

# Rebuilding the Rural Vote

BRIEFING FROM THE DATA AND RESEARCH UNIT

## Introduction

The Conservative Party's collapse in rural Britain during the 2024 General Election marked a historic political shift, but it is not irreversible. Conservatives Together has produced this report to begin the urgent task of rebuilding the Party's presence and operations across rural constituencies. Whilst policy evolution will play a vital role, key failures in 2024 were both ideological and organisational.

The 2024 General Election marked the most significant erosion of Conservative support in rural Britain for a generation. A swing of over 14.5% from the Conservatives to Labour in rural seats – 3% greater than the national average shattered the long-standing belief that rural constituencies are inherently safe for the Party. The result was not simply a rejection of policy; it was a rejection of complacency.

At the centre of this report is a detailed analysis of 130 rural constituencies identified using a rigorous population density-based methodology. These are the seats where campaigning becomes significantly harder due to dispersed settlement patterns and limited infrastructure. Of these, 70 have been identified as critical to Conservative success at the next election, collectively representing 11% of the UK electorate.

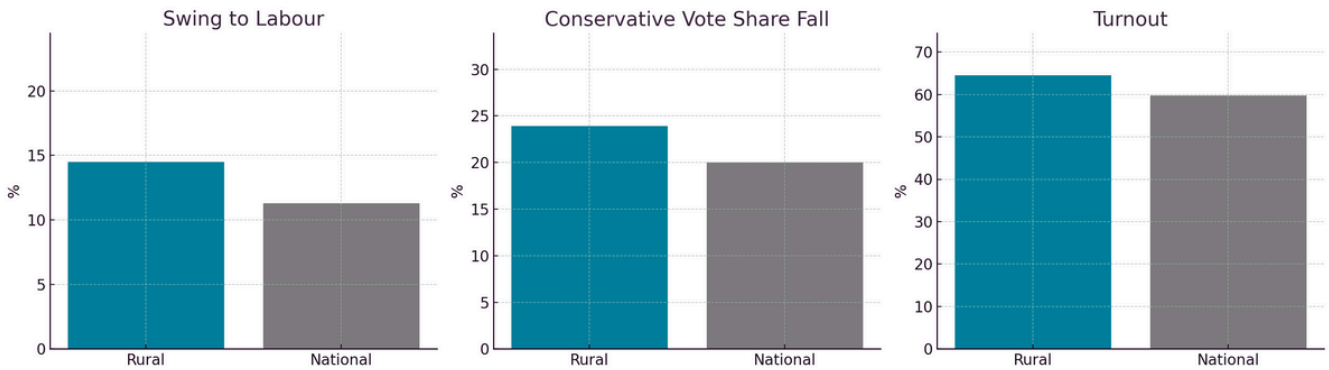
## How did we get here?

A prevailing narrative suggests that the Conservative decline in rural Britain was simply the result of demographic change – that new, younger, more liberal arrivals from urban areas fundamentally altered the electoral landscape. Whilst such shifts are visible, this explanation is insufficient on its own. The 2024 results reflect a deeper trend: a party whose organisational approach had become dangerously outdated for the rural context. Even as rural constituencies became more politically competitive, Conservative campaign infrastructure was based on assumptions of inherited loyalty and minimal effort. In 2024, voters were not enthusiastically endorsing alternatives – they were actively punishing the Conservatives. That rejection, combined with the intense logistical difficulties of campaigning in low-density areas – where persuasion is harder, contact rates are lower and visibility is more difficult to achieve – created the conditions for a collapse.

# The Numbers Tell the Story

In the 2024 General Election:

- Swing to Labour in rural seats: 14.5% vs 11.3% nationally
- Conservative vote share fall in rural seats: 23.9% vs 20.0% nationally
- Turnout in rural seats: 64.5% vs 59.8% nationally



## Defining the Rural Battleground

To identify where the Conservative Party must prioritise recovery, this report uses a novel, density-based classification of rural constituencies. Rather than relying on outdated administrative boundaries or subjective descriptors, we analysed population density - specifically, the number of registered voters per hectare across all 650 UK constituencies.

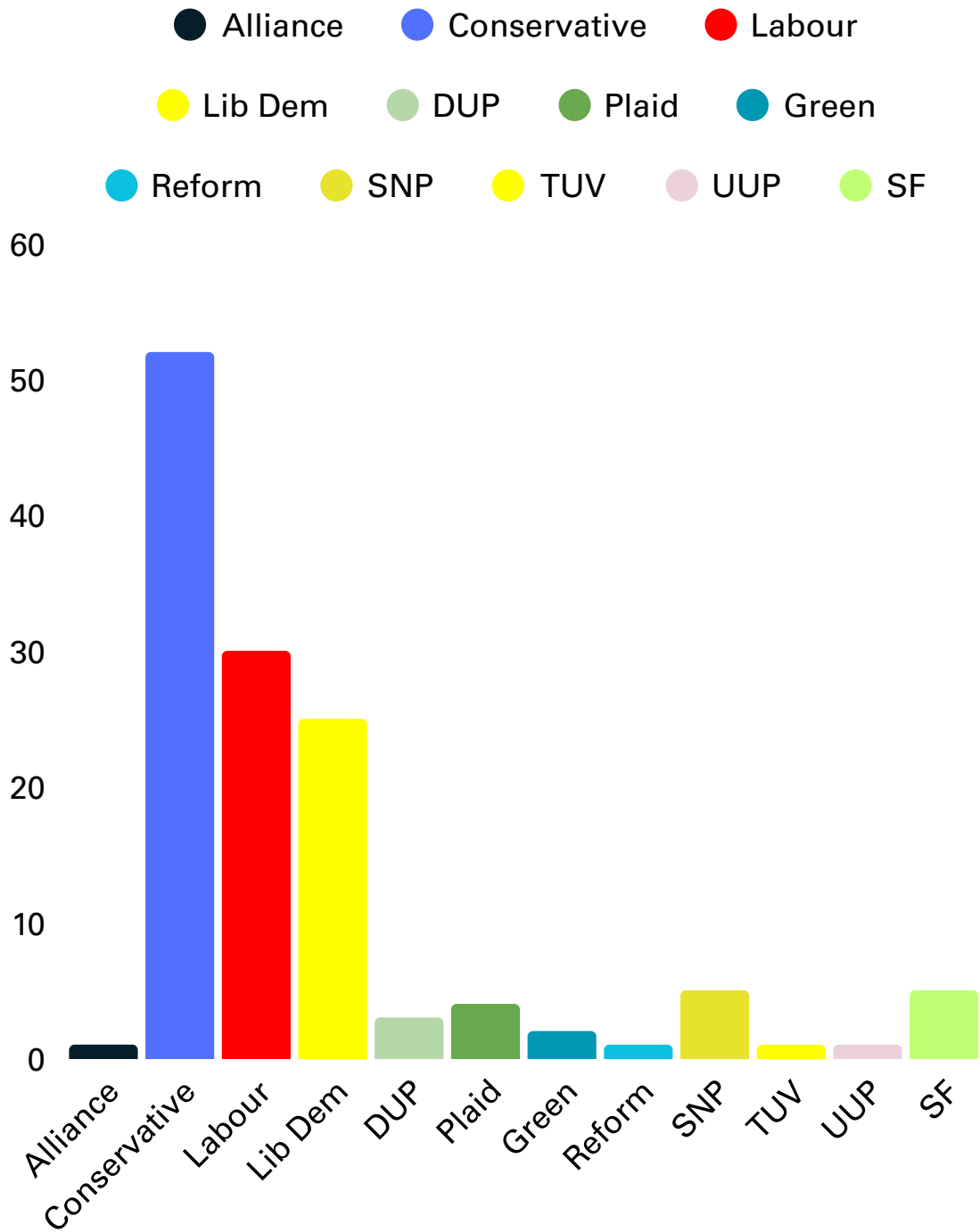
### Why Density Matters

Whilst each constituency has roughly the same number of electors, their sizes - and population density - wildly differ. We have set a threshold of approximately 1.5 electors per hectare, where the character of a seat fundamentally changes. Above this threshold, constituency population density rises sharply and the challenges associated with true rural campaigning diminish. This inevitably means higher costs per contact, inefficient canvassing routes and resource-intensive operations.

The average density across the 130 seats in this study is 0.86 electors per hectare, compared to a UK average of 14.36. These are constituencies where effective voter contact requires significantly more resource, travel and time per interaction. These 130 rural seats are not marginal in national terms. They make up over 20% of the total electorate (9.63 million out of 48.25 million) and are a bloc that no serious party can afford to ignore. By isolating these constituencies, we are identifying the areas where rural campaigning challenges are most acute – and where the Conservatives must recalibrate fastest.

Of these seats, the majority 52 are Conservative held, followed by Labour at 30 and the Liberal Democrats at 25. A full breakdown of seats, ranked by population density, can be found below.

# The 130 Rural Seats



Constituency	Incumbent	Votes Needed or Con Majority (shaded)	Population Density (p/ha)
Central Devon	Conservative	61	0.55
Beverley and Holderness	Conservative	124	1.02
Forest of Dean	Labour	279	1.25
Derbyshire Dales	Labour	351	0.81
Ely and East Cambridgeshire	Liberal Democrats	496	1.09
South West Norfolk	Labour	631	0.64
Ynys Mon (Anglesey)	Plaid Cymru - The Party of Wales	638	0.71
Broadland and Fakenham	Conservative	719	1.07
Ribble Valley	Labour	857	1.24
Gordon and Buchan	Conservative	878	0.33
Dumfries and Galloway	Conservative	930	0.19
Aberdeenshire North and Moray East	SNP	943	0.52
Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey	SNP	1,002	0.16
Suffolk Coastal	Labour	1,071	1.11
Staffordshire Moorlands	Conservative	1,175	1.31
East Hampshire	Conservative	1,275	1.37
Hereford and South Herefordshire	Conservative	1,279	0.97
Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe	Liberal Democrats	1,473	0.24
Huntingdon	Conservative	1,499	1.34
North Dorset	Conservative	1,589	0.91
South Shropshire	Conservative	1,624	0.42
Skipton and Ripon	Conservative	1,650	0.39
Mid and South Pembrokeshire	Labour	1,879	0.8
South East Cornwall	Labour	1,912	1.03

South Cambridgeshire	Liberal Democrats	10,642	1.31
North Cornwall	Liberal Democrats	10,768	0.6
Orkney and Shetland	Liberal Democrats	10,807	0.12
North Ayrshire and Arran	Labour	10,868	0.87
Wells and Mendip Hills	Liberal Democrats	11,122	1.09
Arundel and South Downs	Conservative	12,134	0.93
Richmond and Northallerton	Conservative	12,185	0.39
Whitehaven and Workington	Labour	13,719	1.37
St Ives	Liberal Democrats	13,787	1.21
Winchester	Liberal Democrats	13,822	1.37
North Shropshire	Liberal Democrats	15,312	1
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	Labour	15,529	1.06
Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire	Liberal Democrats	15,658	0.08
Ceredigion Preseli	Plaid Cymru - The Party of Wales	16,976	0.31
Dwyfor Meirionnydd	Plaid Cymru - The Party of Wales	17,077	0.28
Lothian East	Labour	18,021	1.09
Boston and Skegness	Reform UK	2,011	0.93

Romsey and Southampton North	Conservative	2,191	1.34
North Norfolk	Liberal Democrats	2,586	0.93
North West Essex	Conservative	2,610	1.28
South Norfolk	Labour	2,827	1.42
Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross	Liberal Democrats	20,877	0.06
Westmorland and Lonsdale	Liberal Democrats	21,473	0.3
North East Fife	Liberal Democrats	21,719	0.85
Daventry	Conservative	3,012	1.04
South Suffolk	Conservative	3,047	1.25
Mid Norfolk	Conservative	3,054	0.9
Chester South and Eddisbury	Conservative	3,057	0.98
Bridlington and The Wolds	Conservative	3,125	0.79
Brigg and Immingham	Conservative	3,243	1.49
West Suffolk	Conservative	3,247	1.01
Banbury	Labour	3,257	1.43
Monmouthshire	Labour	3,339	0.84
North Cotswolds	Conservative	3,357	0.71
West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine	Conservative	3,441	0.22
Tiverton and Minehead	Liberal Democrats	3,508	0.56
Gainsborough	Conservative	3,532	0.66
Newark	Conservative	3,572	1.03
Goole and Pocklington	Conservative	3,572	1.12
Braintree	Conservative	3,670	1.5
South Northamptonshire	Conservative	3,687	1.24

Hexham	Labour	3,714	0.28
Salisbury	Conservative	3,807	1.04
Torrige and Tavistock	Conservative	3,950	0.46
Perth and Kinross-shire	SNP	4,128	0.53
Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale	Conservative	4,242	0.16
Central Suffolk and North Ipswich	Conservative	4,290	1.33
Witney	Liberal Democrats	4,340	1.35
Sleaford and North Hykeham	Conservative	4,346	1.05
Grantham and Bourne	Conservative	4,496	0.97
Clwyd East	Labour	4,623	1.13
East Wiltshire	Conservative	4,716	0.7
Wetherby and Easingwold	Conservative	4,846	0.79
Angus and Perthshire Glens	SNP	4,871	0.14
Montgomeryshire and Glyndwr	Labour	4,935	0.31
North West Norfolk	Conservative	4,954	0.9
Bangor Aberconwy	Labour	4,973	0.49
South Cotswolds	Liberal Democrats	4,974	0.86
North Northumberland	Labour	5,068	0.35
Carlisle	Labour	5,201	0.87
Penrith and Solway	Labour	5,258	0.39
Barrow and Furness	Labour	5,325	1.28
Melton and Syston	Conservative	5,396	1.3
Scarborough and Whitby	Labour	5,409	1.01
North Bedfordshire	Conservative	5,414	1.35

Frome and East Somerset	Liberal Democrats	5,416	1.5
Louth and Horncastle	Conservative	5,506	0.58
Waveney Valley	Green Party	5,595	0.74
Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock	Labour	5,684	0.43
Morecambe and Lunesdale	Labour	5,816	0.93
Mid Buckinghamshire	Conservative	5,872	1.4
North Herefordshire	Green Party	5,895	0.51
Na h-Eileanan an Iar	Labour	6,046	0.07
Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber	SNP	6,233	0.08
Henley and Thame	Liberal Democrats	6,268	1.34
Corby and East Northamptonshire	Labour	6,332	1.51
West Worcestershire	Conservative	6,547	1.12
Kenilworth and Southam	Conservative	6,574	1.13
Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk	Conservative	6,599	0.2
Glastonbury and Somerton	Liberal Democrats	6,612	1.06
Bishop Auckland	Labour	6,673	0.53
Caerfyrddin	Plaid Cymru - The Party of Wales	6,696	0.36
Honiton and Sidmouth	Liberal Democrats	6,701	1.17
North Devon	Liberal Democrats	6,745	0.73
Sussex Weald	Conservative	6,842	1.51

South Holland and The Deepings	Conservative	6,856	1.01
Stratford-on-Avon	Liberal Democrats	7,123	1.2
South Devon	Liberal Democrats	7,128	1.14
North East Cambridgeshire	Conservative	7,189	1.31
Stirling and Strathallan	Labour	7,388	0.31
Thirsk and Malton	Conservative	7,550	0.4
West Dorset	Liberal Democrats	7,790	0.75
High Peak	Labour	7,909	1.38
Weald of Kent	Conservative	8,422	1
Lagan Valley	Alliance	Non-Target	1.51
East Londonderry	DUP	Non-Target	0.59
East Antrim	DUP	Non-Target	0.86
Strangford	DUP	Non-Target	0.95
North Antrim	TUV	Non-Target	0.66
South Antrim	UUP	Non-Target	0.97
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	SF	Non-Target	0.3
West Tyrone	SF	Non-Target	0.35
Mid Ulster	SF	Non-Target	0.56
South Down	SF	Non-Target	0.68
Newry and Armagh	SF	Non-Target	0.85

# What the data reveals

At the 2024 general election, rural seats exhibited three core characteristics:

Sharper rural swing to Labour	With an average swing of 14.5%, Labour outperformed its national average swing (11.3%) by over 3 percentage points. Rural voters moved away from the Conservatives more aggressively.
Larger Conservative vote collapse	The Conservative vote share fell by an average of 23.9%, compared to 20% nationally. This steeper decline reflects an active rejection, translated into sudden, unexpected losses.
Rural voters were not apathetic	Turnout in rural constituencies averaged 64.5%, versus 59.8% nationally. Rural voters were not apathetic; this was an active rejection of the Conservatives.

## Rural campaign challenges

Low population density does not cause every problem in rural campaigning, but it amplifies all of them. The average density across the 130 rural seats in this study is 0.86 electors per hectare, compared to a national average of 14.36. This makes voter contact harder, distances between communities greater, and traditional campaign tools less effective. The Party has failed to adapt its operations to these realities.

Inefficient ground game	Doorstep campaigning becomes logistically expensive and demoralising when voters are miles apart. With fewer than one elector per hectare in the average rural seat, even basic canvassing requires more fuel, time and manpower than most associations can deliver.
Dispersed, decentralised communities	Voters are scattered across multiple small villages, farms and hamlets - often with little cohesive 'community centre' to campaign around. This is a challenge because it makes it more difficult for campaigners to be present, visible and nimble.
Weakened year-round presence	Traditional rural campaign rhythms, including periodic visits are no longer sufficient. Rural associations have thinned out. Constituents expect ongoing and authentic engagement. In low-density areas, visibility and relationships matter more.
Poor candidate selection	Too many rural candidates lacked local roots, credibility or connections to the area they were selected to represent. It takes a long time to build a profile within such communities. Parachuting in candidates can alienate members and supporters, undermining trust in the party.

# 70 Rural Targets that the Conservatives must win or hold

Using internal data and bespoke methodology, Conservatives Together has identified 70 out of the 130 rural constituencies as priority targets for the next election. These are either must-hold or must-win seats for the Conservatives where:

- The Party lost narrowly in 2024 but remains competitive
- Incumbents hold slim majorities and are vulnerable
- Organisational investment would yield the highest return

Together, these 70 seats represent over 5.2 million voters – 10.8% of the total electorate. They are the highest-return opportunities for Conservative resurgence in rural Britain – and the places where investment in organisation, candidates and messaging must begin immediately.

Constituency	Incumbent	Con Majority/Votes Needed	Turnout	Population Density (p/ha)
Central Devon	Conservative	61	70.90%	0.55
Beverley and Holderness	Conservative	124	62.40%	1.02
Forest of Dean	Labour	279	66.00%	1.25
Derbyshire Dales	Labour	351	69.90%	0.81
Ely and East Cambridgeshire	Liberal Democrats	496	66.20%	1.09
South West Norfolk	Labour	631	59.30%	0.64
Ynys Mon (Anglesey)	Plaid Cymru - The Party of Wales	638	61.40%	0.71
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Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey	SNP	1,002	60.30%	0.16
Suffolk Coastal	Labour	1,071	66.40%	1.11

Staffordshire Moorlands	Conservative	1,175	62.00%	1.31
East Hampshire	Conservative	1,275	70.90%	1.37
Hereford and South Herefordshire	Conservative	1,279	63.10%	0.97
Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe	Liberal Democrats	1,473	63.70%	0.24
Huntingdon	Conservative	1,499	65.80%	1.34
North Dorset	Conservative	1,589	68.30%	0.91
South Shropshire	Conservative	1,624	67.40%	0.42
Skipton and Ripon	Conservative	1,650	67.50%	0.39
Mid and South Pembrokeshire	Labour	1,879	59.00%	0.8
South East Cornwall	Labour	1,912	67.80%	1.03
Boston and Skegness	Reform UK	2,011	53.40%	0.93
Romsey and Southampton North	Conservative	2,191	69.60%	1.34
North Norfolk	Liberal Democrats	2,586	65.90%	0.93
North West Essex	Conservative	2,610	68.20%	1.28
South Norfolk	Labour	2,827	67.00%	1.42
Daventry	Conservative	3,012	65.60%	1.04
South Suffolk	Conservative	3,047	65.40%	1.25
Mid Norfolk	Conservative	3,054	61.00%	0.9
Chester South and Eddisbury	Conservative	3,057	70.70%	0.98
Bridlington and The Wolds	Conservative	3,125	57.70%	0.79
Brigg and Immingham	Conservative	3,243	58.20%	1.49
West Suffolk	Conservative	3,247	59.80%	1.01
Banbury	Labour	3,257	65.80%	1.43
Monmouthshire	Labour	3,339	68.00%	0.84

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West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine	Conservative	3,441	67.10%	0.22
Tiverton and Minehead	Liberal Democrats	3,508	65.90%	0.56
Gainsborough	Conservative	3,532	61.60%	0.66
Newark	Conservative	3,572	67.00%	1.03
Goole and Pocklington	Conservative	3,572	62.20%	1.12
Braintree	Conservative	3,670	63.10%	1.5
South Northamptonshire	Conservative	3,687	68.60%	1.24
Hexham	Labour	3,714	67.80%	0.28
Salisbury	Conservative	3,807	69.90%	1.04
Torridge and Tavistock	Conservative	3,950	68.00%	0.46
Witney	Liberal Democrats	4,340	67.00%	1.35
Clwyd East	Labour	4,623	62.40%	1.13
Montgomeryshire and Glyndwr	Labour	4,935	58.40%	0.31
South Cotswolds	Liberal Democrats	4,974	72.70%	0.86
North Northumberland	Labour	5,068	65.80%	0.35
Carlisle	Labour	5,201	59.10%	0.87
Penrith and Solway	Labour	5,258	63.20%	0.39
Barrow and Furness	Labour	5,325	56.30%	1.28
Scarborough and Whitby	Labour	5,409	59.30%	1.01
Frome and East Somerset	Liberal Democrats	5,416	65.30%	1.5
Waveney Valley	Green Party	5,595	67.20%	0.74
Morecambe and Lunesdale	Labour	5,816	62.90%	0.93

North Herefordshire	Green Party	5,895	69.20%	0.51
Henley and Thame	Liberal Democrats	6,268	72.10%	1.34
Corby and East Northamptonshire	Labour	6,332	63.00%	1.51
Glastonbury and Somerton	Liberal Democrats	6,612	65.00%	1.06
Bishop Auckland	Labour	6,673	57.10%	0.53
Honiton and Sidmouth	Liberal Democrats	6,701	67.10%	1.17
North Devon	Liberal Democrats	6,745	65.00%	0.73
Stratford-on-Avon	Liberal Democrats	7,123	69.90%	1.2
South Devon	Liberal Democrats	7,128	67.80%	1.14

# Recommendations

Fast-track early selections

Rural candidates must be in place as soon as possible to build profile, trust and visibility. Early selections allow for longer periods of time for candidates to build name recognition, develop crucial relationships and build trust. Strong evidence also supports the conclusion that voters will actively punish a party for 'parachuting' candidates, undermining party credibility.

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Targeted association support

Provide specialised funding, field officers, and training to the 70 target rural associations. This may include training on rural messaging, on volunteer mobilisation and funding for local outreach events. Rural associations should not be left to operate in isolation; party strategy must bridge the resource gap that makes rural campaigning more difficult than in urban areas.

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Develop a 'rural playbook'

Create a detailed handbook for rural campaigners, rooted in data and best practices, to properly equip candidates and associations. This playbook should draw on internal data from past elections and external polling on policy and communication preferences among rural seats. This should be made required reading for candidates, campaign managers and agents in rural seats.

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Regular monitoring of rural opinion

Invest in more consistent polling to ensure real-time strategy adjustments. Demographic shifts - particularly in years coming - economic turbulence and changing social attitudes demand constant attentiveness and rigorous monitoring. Better insight into rural attitudes would create a feedback loop between party leadership, its prospective candidates and rural voters.

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Strengthen local Associations facing decline

The steep fall in rural vote share, paired with evidence of stretched volunteers means many rural associations cannot provide sufficient resources for effective campaigning. Weaker rural associations need intervention. Options include clustering with stronger neighbours, leadership training, better digital tools (Connect, VoteSource) and thematic policy issues (e.g. crime).

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## Conclusion

The 2024 election shattered the myth of the 'safe rural seat'. The Party's vote collapsed harder in rural areas than the national average, and on higher turnout. The message was clear: rural Britain is no longer guaranteed Conservative territory. But this is not an unfixable crisis. Labour's gains are not yet embedded. Most of the damage was organisational, not ideological. With serious investment in early selections, regionalised campaigning and local association support, rural constituencies can once again form the backbone of a Conservative majority.

The evidence from 2024 points to the conclusion that infrastructure was as important an issue as ideology. Campaigns in rural seats were often under-staffed, under-resourced and underpowered. Meanwhile, opposition parties often filled this void with sharp messaging, honed in on rural priorities and concerns.

The 70 target seats identified here offer a clear imperative. Rebuilding trust, sharpening messaging and showing up consistently will not just repair our position – rural Britain may once again become a foundation of the Conservative Party's electoral future - not a fault line. With the right structure, the right people and the right strategy, the Conservatives can win rural Britain back.