shortage of traditional agricultural infrastructure, unstable incomes for farmers, and a limited number of jobs<sup>[3]</sup>, after the Second World War, the UK government formulated a set of rural development strategies, which adopted a top-down governmental top-level design to manage rural issues in an orderly manner through policy.

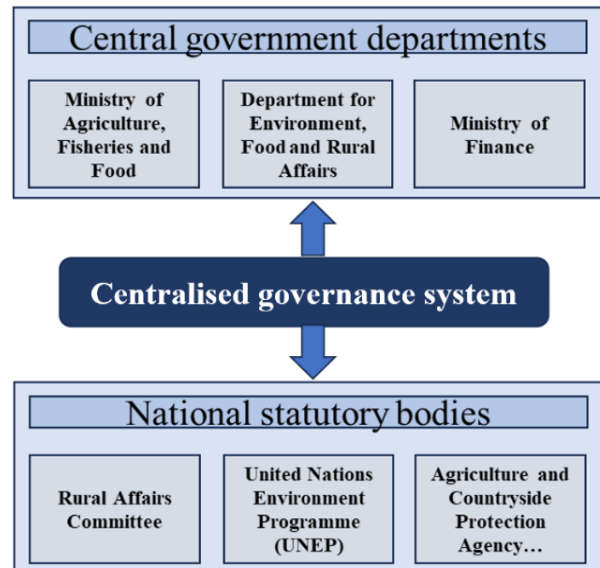


Figure 1 Centralised governance system<sup>[2]</sup>

As shown in Figure 1, The centralised governance system consisted of central government departments and national statutory bodies. Central government departments were responsible for the formulation, promulgation and implementation stages of agricultural policies and rural development programmes. National statutory bodies were mainly responsible for formulating policies to address the rural-urban divide, protecting the landscape and environmental resources of the countryside, and revitalising the rural economy.

However, in the 1970s rural development strategies were criticised for not matching the needs of local communities to their detriment, and in the face of the challenges of reverse urbanisation and globalisation at the end of the twentieth century, these rural policies were unable to offer strong competitiveness. As a result, in the 1980s and 1990s, rural development planning in the UK shifted to a 'bottom-up' approach<sup>[5]</sup>, with communities and stakeholders taking the lead in local development.

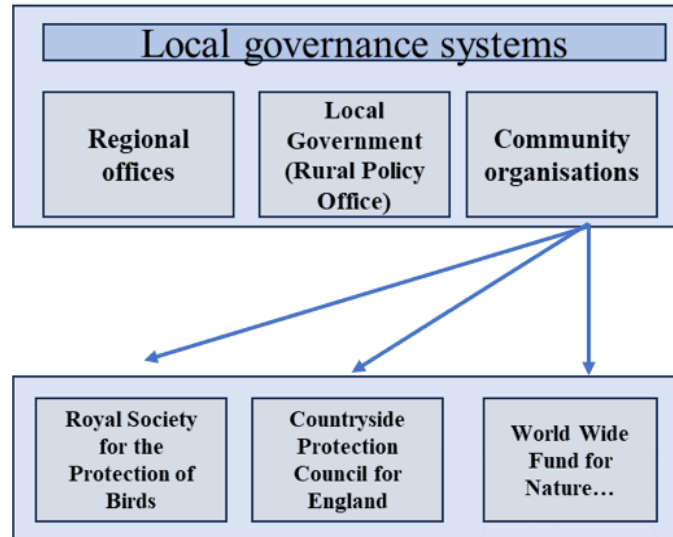


Figure 2 Local governance system [2]

Local authorities have the flexibility to adapt their countryside strategies to local circumstances. In particular, *the Localism Act 2011*, introduced by the UK government in 2011, ensured that local areas have greater autonomy in planning and implementation. Local community organisations influence the policy and legislation of the English countryside, as well as the implementation of the construction process, mainly by engaging the public and lobbying for policy, so as to promote the development of the countryside in a sustainable way.

After decentralisation to the community, a series of community-led innovation acts have emerged, one of which was the village assessment mechanism, which generally involved community self-discovery of public needs through observations and conversations among community members, and which incentivised the active participation of local villagers. The role of the government changed to that of a listener and collaborator. However, the successful implementation of these development programmes is an embedded and naturalised process, based on the participation of local people through the voluntary approach of residents' mutual assistance and collaboration between residents and local authorities.

### 3.2 Regulatory instruments

Table 3 shows some of the major rural policies in the UK, broadly categorised into three areas, agriculture, land use, and environmental protection.

Table 3 Major rural policies in the UK [6]

Timeframe Aspect	1930s - 1960s	1970s-
<b>Agricultural revitalisation</b>	<i>Scott Report</i> (long-term development program) <i>Agriculture Bill</i> (ensure market stability for agricultural products and established Rural Development Boards)	<b>Influenced by agricultural development policies developed by the European Community</b> (Integrated price mechanisms and common markets) <i>Seven-Year Rural Development Plan 2007-2013</i>
<b>Land development</b>	<i>Restricted Belt Development Act</i> <i>Green Belt Act</i> <i>Scott Report</i> <i>New Towns Act</i> <i>Town and Country Planning Act</i> (strict control of development and construction in rural areas)	<i>Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act</i> (encourage sustainable development) <i>Planning Policy Paper No. 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas</i> (integration of conservation and utilisation)
<b>Natural resource protection</b>	<i>Village Water Supply and Sewage Treatment Act</i> <i>National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act</i> (established National Parks Board) (balanced development of ecology and community quality of life)	<i>Our Countryside - The Future - A Fair Deal for Rural England</i> (urban-rural integration and coordination)

The policies in the earlier period laid the legal foundation for the later long period of development, and the goal of the construction of the later rural policy is like the words of the UK government in the White Paper *Our Future Countryside*, "a liveable countryside providing high quality public services, a countryside with diversified economic activities and stable employment, an environmentally sustainable countryside, and a self-help community with a vibrant village.

The high level of urbanisation in the UK had a great impact on rural development, policies have continued to be refined to address the balance between urban and rural development and land use issues. *The Town and Country Planning Act of 1947* continued *the Scott Report's* concept of land development, and as one of the longest and most complex pieces of legislation passed by the UK Parliament, *the Town and Country Planning Act* was the cornerstone of the entire planning system established after the Second World War. Aimed at stopping urban sprawl, *the Act's Green Belt policy* protected rural agricultural land through the establishment of Green Belt and achieved long-term improvement of the UK's living environment.

For the UK's agriculture, the outbreak of the Second World War was a turning point in the development of agriculture. The government realised that the development of agriculture is crucial, through the "Green Belt" and other arable land protection mechanism under the implementation of the post-World War II agricultural services and the rapid development of animal husbandry, animal husbandry output value accounted for half of the total value of agricultural output, pasture area close to half of the UK's land area, and at the same time, in order to promote the precision and intelligent production of agricultural production<sup>[8]</sup>. At the same time, in order to promote the precision and intelligence of agricultural production, the government formulated the *British Agricultural Science and Technology Strategy*, which introduced information technology into the development of modern agriculture and accelerated the efficiency of agricultural production. Thanks to the protection of the rural environment by the government, pastures, meadows, hedges and country roads with the characteristics of the UK's countryside have been preserved, attracting a large number of tourists and making rural

tourism a driving force in promoting the rural economy.

The characteristics of the rural economy have shifted from unitary to multifunctional and sustainable, and the characteristics of the rural environment have shifted towards livability, so that the realisation of urban-rural functional complementarity and equal development is the key to the rural revitalisation policy.

## 4 Discussion of challenge to the future of rural planning in the UK

### 4.1 Factors Influencing the evolution of rural policy creation

Globalisation means that the UK agricultural market is expanding globally, and the extension of the chain requires more transport infrastructure and more land resources to increase production, and these construction programmes may conflict with the creation of land use and nature conservation policies.

Global climate change is a driver for rural policy change, according to surveys the agricultural economy accounted for one-tenth of the UK's emissions<sup>[1]</sup>. Agriculture contributes to climate change by emitting greenhouse gases and, on the other hand, climate change leads to acid rain and higher temperatures that are detrimental to crop growth, reducing agricultural yields and seriously endangering sustainable rural development and urban-rural balance. Renewable agriculture offers an opportunity for land adaptation in rural areas, which delivers a wide range of environmental and social benefits.

### 4.2 Challenges of rural policy implementation

Covid-19's blow to the global economy and the changing international trade landscape and policy changes caused by the Brexit have influenced the implementation of rural policy in the UK.

The impact of Covid-19 on the UK economy in 2020 can be seen in Figure 3. With some UK farms facing operational difficulties, restrictions on trade imports and exports, a slump in the tourism industry, the rural economy was in a in a poor situation. In the face of disruptions in the supply chain, rising transport costs and lower market demand, the UK government has increased its policy of subsidising farmers to encourage the marketing of local produce.

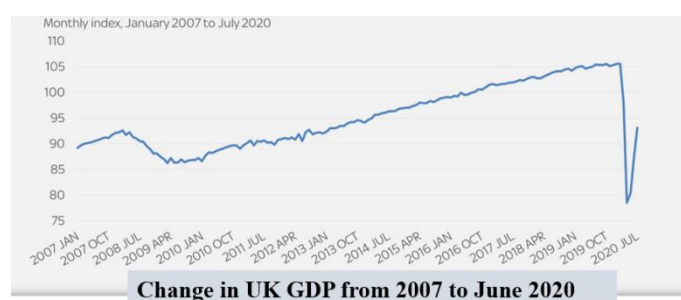


Figure 3 Change in UK GDP

Survey shows that after the UK's exit from the EU in 2020, between 2021 and 2022, the UK's agricultural exports declined. Imports and exports of agricultural products were discouraged by post-Brexit non-tariff barriers such as clearance procedures, customs restrictions, etc., which resulted in severe economic losses for farmers who rely heavily on the EU market<sup>[4]</sup>. Leaving the EU's Common Agricultural Policy has resulted in changes to the UK's agricultural subsidies, but it is also likely to better

support agricultural development through the allocation of new agricultural subsidy strategies. Labour shortages in rural areas of the UK have increased because of the restricted rights of EU citizens to work in the UK. Therefore, in order to build a safer, greener and competitive rural economy, it is important to improve the efficiency and technology of agriculture.

## Conclusion

The modernisation of the countryside in the UK is a relatively well-developed and distinctive system that explores the balance between ecological guardianship, community prosperity and industrial revitalisation in rural areas through the synergistic development of urban and rural areas. Overall, by building a multi-level organisational system with an integrated policy framework, rural planning in the UK will progress more steadily on the platform of globalisation.

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