

# Fieldwork



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England

HELPING YOU TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE COUNTRYSIDE

December 2008

## Saving the countryside through affordable homes

**I**n our rural areas, work and housing do not match up, as Matthew Taylor MP pointed out in his recent review of affordable rural housing. Increasingly, people who live in the countryside do not work there, while those who work in the countryside cannot afford to live there. CPRE and the National Housing Federation have set out their ideas for affordable rural housing in a joint charter, *Save Rural England – Build Affordable Homes*, published in September 2008.

### Growing waiting lists

Rural wages tend to be lower than the national average, which makes it harder for local workers to buy or rent homes on the open market. As a result, waiting lists for affordable homes in rural districts have soared. Over the last five years, the number of people waiting for an affordable home in rural areas has risen by 37%, up from 507,757 in 2003 to 695,735 last year (or 311,000 households). In Dorset, for example, house prices are over 15 times local incomes, one in 30 homes is a second home and waiting lists have doubled in the past five years.

On average, more than 150,000 affordable homes were built each year in the 1950s and more than 100,000 in the 1960s and 1970s. This fell to 44,000 in the 1980s and 26,000 in the

RHM Architects/Nick Kane



*The housing scheme at Elmswell helps address the lack of affordable housing in Suffolk*

1990s. Just 13,000 were built in 2003, although 2007 shows a rise to 22,000.

These trends have far-reaching implications. Rural communities are increasingly made up of elderly and wealthy residents and owners of second homes. The younger generation is being priced out. A growing mismatch between where people work and where they live means more roads and traffic: the countryside feels urbanised, even where it is not actually built

on. Without local customers, schools, shops, pubs and post offices are at risk of closing, and a lack of local people of working age threatens the rural economy.

### Better planning needed

Providing more affordable homes does not mean concreting over the countryside. We need more of them, but they must be well-designed and in the right place. Most of them can be provided

through redeveloping land and reusing buildings within existing settlements. Where this cannot be done there may be a case for a limited number of affordable homes to be built on greenfield land to meet identified needs, but it makes sense to consider other options first. Research by CPRE found that local authorities seriously underestimate the availability of brownfield sites in

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# Fieldwork

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## Saving the countryside

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suitable locations for housing, overlooking the potential of smaller sites and smaller settlements in particular.

CPRE's joint charter with the National Housing Federation sets out measures that are needed to provide more affordable homes in rural areas. These include better planning, action to tackle empty properties and community-led initiatives. One of our recommendations is a call for more public investment. Local strategic partnerships should consider funding rural housing enablers to help bring forward sites for affordable homes where there is an identified need.

We also want to see more effective planning. *Planning Policy Statement 3 – Housing* has great potential to ensure that sufficient, high quality affordable homes are provided



*Local authorities can now allocate small sites solely for affordable housing*

in rural areas. However, its implementation is patchy. Rural planning authorities should set ambitious but achievable affordable housing targets for all suitable sites, however small. They should make full use of their planning powers to allocate sites solely for affordable housing in their planning documents, and to secure effective use of windfall sites in appropriate locations. Conditions can be used to ensure homes remain affordable in perpetuity to people who need to live and work in the area. Around 2,400 additional



*Providing more affordable homes does not mean concreting over the countryside*



homes each year could be provided if all local authorities matched the performance of the best.

We need a targeted programme to bring empty property back into use in rural areas. England has around 750,000 empty homes – 80,000 in the Yorkshire and Humber region alone – and thousands of other properties also lie vacant. Local authorities should make full use of empty dwelling management orders to bring empty homes back into use, and they should remove the council tax discount on second homes.

The Government and the EU should reduce VAT on building repair and maintenance. The cost of VAT is a barrier to restoring empty homes and a deterrent to responsible property maintenance. It also tips the scales in favour of development on green fields, since new development is not subject to VAT.

### Local input is key

Planning that has communities at its heart is more likely to respond to local needs and circumstances. Grass roots initiatives such as parish plans and village design statements let local people set out the priorities for their area and can include housing needs, design and location. CPRE believes community land trusts should play a growing role in future, empowering communities to decide how land should be used in their area to meet a variety of needs, including the need for affordable housing.

The Suffolk Preservation Society initiated a positive and practical affordable housing scheme in 2004. It wanted to do something about the lack of good quality affordable housing in the county. So the

Society found partners with the right expertise and resources to help them take forward the project. An active process of community engagement led to an exemplar affordable housing project, Elmswell, which has 13 two-bedroom houses, 9 three-bedroom houses and 4 one-bedroom flats. They have virtually carbon-free footprints. Low-maintenance communal areas include a wildflower meadow, an orchard with Suffolk apple trees, and allotments.

Achieving high design and environmental standards is crucial. Housing schemes should be sensitively sited, in keeping with local landscapes, and built to high standards of design using sustainable construction methods. Current building regulations do not require private developers to meet the same high environmental standards as housing associations. This is unfair and increases the cost of affordable homes. If standards were raised across the board, green technologies would enjoy reduced costs from economies of scale and increased availability of specialist skills, which would become mainstream.

Lastly, public funding is essential. In today's challenging housing market we can no longer simply rely on contributions from private developers to pay for affordable housing. The next Comprehensive Spending Review must commit a fair share of future Government spending on social housing to delivering affordable rural homes.

**Grab a copy:** *Save Rural England – Build Affordable Homes* is available at [www.cpre.org.uk/library](http://www.cpre.org.uk/library). ■

# breakthrough

How our work is making a difference

## Mortar plant application refused at Surrey quarry

**CPRE Surrey and local campaigners recently celebrated a success after a two-year campaign against a controversial planning application for a mortar plant at a local sand quarry.**

Situated in Bletchingley in the Green Belt and near the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, North Park Farm quarry is a source of high quality sand which is used to make glass. This type of sand is found in only a few places around the country, so CPRE recognises that it is an important operation. However, there has been a long history of campaigning around the quarry.

The owners had applied to add a sand processing plant to the site, but they built the wrong thing in the

wrong place. CPRE wanted Surrey County Council to take enforcement action, but the council decided to go ahead with a retrospective planning application, which was approved in the end.

In the meantime, Tarmac Ltd had put in an application to install a dry silo mortar plant at the quarry. The plume that would be emitted from the stack at the proposed plant would intrude on the Green Belt and be visible from the Surrey Hills.

CPRE Surrey joined forces with the local campaigning organisation, the Quarry Observation Group, to fight the application. Campaigners were concerned about the noise and visual impact on the Green Belt and Area of

Outstanding Natural Beauty. They felt that, because Tarmac could use a lower grade of sand for its operation, it had not actually demonstrated the need to be at that particular location. A miscount at the planning committee meant the application was erroneously approved. However, CPRE and the Quarry Observation Group kept up the pressure, using the press to expose the situation and writing to councillors and the council leader. Finally, the original vote was revoked and the application was refused.

It is now likely that there will be a major extension to the quarry, so CPRE Surrey will work with the Quarry Observation Group on this next campaign.

## Campaign successes in Norfolk

**CPRE Norfolk's campaigns have been yielding a rich harvest recently. The group has yet again scored a victory in the battle against Tesco's plans for a supermarket in Sheringham. And its green buildings open days have been a resounding success.**

Last year North Norfolk District Council voted unanimously to turn down Tesco's application to build a supermarket in Sheringham. When the supermarket giant appealed against the decision, local campaigners had to keep up the fight. Following a ten-day inquiry in July, an inspector finally rejected the

proposal. Tesco's appeal was dismissed because of the harm the development would do to the vitality, viability and retail function of Sheringham town centre and the likely detrimental impact on future investment. The inspector also concluded that it would have adverse effects on the character and appearance of the area 'arising from the poor design of the building and the ineffective functional linkages to the wider town centre'. CPRE thought this would be the end of the matter once and for all, but it has just heard that Tesco plans to challenge the decision once again.

CPRE Norfolk's programme

of green buildings open days is one of the first of its kind in the country. Over 600 people booked for guided tours with architects, owners, builders and researchers at some of Norfolk's most energy-efficient homes and groundbreaking developments in September. The event attracted coverage in the national and regional media.

Each of the 15 buildings in the event featured a range of methods for conserving energy and reducing fuel bills, applying the very latest renewable energy technologies together with improved insulation, rainwater recycling and use of local materials.

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### How do the political parties measure up on the environment?

Last year, CPRE and eight other leading environmental groups tested politicians' commitment in six areas of environmental policy.

One year on, the groups (CPRE, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Green Alliance, the National Trust, the RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts, the Woodland Trust and WWF) published a second assessment, *Fit for the Future*. This time, we reviewed the performance of the three main parties over the last year. Despite the range and urgency of environmental threats continuing to increase, all three parties have retreated from the green agenda.

The current economic downturn does not reduce the need for action on the environment – quite the opposite. Any party that is fit for the future should use the present economic climate to switch to a low-carbon economy.

The assessment acknowledged some positive developments, including progress by the Government on the Climate Change Bill, robust opposition by the Conservatives to the Planning Bill, and a major review by the Liberal Democrats of their natural environment policy, which will report next year.

However, on the debit side, we described the Government's policies overall as contradictory and incoherent, particularly on climate change. We felt that the Conservatives have still not matched strong presentation with comparable policy substance, and we saw traditional Liberal Democrat leadership on the environment waning. All three parties must improve their performance dramatically before the next general election.

To read the assessment, visit [www.green-alliance.org.uk](http://www.green-alliance.org.uk) and search for 'Fit for the Future'.

# newsroundup

Keeping you on top of countryside developments

## Stansted Airport expansion approved

**Within days of the Climate Change Commission recommending an increase from 60% to at least 80% in the target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, the new Secretary of State for Transport, Geoff Hoon, approved plans to increase flights at Stansted Airport.**

The increase in the target that will form the centrepiece of the Climate Change Bill was widely predicted. Less so was the decision to have regard to trends in international aviation and shipping emissions when reviewing the target in future – we can thank CPRE campaigners and others for this change of heart by the Government. However, the decision to approve the flights expansion explicitly afforded 'little weight' to the Climate Change Bill, as it 'might be subject to change'. The proposal to include aviation within the EU's emissions trading scheme

was similarly accorded little weight at the public inquiry.

Aviation Minister Jim Fitzpatrick justified the decision to increase the cap on Stansted passenger numbers from 25 to 35 million, stating: 'There is an urgent need for additional runway capacity.' However, in the last few months Stansted has lost many of its services. Overall passenger numbers at BAA airports have dropped by 5% in the last year, even before the impact of the recession has been felt.

Concerns about the impact

that more flights will have on the tranquillity of Hatfield Forest were met with the argument that the area has attracted higher visitor numbers as Stansted has grown. Perversely, though, this means that any increases in noise will affect even more people.

CPRE's branches continue to fight against the expansion, in particular the proposed second runway which will be the subject of an inquiry next year. CPRE is also challenging the assumptions behind the 2003 Air Transport White Paper.

### Disused rail link due to reopen

A disused rail link is to be reopened in Tavistock, Devon. The plans are part of a development which includes a redeveloped school and community hospital. The railway line will link the town with Plymouth and will provide an alternative way to travel into the city. The plans have been approved as the preferred option by West Devon Borough Council in its draft core strategy.

## Understand local government reforms

**Reforms in local government are not always easy to keep track of or understand. To help people get to grips with what is going on, we have produced a draft briefing paper, *The Local Government Reform Agenda*.**

New powers have been devolved to local authorities and their communities. New statutory local area agreements and multi-area agreements seek to align all area-based programmes – whether public, private or voluntary – into a single delivery plan. Then there are the Sustainable

Communities Act (see page 8) and the White Paper *Communities in Control: Real people, real power* to consider. Our briefing paper discusses the opportunities and threats these new powers pose for the future of the countryside.

Because local councils are having to focus on delivering area-based programmes, preparing sound local plans has taken a back seat. This marginalisation of planning at the local level poses a significant threat for the countryside and we continue to challenge it.

However, our briefing paper concentrates on the positive opportunities the changes present for the future of the countryside: the opportunity to improve local environmental quality, to nurture sustainable communities, and to sustain the provision of rural services such as local food networks, affordable homes, public transport and post offices.

For a copy of the briefing visit [www.cpre.org/library](http://www.cpre.org/library) and search for 'local government', or contact Richard Moseley at CPRE: [richardm@cpre.org.uk](mailto:richardm@cpre.org.uk), 020 7981 2832.

## dates of note

## Next steps on eco-towns

**The sustainability appraisal for eco-towns and the draft eco-towns Planning Policy Statement were published in November by the Government. They launched a second round of consultation on the proposed locations and standards for eco-towns.**

The Planning Policy Statement sets out the green standards for the new developments, including achieving zero carbon status across all the buildings in the eco-town and allocating 40%

of the area within the town for green space. It also states that individual eco-towns will need to submit planning applications in the same way as any other major development proposal.

The continuing insistence that eco-towns must be new settlements is worrying. Many of the schemes are in locations where development would entail building on greenfield land, including high quality agricultural land, or in areas at risk from flooding. The combination of

poor locations and the cost of providing high quality public transport to them means that shortlisted schemes will inevitably be car dependent. CPRE will be examining the proposed policy and schemes carefully.

**Take action:** Find out more and respond to the consultation on the Planning Policy Statement and sustainability appraisals of all the new schemes by visiting [www.communities.gov.uk/ecotowns](http://www.communities.gov.uk/ecotowns). The consultation closes on 19 February 2009.

## Rural transport solutions needed

**Five studies looking at transport challenges facing rural areas have been published by the Commission for Rural Communities. It is calling for urgent new solutions for rural transport.**

People who live in rural areas travel around 10,000 miles each year, compared with around 7,000 for the

population as a whole. Use of cars is significantly higher in rural areas. A continuing decline in local services means rural residents need to travel greater distances. This is exacerbated by significant gaps in public transport.

The studies look at the contribution of transport to sustainable rural communities;

sustainable rural accessibility and whether it's really possible; rural life without carbon; the implications of technological change for rural transport; and the potential impacts of road pricing on rural areas.

You can find the five studies at [www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk). Search for 'solutions for rural transport'.

## Funding boost helps community land trusts

**Community land trusts are to be given a helping hand by a new development fund, the Community Land Trust Fund.**

Community land trusts address the lack of affordable housing by securing land and building houses that are partly owned, in perpetuity, by the local community. Houses built by community land trusts are sold or rented to people in proven housing need at less than the

market rate. The difference between the actual market rate and the sum paid is the trust's continuing stake in the property.

Interest in the community land trust model is high. However, trusts have experienced two major obstacles. These are a lack, firstly, of technical support during the early and development stages and, secondly, of access to development capital. The new Community Land Trust Fund,

whose initial contributors are the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Tudor Trust, has a total of £2 million to support emerging trusts. By demonstrating that community land trusts are financially viable, the Fund will encourage mainstream financial institutions to become investors in a greater number of community land trust ventures.

To find out more, visit [www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk](http://www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk).

### Litter training courses

ENCAMS (the environmental charity that runs the Keep Britain Tidy campaign) provides the obligatory training course for people giving out fixed penalty notices for litter: visit [www.encams.org](http://www.encams.org). Courses are planned for:

*15 and 22 January and 5 February 2009*

### Eco-towns consultations

The second stage of the eco-town consultation programme opened in November. Have your say on the *Draft Planning Policy Statement: Eco-towns* and sustainability appraisals of all the schemes.

*Consultation closes 19 February 2009*

### Ecobuild 2009

The Ecobuild 2009 Conference will discuss sustainable design, construction and the built environment. It is free to attend and seats are available on a first come, first served basis. For more details visit [www.ecobuild.co.uk](http://www.ecobuild.co.uk).

*3-5 March 2009, Earls Court, London*

### Vitalising Rural Communities for the 21st Century

A joint workshop by CPRE Norfolk, Suffolk Preservation Society, Norfolk Rural Community Council and Suffolk ACRE. The event hopes to examine the scope for revitalising rural communities in Norfolk and Suffolk for the mid 21st century. Among other things it will look at opportunities for low carbon and affordable housing. For more details contact the Suffolk Preservation Society: [sps@suffolksociety.org](mailto:sps@suffolksociety.org), 01787 247179

*11 March 2009, Elmswell, Suffolk*

## current issues

### Gloucestershire awards recognise good practice

Projects that bring real benefits to the environment and local community are being celebrated through a new CPRE Gloucestershire awards scheme.

The branch launched the awards scheme last year to recognise and celebrate projects across the county. Projects must be exemplars of good practice which others might follow. The awards also show CPRE to be a forward-looking organisation which supports positive change.

The branch looks out for projects that demonstrate sustainability, improve the rural environment – natural or built – and are visible from public places. It has identified three categories of project with specific criteria, which were developed with help from the Countryside and Community Research Institute at the University of Gloucestershire. One category is well-considered buildings, which might be completely new, or restored or converted. Another is projects that make innovative use of natural resources. This might be about habitat management or renewable energy, for example. Lastly are projects developed by, or primarily benefiting, the local community.

To find out more, visit [www.cpreglos.org.uk](http://www.cpreglos.org.uk).

### Planning help

If you need some help with understanding the planning system, or want a reliable source of planning information, log on to CPRE's planning help website: [www.planninghelp.org.uk](http://www.planninghelp.org.uk).

# letter from the field

Words from local campaigners



## Susan Carter, member of CPRE Kirklees and on the West Yorkshire Branch Executive Committee, finds that achieving a Quiet Lane is easier said than done

### Dear reader,

Magdale is a pretty lane, about half a mile long, along a narrow, steep valley with a mill dam on the lower side and cottages and houses on the other. It is very narrow, only wide enough for one car, and yet it is used as a rat run, particularly morning and evening, by impatient motorists trying to avoid traffic lights in Honley. It is also used by commercial vehicles, which often get stuck, going to a small industrial complex in a nearby mill yard.

The residents grew tired of this and applied to Kirklees Council for Quiet Lane status. Under the Transport Act 2000, local authorities are able to designate minor rural roads for which they are responsible as Quiet Lanes. Quiet Lanes are designed to pay special attention to the needs of walkers, cyclists and horse riders and reduce the problems caused by the volume or speed of traffic. They should have low traffic flows travelling at decreased speeds.

After a lot of prevarication on the part of the council, Quiet Lane status was set up. This was when CPRE first heard of the scheme, so we went to

have a look to see how it was working. We met with several of the residents, who told us that the way the scheme had been done meant it certainly was not working and that it had made no difference to the traffic problem. (In fact, when we walked along it at around 7pm, we had to move aside for about a dozen or so cars and vans.) It is not working for a number of reasons. Firstly, the council didn't want to make the Quiet Lane a 20mph zone as requested. So traffic still travelled far too fast along it. The residents had also asked for traffic calming, in the form of either road plateaux or narrowing, but the council hasn't done this.

Another problem is that, although signs have been put up at either end of the Quiet Lane, they don't mean anything to the average motorist and there is no explanation. Unfortunately, the highway authority's answer to traffic calming is to plaster the lane with bright red plastic material with 'slow' written all over it. This does not sit well in a conservation area and looks awful. What's more, it is having no effect on speed whatsoever.

We really felt that many of the

requirements for Quiet Lanes have either been ignored or not implemented. So CPRE Kirklees approached the council to see if it couldn't improve matters for Magdale. At last, the council has agreed to change the speed limit to 20mph, which we are really pleased about.

We also want to work with the council to identify more lanes in the area that are crying out for Quiet Lane status. There needs to be more publicity both nationally and locally for the average motorist to understand the rules for Quiet Lanes.

*CPRE has raised concerns that Quiet Lane designation would have limited benefits if introduced without lower speed limits. Government research in 2004 showed low levels of comprehension among drivers and traffic engineers of many traffic signs. Comprehension of Home Zones or the new sign for Quiet Lanes will be even lower. The Government's Traffic Signs Policy Review (see p.10), the forthcoming Road Safety Strategy Review and third round of Local Transport Plans provide key opportunities for CPRE to deal with these problems.*

# goodideas

Learning from each other

## Local food message reaches the classroom in Northamptonshire

**Wouldn't it be lovely if, wherever you live, you were able to walk into a shop, supermarket or restaurant and find high quality, affordable local food? Food that not only comes from the nearby countryside, but is produced in a way that benefits the environment, or at the very least, does not harm it. This is the vision that CPRE Northamptonshire is working towards.**

Thanks to funding from Awards for All – the Lottery grant scheme for local communities – the branch has been able to start working towards its vision. It is in the middle of a very successful food miles campaign. The

campaign aims to raise awareness of CPRE and the food miles issue and get primary schools, groups and after-school clubs linked to their local food network or equivalent (such as a local farm shop). The lessons learnt from this project will then help the branch to start a new project targeted at senior schools.

The branch has just one year to contact all primary schools and choose up to 25 to participate in the project. It has designed imaginative, fun educational packs as a resource for anyone working with children of primary school age. Included are colourful factsheets to build up knowledge of the issues

surrounding food miles. There are also activity sheets so that children can enjoy themselves while they learn more about the impacts of transporting food over long distances. The pack is designed to fit into different elements of the curriculum, and links into key skills. As part of the project, the branch is working directly with schools to help get the message across. It is visiting schools to give presentations in assemblies as well as working with year groups to help pupils get to grips with the issue of food miles.

CPRE Northamptonshire will be evaluating the project in early 2009 in preparation for use in secondary schools.

## Fish and chip supper event helps reduce litter

**CPRE Craven found a quirky way to reduce litter from takeaway packaging. As part of CPRE North Yorkshire's local *Stop the Drop* campaign, the district group set up a fish and chip night – with a difference.**

The group was fed up with the amount of fast food packaging that ended up as litter and wanted to do something about it. It had heard about a local fish and chip shop that had switched to putting its fish and chips into a biodegradable box instead of polystyrene. This had come about because the owners were

sick of seeing litter around the town. As polystyrene does not biodegrade it was often seen floating along the local canal. Until recently there was no environmentally friendly alternative.

With the introduction of the Bio-Box by one of the biggest independent suppliers to UK fish and chip outlets, all this has changed. The box is made from the plant material left over after sugar cane has been processed. This material was previously burned as it had no use, creating further damage to the environment. The boxes rot down after 90 days, keep the

food warm, and have even been said to help keep the fish crispier.

Campaigners at CPRE Craven had the bright idea of publicising this with a fish and chip night in October. They produced promotional leaflets about the new packaging and with information on the *Stop the Drop* campaign. On the evening, 35 guests enjoyed delicious food and found out more about the campaign. The diners took the leaflets with them and will pass them on to their local takeaways. Local press coverage of the event helped spread the message.

### CPRE forms local group against housing expansion

Faced with a proposal that Luton should expand eastwards with thousands of new houses in the Green Belt in North Hertfordshire, CPRE Hertfordshire decided to set up a local campaign group to fight the threat.

The branch knew that, because it did not have enough staff and volunteers to run it, the campaign committee would have to be independent of CPRE, although it would expect to be represented on the committee.

The first step was a public meeting in July to raise awareness and find volunteers to form a campaign committee. The branch asked the local MP, Peter Lilley, to address the meeting, and at least 120 people turned up. A senior planner from North Hertfordshire District Council came to explain the planning background to the proposal.

The situation is all the more urgent because a consortium of landowners and developers is currently preparing planning applications for the development. These could be submitted at any time, without waiting for the local development framework process to move on. Not only is the proposed urban extension (of at least 300 hectares) in the Green Belt, it is of high landscape value, being on the edge of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The public meeting generated a lot of enthusiasm, but there were hardly any volunteers for the key committee posts. At a second public meeting in September, though, more volunteers came forward, and the nucleus of a campaign committee emerged. Since then, the committee has started to organise a website, publicity, recruitment and fundraising.

The group is called Keep East of Luton Green. Visit its website: [www.keolg.org](http://www.keolg.org).

## current issues

### Handbook gives tips on going green

With the countryside facing a real threat from climate change, any way to reduce personal carbon emissions is welcome. Help is at hand to slim your carbon footprint.

The *Three Tonne Club Handbook* inspires people to come together to campaign on a personal level. The title refers to the personal carbon footprint we need to achieve by 2030 in order to limit global warming to 2°C. Three tonnes sounds heavy, but most people's starting point will be over 13 tonnes.

The handbook starts off by helping you calculate your own carbon footprint. Then it looks in detail at areas where you can make a difference: home energy, air travel and food, for example. The idea is for people to support each other in groups by sharing problems and solutions and identifying easy things to do.

To find out more, visit [www.wen.org.uk](http://www.wen.org.uk) or contact Women's Environmental Network: 020 7481 9004.

### New planning rules come out

New planning rules came into effect on 1 October. They are designed to allow homeowners in England to extend and improve their properties without going through the planning system.

The new regulations mean that the majority of homeowners will no longer need to get planning permission to extend their home. In addition, anyone who wants to install a new driveway or parking area over 5m<sup>2</sup> will not require planning permission if they use surfaces that allow the water to soak through the ground.

# stepbystep

Guide to good campaigning

## How to make the most of the Sustainable Communities Act

**In October 2007 the Sustainable Communities Act became law. It is based on the philosophy that it is local people and their communities who know the best ways to promote sustainability in their area. The Act introduces a new procedure for local authorities to make proposals for enhancing local sustainability to the Secretary of State.**

The Secretary of State took the first step in October 2008, inviting local authorities to bring forward proposals by 31 July 2009. This will be an annual invitation. If local authorities accept this invitation they must set up panels of representatives of local people to bring forward and consider proposals. Panels must include people from under-represented groups.

Once all proposals by local authorities have been identified, the Local Government Association, which represents all councils, will prioritise those to be put forward to the Secretary of State. Finally, the Government has to reach agreement, in cooperation with the Local Government Association, on the proposals to be acted upon.

Should local authorities be encouraged to opt in to this process? Yes, for several reasons. Firstly, the Act gives the Government a legal duty to assist local authorities in dealing with neighbourhood decline or unsustainable change, and gives local authorities the power to determine that assistance.

Secondly, it can lead to new powers being delegated to the local level through the transfer of functions and money from central to local control. Thirdly, the Act requires central Government to open its books in terms of money spent locally by Government departments and agencies. This will help local authorities make sure that these spending plans and programmes work well together towards the common purpose of creating sustainability and well-being in their communities.

CPRE cares deeply about protecting and enhancing the quality of the local environment. We also appreciate that using public finance more effectively to promote sustainable communities in existing settlements can help to prevent new development in the countryside in the long term. CPRE wishes to see more public investment to sustain rural services, including local food networks, affordable homes, public transport and post offices.

So the Act could improve your local community in many ways. Here's how you can use it.

### 1 Ensure your council takes action

Your local authority has been invited to submit proposals to the Government. As a local citizen, you can help to make clear the benefits of doing this. If your local authority chooses not to submit proposals, challenge it. Make it aware that under the Local Government Act 2000 it

has a duty to promote the well-being of its area. If you have evidence of community decline, use it to show that the council needs central Government assistance to meet this duty.

### 2 Get inspired

If you are stuck for ideas about how to make use of the Act, there is a handy guide available. The *Sustainable Communities Act Guide* is aimed at members of the public. It describes how the Act can be used and gives helpful examples of what can be achieved. A copy is available via the Local Works website, [www.localworks.org](http://www.localworks.org), and from Steve Shaw, Local Works, c/o Unlock Democracy, 6 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF.

### 3 Develop proposals

The Act defines promoting the sustainability of local communities as 'encouraging the economic, social or environmental well-being of the authority's area, or part of its area'. Its definition of social well-being includes 'participation in civic and political activity'. Importantly, this could involve devolution of powers to communities and parish councils.

The Act fleshes out this definition and provides additional ideas and inspiration over the types of proposal it supports – for instance, proposals about local services, the local food economy, local jobs, energy conservation, or traffic reduction. You can find more information in

## current issues

### Conservation through grant giving

Historic water meadows near Salisbury are being conserved, thanks to a recent grant from CPRE South Wiltshire.

The district group is in the enviable position, courtesy of an annual four-figure grant from a local private trust, of being able to build up a substantial capital sum. From this it can make grants to suitable environmental and conservation bodies in South Wiltshire. However, it can be surprisingly difficult to winkle out likely recipients or judge the merit of those who approach the group.

The Harnham Water Meadows Trust, the current lucky recipient of a grant, is a worthy beneficiary. The Trust owns or manages 40 hectares of historic irrigated water meadows that stretch up to the heart of Salisbury city centre. The grant is being put towards the purchase of a cottage which will act as a base for an education and development officer, house a display and provide a centre for visiting groups and school parties.

Over the years, CPRE South Wiltshire has made grants for a number of interesting projects. One example is a remote camera at a Wiltshire Wildlife Trust aquatic reserve. It has also given money to a recently formed nature reserve on the River Nadder near Salisbury, and to three separate pieces of woodland for a variety of small improvements. The most unusual project has probably been the restoration of the Nine Clumps, an early nineteenth century landscape feature where each clump of trees represents one of Nelson's ships at the Battle of Aboukir Bay in 1798.

## LINCOLN'S VILLAGE STORE

WESTLETON POST OFFICE

*The Sustainable Communities Act will support proposals about local services, local jobs and the local food economy, among other issues*

the *Sustainable Communities Act Guide*.

In essence, a proposal is purely an idea for local improvements. It can take any form. When your local authority opts in to the scheme, it will have to set up a system for dealing with proposals. You will need to ensure you are aware of this.

### 4 Use evidence

It is important that proposals conform generally with the existing planning policy framework at national, regional and local level. Refer initially to your local planning authority for a copy of the planning policies that are currently in force in your area. In addition, ensure you look at the Government's overarching policies for the delivery of sustainable development through the planning system. These are available from the Department for Communities and Local Government ([www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk), 020 7944 4400).

April 2009 will see a new system of comprehensive area assessment, which will hold local authorities and other public agencies to account collectively for how well they are doing. An

area risk assessment into the prospects for the area and the quality of life for local people forms a key part of the comprehensive area assessment. This will provide useful evidence in support of ideas and initiatives for proposals. The new requirement on central Government to open its books through an annual local spending report may also provide useful information to support proposals that seek the transfer of functions and monies to local control.

### 5 Drum up support

Local authorities may have to choose between a number of proposals. It is therefore important that you win widespread support from key partners before submitting proposals. They could comprise other local people or organisations, including the relevant parish council. Parish councils are identified as a key consultee within the Sustainable Communities Act.

As local authorities will be in competition to get their proposal prioritised by the Local Government Association, it may be helpful to seek cross-boundary support for your proposals. Think about projects that neighbouring authorities

could support. Having a number of partners across different authorities will give your proposal more weight. For instance, there might be a post office you want to open or re-open locally. Think about teaming up with neighbouring authorities that might want to replicate this project in their area. Another proposal idea might be to suggest your local authority takes the power away from central Government on rural affordable housing issues, meaning it could set quotas locally.

### 6 Talk with local panel

Your local authority must try to give all local people the chance to talk with those who are sitting on the panel that will vet the proposals. This is to help you test ideas and initiatives before submitting them formally. You could try to become a member of your local panel. The criteria for getting nominated onto your local panel are set locally. Ask your council for details of how to go about this, and get other people and organisations to nominate you. Sitting on your local panel should give you a better chance of having your proposal taken up. ■

## current issues

### Road signage study begins

In September, the Government launched the biggest review of UK road signs for 40 years.

It will consider powers to reduce street clutter and ensure that out-of-date signs are removed. It will also explore technologies for managing traffic flow and providing better information such as up-to-date travel news.

CPRE will be taking part in some of the sub groups looking at particular signage issues such as rural roads. An action plan for the review is due by mid 2009. The Department for Transport will then develop policy proposals to put forward for consultation.

### Eco-friendly housing scheme leads way

Groundbreaking plans for an eco-friendly social housing scheme in Long Sutton in Lincolnshire have been approved.

The Long Sutton Earth Sheltered Social Housing scheme will consist of six earth-sheltered dwellings. The usual planning considerations for design and character were set aside so councillors could approve this unique development.

Each house will use state-of-the-art energy-saving technology, including photovoltaic panels providing electricity and heated water. Earth bunding will surround the walls to help insulation, and there will be a rainwater harvesting facility.

It will be the first UK social housing scheme to give tenants autonomy over their energy, water and waste management. They will be paid for the excess electricity filtered back into the National Grid, aided by a 6kW wind turbine.

# parishbeat

Effective solutions for your parish

## Toolkit helps fight litter and fly-tipping

**Litter and fly-tipping may well come high up on your parish council agenda. Parish councillors, clerks and officers work tirelessly on this issue, and with great results. CPRE's recently issued *Stop the Drop* toolkit is designed to support these efforts.**

Since Bill Bryson launched CPRE's *Stop the Drop* campaign in April we have been raising awareness about litter and fly-tipping and encouraging action by the Government, by local authorities and by individuals.

Our *Stop the Drop* parish

council toolkit was sent out last month to all parish councils who are members of CPRE. It is also on our website: go to [www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns](http://www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns) and click on '*Stop the Drop*'. It gives you facts and figures, ideas and tips, and all the resources you need to bring *Stop the Drop* to your parish.

We hope your parish council will be able to support our campaign in some way. This may be by organising community litter picks, ensuring you have litter bins in all the right places and possibly even issuing fines to people caught littering. If you don't already,

alert your local authority to fly-tipping hot spots and ensure it fulfils its duty to clean up litter. Please help spread the word and change people's attitudes to litter by working with schools and community groups, and using your parish magazine and noticeboards to raise awareness.

We hope you have found some new ideas and inspiration in the toolkit. If you haven't received your copy, or would like to tell us your ideas for fighting litter, please contact the CPRE campaigns team: [campaigns@cpre.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@cpre.org.uk), 020 7981 2869.

## Protecting local landscapes

**If your parish is about to embark on a parish plan or a village design statement, adding a community landscape character statement will give a view of the village in its widest possible setting.**

A community landscape character statement is a document which records what your local landscape is like and what your community values about it. By involving the whole community and asking for memories, feelings, hopes and fears as well as factual descriptions you can make the connections between people and the landscape and find out what people's aspirations are for where they live.

It is often hard work to bring a worthwhile project like this to life, so we have produced a step-by-step guide to help you get started. This guide accompanies our *Unlocking the*

*Landscape* action pack, which gives more in-depth ideas on putting together a community landscape character statement. As with any project like this, the more people you can involve the easier it is for everyone. Being clear about what the benefits will be will help you to attract volunteers. They will want to know that they can really make a difference. Many people we spoke to had come up with their own imaginative ways of bringing the community together and protecting their surroundings. One group held a tea party especially for elderly residents and used the occasion to record their memories of the landscape they grew up in.

Local development frameworks allow for community involvement at many stages. Our action pack explains how to be part of this process. Talk to your local planning department about how your community

landscape character statement, village design statement or parish plan can feed into the local development framework. Ideally, you should aim to have it accepted as a supplementary planning document as part of the local development framework, so that it qualifies as a material consideration when planning decisions are made in your area.

We would love to hear from you if you have already had experience of producing a parish plan, village design statement or community landscape character statement, especially if you have successfully had this adopted as a supplementary planning document. Please contact the CPRE campaigns team: [campaigns@cpre.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@cpre.org.uk), 020 7981 2869. You can find the step-by-step guide and the action pack at [www.cpre.org.uk/library](http://www.cpre.org.uk/library), or contact our campaigns team.

# campaigner

## Champion of local foods in Cheshire

**B**eing a country girl at heart, Charlotte Burton felt becoming involved with CPRE Cheshire would be a great way to get to know the county she'd just moved to.

Nick Figg

Charlotte had always done a lot of volunteering. After moving to Cheshire she was looking to get involved in local projects. An advert for a volunteer on CPRE Cheshire's website set the ball rolling. Charlotte was not only very interested in what CPRE stood for, she felt that the local group would be really supportive – an important consideration when you're giving up your time to volunteer!

CPRE Cheshire had started a local food awards scheme a couple of years ago. Because it was so stretched for resources in terms of staff time, the branch felt it wasn't making the most of a great opportunity. This is where Charlotte's volunteering help came in. Describing herself as 'passionate about local food', Charlotte was very keen to help grow the awards scheme.

### Creative tactics

She used her contacts to get an attractive and eye-catching leaflet designed and printed at a reduced rate. The next step was to create a simple database of as many people involved in local food growing, processing and retailing as she could find in Cheshire. Charlotte then sent a tailored letter as well as a bundle of leaflets (so they could be displayed in the shop or stall) to each of the 150 people on the database, inviting nominations for the awards. Another marketing tactic was setting up a stall at a local farmers market.



*Charlotte is passionate about local food*

She used the leaflets to promote the event and encourage people to support local food producers and retailers.

Throughout the summer, a constant stream of entry forms arrived in the office. 'It's been lovely to read about local businesses passionate about what they do,' says Charlotte. All in all, CPRE Cheshire received over 50 nominations.

As well as volunteering, Charlotte holds down a couple of jobs. One of those is working for a dynamic consultancy which runs environmental projects and community consultations and events. From this, Charlotte has learnt the power of creativity and how to tackle things in imaginative ways in order to get the best results. She believes

it's important to provide various means for people to contribute to a project – and to make it as easy as possible for them to do this.

Charlotte really wants to ensure Cheshire's local food project links in with the growing awareness of local and wild food. She feels a good way to do this is to build up a lively programme of events – things like mushroom identification walks – that will engage different people and encourage them to get involved with CPRE.

For Charlotte, persistence, innovation and ensuring you have a tailored message are key to a great campaign. And, she says, it's so important to 'make people feel they want to be a part of it'.

## current issues

### Rewarding the work of volunteers

This year CPRE launched its first national award scheme, the Marsh Awards. They have been set up with the Marsh Christian Trust to help us recognise and reward the outstanding work of CPRE volunteers – and to inspire others. Each year, we will reward one CPRE campaigning group and one CPRE volunteer for their work.

Our first year's nominations demonstrate the remarkable amount, variety and effectiveness of work being done by our volunteers. CPRE Hampshire's Campaigners for a Proper Park were this year's group winners for their outstanding contribution to the South Downs campaign. Martin Walton of CPRE Norfolk was the individual winner, for his work on the innovative and long-standing Norfolk Awards scheme.

Campaigners for a Proper Park have shown unflagging determination in their efforts to ensure the Western Weald is included within the draft South Downs National Park boundary. The group continues to conduct lobbying, media work and research, making a vital contribution to the campaign.

The Norfolk Awards is the longest-running CPRE award scheme. Hundreds of projects have received awards from the scheme, now in its 28th year. The awards emphasise the importance of promoting appropriate development and giving positive recognition. Martin Walton has been a key figure in the scheme. His work has inspired other CPRE branches to adopt similar schemes.

To find out how to make a nomination contact Vicki Snodgrass at CPRE: [vickis@cpre.org.uk](mailto:vickis@cpre.org.uk), 020 7981 2862.

## current issues

### Using green space creatively

Local authorities are being called on to use green space creatively to reduce the impact of climate change.

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, the Government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space, has launched a series of case studies. They show how adapting public spaces to the impacts of climate change has helped towns and cities respond to the seasonal problems of flooding, water shortage and rising temperatures. For instance, rainwater can be stored to keep trees green in summer and so moderate the urban heat island effect.

In 2007 the UK spent £36 billion on tackling flood damage. The Commission argues that some of this could be better spent on green space designed to lessen this damage by creating natural defence systems.

One study features the River Quaggy in south London, which has been brought back up to the surface from being piped underground. The river now flows through a local park which is simply allowed to flood during periods of high rainfall. Further flood storage has been created in nearby sports fields. The final stretch of the river has been altered to create more natural meanders and areas of deeper and shallower water. A knock-on effect has been an improved habitat for wildlife. Where possible, hard defences were replaced by soft defences. Where it was impossible to replace the hard defences, bird nesting areas and planting boxes have been added, alongside fern habitat. The scheme has even incorporated people's back gardens.

# inreview

Our perspective on countryside issues

## Goodwill payments

**A growing number of local communities across England are being drawn in to accepting offers of goodwill payments from wind farm developers. But CPRE believes that these payments are undermining public faith in the planning system.**

Arguably, goodwill payments could be seen as tantamount to buying planning permission. Currently, goodwill payments only appear to arise in relation to planned wind energy development. Community benefits may arise in relation to most, if not all other forms of new development, but are addressed through the Section 106 process. Goodwill payments are not Section 106 agreements, and it is worth considering the differences between the two.

### Community benefits within planning system

Section 106 agreements are a well-established method of allowing developers to agree contributions to local communities. These agreements are generally accepted by all interests involved in planning and work well where they are used. They are a way of ensuring that a reasonable share of development profits goes to necessary public goods – such as affordable housing – that also relate closely to the development in question.

The Section 106 process is now generally seen to work in accordance with publicly agreed policy objectives as set out in the development plan. Government policy encourages full public involvement in the

negotiation of the agreements. Also, they are legally enforceable, which ensures that whatever community benefits have been agreed are sure to happen.

### Unfair and unaccountable

Goodwill payments are unsatisfactory when compared to Section 106 agreements in all these respects. They operate outside the planning system. The process by which



Energy companies should be required to work through the planning process in the same way as any other developer



the payments are made, with one or two possible exceptions in individual cases, is not fully transparent or open to full public involvement. It is also likely that local communities which accept such payments are being short-changed. CPRE believes that they would get a much fairer deal if offers of community benefit from wind farm development were properly considered through the local planning process.

We understand that in many cases the developer will publicise or offer goodwill payments to whoever they feel like within the local community. Often this will be the nearest parish council and

local residents closest to the proposed development. These offers of community benefit do not go through the proper procedures of the planning system, unlike similar offers from most other developers. Money from the payments is often used for purposes such as senior citizens' lunches and youth clubs, which may be worthy in themselves but bear no relationship to the development. Also, the payments offered to date often have no means of being legally enforced. At the very least, the attempt to focus on particular parish councils and other groups, as has happened in the majority of cases notified to us, is unfair and potentially divisive.

Developers of a wind farm in one county recently offered a large financial gift to a youth club, thus obliging some parish councillors to declare their interest in the youth club and withdraw from the parish council meeting. The withdrawal of these members left the council inquorate, meaning that it was unable to reach a view on the planning application made by the same developer.

CPRE supports the need to increase investment in renewable energy, including wind energy. But goodwill payments threaten to bring the planning system into disrepute and are questionable even on the grounds of the need for more renewable energy. We believe that the solution is to outlaw these payments completely. Energy companies should be required to work through the planning process in the same way as any other developer.

# Q and A

The answers you need

## Looking after fingerpost signs

**Q** I have noticed that the traditional direction signs in my area are looking a bit neglected. I'm worried that they will continue to deteriorate and eventually be replaced with standard modern signage. Who should be looking after them?

**A** Traditional direction signs make an important contribution to the local character and identity of suburbs, villages and rural areas across the country. The wide variety of surviving regional and local designs helps to reinforce local distinctiveness, which creates a sense of continuity in a rapidly changing environment.

Local authorities are encouraged to maintain

historical street furniture and should include provisions for this in their local development plans. Policies for repairing or reinstating signs should also be included in village design statements, parish plans and anywhere else they are relevant, such as Quiet Lane initiatives and local transport plans. Well-maintained signs can be a useful boost to local tourism.

The repair of traditional fingerposts and the provision of appropriately designed new signs can form part of the maintenance bid in the local transport plan, which will be administered by your local authority. Wherever appropriate in terms of service and safety, traditional fingerpost signs can

be reintroduced on rural roads, other than 'A' and 'B' classified roads, to reinforce local identity.

You should contact your local authority, usually the transport department, to see if it has a policy on maintaining these signs and, if so, when it plans to spruce them up in your area. You could also contact your parish council and Tourist Information Centre to see whether they are aware of this issue and what action they are taking.

To find the 2005 Department for Transport traffic advisory leaflet about traditional direction signs (number 6/05), visit [www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk) and search for 'traditional direction signs', or call Emma Marrington at CPRE: 020 7981 2840.

## When developers look at more land than first thought

**Q** A major new urban extension is being proposed in our area in the final draft of the regional plan, currently under consultation. Agents for the development have submitted a request for a scoping opinion in respect of an environmental assessment to cover a much greater area than we were led to believe the extension would need. Is this pre-empting consultation on the regional plan?

**A** Developers often promote, and local councils often begin consulting on, sites for new development some time before the relevant regional spatial strategy policy is finalised. In one

recent example, a local authority organised a consultation on possible sites for an urban extension when the regional spatial strategy policy promoting the extension was still under consultation. Alongside this, the developer's agent also submitted a request for a scoping opinion for an environmental impact assessment to cover the full range of possible sites within the general area covered by the draft regional spatial strategy policy.

If the local authority agrees to this request, it does not mean that permission for development on the area covered has been agreed. Nor does it necessarily mean that the developer is seeking a bigger development than the consultation may

suggest, though it is worth watching this closely.

CPRE has produced a briefing with tips on responding to a request for a scoping opinion, and there is also policy guidance in a Government circular (Circular 02/99). Both are available on our planning help website: [www.planninghelp.org.uk](http://www.planninghelp.org.uk). You could argue with the local planning authority that it should not accede to the request for a scoping opinion because it is premature. There may be some difficulty contending this, however, as the urban extensions being proposed across England are often in designated growth points, where councils gain extra Government funds in return for agreeing to more new housing.

## current issues

### Moving to a unitary system

Five counties will be moving to a unitary authority system from 1 April 2009 – Cornwall, Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire and Wiltshire. Alongside this, two counties – Bedfordshire and Cheshire – are being split into two separate unitary authorities.

This has previously happened in other parts of the country and could well happen again in future. One worry is that it will take time for new planning committees to form, because new councillors have to be elected, and there are no arrangements to deal with planning applications in the interim period. There are particular concerns about the short timescale for the transition. In Shropshire all decisions will be devolved to officers during the transition, which offers a window of opportunity for developers.

In Northumberland and Cornwall there are anxieties about how local plans will be incorporated into a single unitary plan and possible delays in developing that plan. In Northumberland, planning committees at district and county levels will remain until a single local development framework is in place for the county (likely to be in three to five years' time). Something similar will happen in Durham.

In Bedfordshire the change to two unitary authorities seems to be fairly well organised and planned, and CPRE Bedfordshire is supportive of the plans that are emerging.

If you have concerns or ideas about the process, please contact Richard Moseley at CPRE: [richardm@cpre.org.uk](mailto:richardm@cpre.org.uk), 020 7981 2832.

### Making good use of the uplands

In Cumbria, CPRE is represented by Friends of the Lake District. It owns 464 hectares (1,146 acres) of common land, 44 hectares (108 acres) of farmland and three woodlands. One of the areas of common land, Little Asby Common, has about ten commoners with rights to graze sheep or cows on the common. The communal hefting system – where the sheep or cattle have been bred at a sustainable level for generations on the same piece of land, and always instinctively return to it – is part of the cultural heritage of the common.

The result is a mosaic of internationally and nationally important habitats on the common. The texture and appearance of the land is maintained, reinforcing its landscape character and keeping the area special for those who come to enjoy it.

The 44-hectare (108-acre) farmstead of High Borrowdale, north of Kendal, includes a derelict farmhouse, a cow shed, and a field barn. Friends of the Lake District plans to maintain, enhance and diversify the special qualities of this landscape. Using funding from green farming schemes it has repaired the traditional buildings and restored dry-stone walls, and is working to re-establish an upland hay meadow.

Jan Darrall, Friends of the Lake District's policy officer and agriculture specialist, says, 'Net Cumbrian upland farm incomes in 2006/07 were just £3,800. However, ... farmers are resilient and genuinely wish to continue farming the uplands, but they cannot do this alone ... it's time for a rural/uplands regeneration push. Farmers can provide practical solutions to issues and problems if they are given the chance and if there is respect for their views.'

# Recognising the of the uplands

**E**ngland's upland areas are facing a combination of economic, environmental and social problems of crisis proportions. The Government's Commission for Rural Communities has recently announced a new inquiry into the uplands, to which CPRE will respond. We hope the inquiry will take a comprehensive approach to the challenges facing the uplands and the solutions that are needed, before it is too late.

The upland areas of England cover 2.2 million hectares (5.4 million acres). Out of this, about 1.8 million hectares (4.4 million acres) are agricultural land. Much of this is also common land. This makes up around 17% of English agricultural land. Remarkably, 74% of the uplands are designated National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or special sites for nature.

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*Livestock farmers are facing low food prices, rising energy and feed costs, and reduced incomes*

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Crisis is nothing new for the uplands. Over the years many reports have been produced by the Government, environmental and farming organisations and academics on the environmental, economic and social problems of our most beautiful, treasured and yet threatened landscapes. So why is this upland crisis different from the rest? Mainly because there is a wide range of factors that in combination are creating serious consequences for the environment, economy and communities of the uplands.

Economically, livestock farmers are facing low food prices, rising energy and feed

costs, and, for some, reduced incomes resulting from the way EU farm payments are calculated. Many upland areas are degraded, suffering from both over- and under-grazing for different reasons. Some important designated wildlife sites are in poor condition, upland soils are being eroded and the carbon they contain is being lost, and flooding in the uplands is increasing. Landscape features are falling into disrepair and the skills or labour to maintain them – and traditional practices such as hefting (communal, unfenced grazing) and communal gathering on the

JESter



# value

Derry Brabbs



*England's upland areas are facing a combination of economic, environmental and social problems of crisis proportions*

commons – are rapidly disappearing. The average age of farmers is increasing as there are few young entrants to the industry. Additionally, house prices are high, making them unaffordable for local people, and rural public transport and rural services are declining.

The uplands are complex and multi-functional. The lowlands too reap benefits from the uplands, and there are large numbers of people who rely on them continuing to do their important job. They provide fine landscapes, biodiversity, drinking water, clean air, cultural heritage, recreation and tourism, local distinctiveness, a sense of place, energy creation, locations for business, and places for spiritual refreshment, inspiration, health and well-being – something for everyone, in fact. However, this all depends on farmers and land managers, and they are becoming an increasingly scarce resource: time may be running out.

## **Fair payments needed**

There are changes afoot for the system of payments that the Government makes to upland farmers to take account of some of these difficulties. The hill farm allowance is being phased out and a new uplands entry level stewardship scheme is being introduced. CPRE has been supportive of introducing a scheme that rewards upland farmers for the countryside management that makes the uplands special. But we are concerned that some of the benefits that are being provided are not being fully recognised or valued.

In our response to the recent consultations and in meetings with officials from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs we have stressed the importance of ensuring the uplands entry level stewardship scheme is easily accessible to the majority of farmers. We want there to be a simple application process and easily understandable requirements. It is important that any change does not make the economic viability of upland farmers even more precarious by unnecessarily constraining farming practices needed to provide upland farmers with a living. We think farmers should be paid the true costs of maintaining and enhancing our countryside, not merely the current calculation of income foregone.

## **Range of solutions**

There is no simple or single solution to the problems for the uplands, but CPRE has some suggestions. The Government's agencies (Natural England, the Environment Agency and English Heritage) should work together and agree on what everyone wants for the uplands, recognising that the uplands are capable of simultaneously being many things to many people.

Plans for whole landscape areas and river catchments need to be developed jointly between all of the agencies. This needs to happen with input from the farmers and communities to ensure what is being proposed is realistic.

In fact, a range of solutions is needed. Diversification and niche markets are not the answers for everyone. Finding ways to close the growing skills gap in particular needs urgent attention. This is so that the next generation of upland farmers can make a living and upland communities can be vibrant places to live.

At a national level, the public's knowledge of upland farming and the management of our landscapes is limited. However, there is an untapped willingness on the part of the public to learn about these aspects of our countryside and to support the maintenance of our upland landscapes and communities.

Official designations in current use – such as 'less favoured areas' and 'severely disadvantaged areas' – imply that the uplands are of little value. Instead, CPRE wants the uplands to be seen and referred to in positive terms that recognise all the important things they contribute. ■

“  
*People are keen to support the maintenance of our upland landscapes and communities*  
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# matter of fact

Support for your case

## Housing in the downturn

**The market downturn is redefining the debate around housing. It underlines CPRE's case for a planning system based on meeting needs, rather than on demand for housing. The credit crunch highlights starkly the fallacy of a top-down, market-driven approach to housing.**

The Government's target of 3 million homes by 2020 appears increasingly improbable. Leading commentators, notably David Orr, chief executive of the National Housing Federation, have observed that this level will not be reached for at least a further nine years. The latest figures show that housebuilding starts fell in August to their lowest level since records began. This is a 51% decrease on the same three-month period a year ago (in the June–August quarter it fell from 51,730 in 2007 to 25,097 this year).

In the private sector, housebuilding starts for this quarter (14,665) declined 65% compared with the same period a year ago (42,071). Starts for the first eight months of this year are 50% lower than they were last year. The social housing sector is showing more resilience. In the June–August quarter, social housing starts were up from 9,659 last year to 10,432 this year. In September, mortgage approvals were down 57% on the same period a year ago. Meanwhile, around 210,000 homes per annum are planned

for in existing and emerging regional spatial strategies. It is estimated that between a third and half of this number may actually get built this year.

### Rural areas affected

Rural areas have fared badly in the downturn. Repossessions have risen and waiting lists for affordable homes in rural districts continue to grow.

The average house price in rural areas is £235,324, 15% higher than the average urban price of £204,290. Falling house prices will improve affordability only if incomes do not also fall.

Figures show the downturn affects affordable housing less than market housing. However, this may not last, because Section 106 agreements, a key source of funding, are being squeezed. Many affordable homes in recent years have been built by private developers as part of their market schemes through these agreements. The market downturn makes it harder for private developers to provide affordable housing in this way and, with fewer market homes being built, other sources of funding are urgently needed.

On top of the well-publicised bank bailout, measures announced by the Government to assist the faltering housing market include an expanded HomeBuy scheme (enabling social tenants, key workers and first-time buyers to buy a share of a home and take their first step on the housing ladder), a

stamp duty holiday, a £13 million fund for housing associations to buy homes from developers, greater grant flexibility for the Housing Corporation, and use of public sector land for development. The Housing Corporation will run a national clearing house through which housebuilders will be able to make stock they cannot sell available for affordable housing.



*Achieving the Government's target of 3 million homes by 2020 appears increasingly improbable*



### Changes needed

CPRE supports many of these Government measures. At the same time, we are calling for a fundamental change in the way housing is provided, based on the following principles.

Housing should be viewed as a service, rather than a tradeable commodity or investment. Wealth has become increasingly concentrated in housing, and this has pushed prices up and diverted investment away from productive economic activity. We need a planned approach, with the level and location of new

housing based on genuine needs, not market demand or spurious top-down targets. The size, type, tenure and cost of new homes should respond to identified needs, and the potential to meet these by using existing property should always be considered. In fact, the number of empty properties in England (750,000) actually rose last year. The right regulatory and fiscal framework is essential to secure responsible levels of lending and transparent accounting.

### Diversity is beneficial

A diversity of housing options would benefit society as a whole. Private renting is set to become increasingly important in future – over the past year demand for rented homes has risen by 50%. Private renting is important for the economy since it underpins labour mobility. We need a renewed commitment to affordable social rented housing and recognition that, for some, social housing is the tenure of choice, not a lesser form of housing. There is a role for real estate investment trusts and community land trusts to support these aims.

Lastly, we need to insist on maintaining good standards. High environmental standards in new and existing buildings will make homes more durable, cheaper to run and resilient in the face of growing international volatility and competition for scarce resources such as fuel. ■



Campaign to Protect Rural England

# Fieldwork

Helping you to protect and enhance the countryside