

The Bishop of St Albans, Dr Alan Smith, has today responded to the publication of the report from the House of Lords Rural Economy Committee. The Bishop, who is President of the Rural Coalition, is the lead Church of England spokesperson for rural affairs and gave evidence to the Committee.

The Bishop of St Albans, Dr Alan Smith, said: 'This report is a serious and urgent call to the Government to implement an integrated, comprehensive, long-term rural strategy.

'Those like me, who live and work in the countryside will recognise the significant opportunities and challenges it identifies. I would hope the Secretary of State to welcome its cross-party, rurally-literate recommendations.

'The opportunities for rural areas identified in the report, such as for new high-growth businesses that support community flourishing, demonstrate the capacity for rural areas to make an enhanced national contribution, yet will require strong backing from the Government.

'Where we can, I am sure the Church of England will support these efforts and already our work on digital connectivity has been rightly highlighted by the Committee.

'It is my hope that the Government will recognise the value of this report and embrace the many difficulties identified within the findings. The challenge of housing for working age people and equal access to services is clearly something that must be addressed.

'As we approach a post-Brexit landscape we must be conscious how vulnerable our rural communities are and make sure their interests are protected in any future Government action.'

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