



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
Standing up for your countryside

FIELD WORK

Winter 2015

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The Housing and Planning Bill – a threat to affordable rural housing?

The Housing and Planning Bill published in October contains some very welcome provisions, such as the proposals for a brownfield register - which CPRE has long argued will help promote urban regeneration by demonstrating that brownfield land is a renewable resource. On the other hand, some elements are likely to compound rather than tackle the housing crisis, particularly in rural areas.

CPRE supports the Bill's provisions for local authorities to be required to allocate land for self and custom housebuilding. We believe this measure would facilitate development by more small and medium sized house builders - thereby helping to improve the design and local distinctiveness of new housing. However, with the countryside likely to prove most attractive to custom and self-builders, we want rural local authorities to be able to utilise exemptions to prevent inappropriate development. We also support the Bill's measures to prevent unnecessary obstacles delaying neighbourhood planning; give local authorities a duty to notify neighbourhood planning bodies of relevant planning applications; and enable the Secretary of State to intervene where requested by those communities.

Nonetheless, the incentive for a community to go through the effort required to produce a Neighbourhood Plan can be limited because such plans can be overruled when decisions are made on planning applications. The only opportunity to

challenge such decisions is through costly judicial reviews that are limited in scope to largely procedural matters. CPRE strongly believes the Bill should be amended to create a limited 'Neighbourhood Right of Appeal' for neighbourhood planning bodies to appeal against the granting of permission that conflicts with the policies of a completed or well-advanced neighbourhood plan.

'Permission in principle'

The Bill introduces significant changes to the basis of the English planning system, including 'permission in principle', without the benefit of having those changes properly debated through a Green or White Paper process. Despite previous statements by Ministers, it is not stated clearly in the Bill or its explanatory notes that 'permission in principle' – automatic approval for applications on land allocated for development - will only be used in relation to brownfield land. CPRE would be deeply concerned if the procedure was used on inappropriate greenfield sites. There are particular concerns that 'permission in principle' will be used to sidestep the Local Plan process.

CPRE's Chief Executive Shaun Spiers said any move towards 'permission in principle' for greenfield sites "will not cause more houses to be built", but could "result in poor quality, low density developments that will increase public antagonism to house

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FIELDWORK

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The Housing and Planning Bill – a threat to affordable rural housing?

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building” and undermine progress on brownfield development and neighbourhood planning. We’re calling for the drafting of the relevant clauses to be tightened and believe that the Bill should make clearer that the ‘permission in principle’ route can only be invoked when a Local Plan is adopted.

Starter Homes

The Bill obliges local authorities to promote, plan for and permit ‘starter homes’ - priced at up to £250,000 outside London – to be sold at a 20% discount to first time buyers aged under 40. CPRE fears the policy would effectively replace other forms of affordable housing – such as rented and shared ownership - which developers could claim would be unviable to provide in addition to discounted starter homes. Even with the discount, the cost of new starter homes would be too great for many rural households.

“Even with the discount, the cost of new starter homes would be too great for many rural households”

The policy could also put further pressure on the Green Belt around London as capping starter home prices in the home counties at 45% of those in London will make new homes built in the Green Belt significantly more attractive than those built on brownfield sites within the city. Starter homes would also be exempt from funding obligations, such as the Community Infrastructure Levy and section 106 agreements which are vital to pay for the improvement of schools and transport links necessary for additional residents. Effectively, the wider community would have to pay the costs of the private discount, at a time of extensive budget cuts.

Right to buy

The Bill also contains clauses which would extend the right to buy to housing association properties. CPRE is very concerned about the impact of these proposals in rural areas where affordable housing already accounts for just 8% of housing stock. As rural communities face the challenges of higher average house prices and lower average wages than urban areas, there is a great need for such housing. And

“The new measures will make landowners reluctant to sell land for affordable housing which, in a few years, will be available at full market rate”

yet there is no requirement for replacement affordable housing to be provided in the communities from which an affordable house has been sold off. This means that housing associations will be incentivised to build replacement affordable housing in the most profitable locations, rather than where there is genuine need.

A large proportion of rural affordable housing is built on land that has been provided at a discount by philanthropic land owners, known as rural exception sites. Usually, the land is provided on the understanding that the housing provided will be used to house local people on low incomes in perpetuity, but the Government’s proposals fails to explicitly protect housing on rural exception sites. Due to their rural location and their property type, many rural affordable homes are likely to be classified as high value and eligible for sell off under the extension of right to buy homes. This makes it unlikely that housing associations - many of which are under financial pressure - will exercise their right to opt out of selling valuable rural stock that is often expensive to maintain.

In his October evidence to the Lord’s select committee on the Built Environment, CPRE’s planning campaign manager Paul Miner pointed out that both the starter homes initiative and the extension of right to buy would lead to a reduction in the construction of rural affordable homes. Pointing out that communities and landowners in rural areas are supportive of new housing when it meets a local need in perpetuity, Paul argued that the new measures will make landowners reluctant to sell land for affordable housing which, within a few years, will be available at full market rate. The local community would also have no incentive to support the development of houses which will likely end up in the hands of commuters or as a second home.

CPRE is calling for a full exemption to the extended right to buy and to the sell-off of high value homes in rural areas. This should cover homes in National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and rural communities up to 3,000 inhabitants, as well as larger rural settlements up to 10,000 inhabitants, where there is significant existing demand for affordable housing.

Find out more: Read our full briefing on the Housing and Planning Bill at www.cpre.org.uk/resources

BREAKthrough

How our work is making a difference

National Parks extension announced at last

On 23 October 2015, the Environment Secretary Elizabeth Truss signed the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales (Designation) (Variation) Confirmation Orders 2015 to extend the two National Parks to within touching distance of each other – separated only by a short stretch of the M6 motorway.

The extensions mean the Lake District National Park gains 70 square kilometres of Cumbria, while the Yorkshire Dales has been increased by over 400 square kilometres of Cumbria and Lancashire. The Friends of the Lake District are delighted that the Secretary of State has finally confirmed the designation orders – two years after the planning inspector made recommendations following a public inquiry at which they played a major role.

Having initiated the extension proposal in 2001, the Friends led campaigning over the subsequent years by gathering evidence and enlisting high profile supporters including CPRE President Sir Andrew Motion. They also coordinated the Key Supporter Group's evidence to the public inquiry in 2013, representing the varied interests of local parish and town councils, businesses, farmers, landowners, individuals and other organisations concerned with the beauty and vitality of Cumbria's countryside.

The planning inspector's recommendations quoted the Friends' argument that designation of the proposed extensions would be "key to the medium-long term viability of hill farms", and "allow better interaction between farmers and visitors and increased respect for

the way the land is worked." The Lakes to Dales Business Survey organised by the Key Supporters Group showed that, contrary to fears the extensions would be bad for business, National Park Authorities encouraged enterprise and would provide local farms and businesses in the extensions with fresh economic opportunities.

Martin Holdgate, President of Friends of the Lake District, said that "these are, and always have been, areas of superb scenery that deserved National Park status years ago." The Secretary of State confirmed the extensions to "some of our country's finest landscapes, beautiful vistas and exciting wildlife" will come into place in August 2016, to join "these two unique National Parks and protect even more space for generations to come."

Securing prime farmland

CPRE Kent has long campaigned for improved flood protection on the Romney Marsh - an area of grade 1 agricultural land – and has been celebrating the good news that work to replace the 70 year old pumps at Appledore is nearing completion.

Reclaimed from the sea in Roman times, the Romney Marsh is now an iconic landscape of 100 square miles of prime farmland, dotted with historic churches and dominated by the power stations at Dungeness. The original flood defence wall was built by the Romans 2,500 years ago, but now the responsibility for flood prevention lies with the Environment Agency, the Internal Drainage Board and farmers and landowners. The current £300,000

project to replace the pumps at Appledore will protect 150 properties and 60 square miles of Kent countryside.

The original diesel pumps were installed in the mid 1940s but are heading off to the Brede Steam Giants Museum, where the surviving working pump will show visitors exactly how they performed to protect the marsh for the last 70 years. The new pumps use modern technology and will be environmentally efficient as well as fish and eel friendly. They are able to pump 609 litres of water a second, or more than two million litres an hour. Phase 1 of the project saw the removal of the old diesel pumps as well as the upgrade of the electricity supply in readiness for the new pumps.

CPRE member and campaigner Charles Wilkinson said: "We are delighted that this scheme has not only led to state of the art new pumps to protect the community and important farmland in this area, but also the added bonus of an unusual and fascinating addition to the nearby museum." Paul Marshall, Operations Team Leader with the Environment Agency, said they had listened to CPRE Kent and local people before planning the maintenance and upgrade, having learned valuable lessons from the 2013/14 floods, which particularly hit the Stour catchment area. The new electric pumps should last at least another 50 years helping to protect this important and iconic part of Kent.

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CPRE maps update

The CPRE Maps website uses the power of open data and visualisation to help local campaigners protect and enhance the countryside, with the opening up of official data representing the biggest change in cartography since Ordnance Survey completed mapping of England in 1883. Whether you simply want to know more about your local area, or want to influence development so as to manage change for the best, our maps can help you. One recent addition to the site shows planning and landscape designations - Green Belt, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty - highlighted alongside areas without an up-to-date local plan. All of this information is overlaid with constituency boundaries to make it easier for you to work with local MPs.

Our latest map shows average daytime noise levels from motorways and busy A roads in England, using data published by Defra this summer to comply with EU requirements on the mapping of environmental noise. Our map shows where average daytime road noise is higher than 55dB on motorways and A roads with more than 3 million traffic movements per year, and where this noise impacts on nationally protected landscapes. With road noise increasing fastest in rural areas, we're using the map to show the Government needs to extend funding to local authorities to protect the quiet areas we still have. The mapping will help identify where low-noise surfacing could reduce noise pollution near busy local roads, while highlighting the need to manage traffic better on the minor country lanes where tranquillity is still a prized resource.

Find out more: at www.maps.cpre.org.uk

NEWSroundup

Keeping you on top of countryside developments

Our Green Belt

Housing and Planning Minister Brandon Lewis responded to our letter and poll marking the 60th anniversary of the Green Belt by recognising the public support for our Green Belts and emphasising the Government's commitment to protecting them.

The Minister also agreed "that many of the arguments put forward for releasing Green Belt for housing are ill-founded; to them, our manifesto commitment to continuing strong protection of the Green Belt should serve as an answer." However, the Minister also claimed that current rates of development in the Green Belt are comparatively low. In fact, as CPRE's Green Belt campaign manager Paul Miner told *The Times* in August, planning permission was granted for 11,977 homes in England's 14 Green Belts in the year to the end of March 2015, up from 5,607 in the previous 12 months, according to Glenigan, a company that provides data on the construction industry. An additional 200,000 houses are designated for currently designated Green Belt in draft

or adopted Local Plans. Given these figures, CPRE fears the Minister is being dangerously complacent and that the Government needs to do more to turn its rhetoric into action to protect Green Belt.

Subsequently, the Government's own compilation of local authority Green Belt statistics has shown that as well as the steep increase in planning permissions being granted, Green Belt land is being lost at the fastest rate since records began in 1997. Rushcliffe in Nottinghamshire removed Green Belt protection from 1,655 acres of its Green Belt to allow 7,650 new homes while Newcastle upon Tyne has sacrificed 1,380 acres of its Green Belt for 6,000 homes. In all, almost 5,000 acres of England across 11 local authorities lost Green Belt status in the year to the end of March 2015.

But CPRE research has shown this could be the tip of the iceberg, with at least 33 more councils planning to change the Green Belt boundaries in the next few years, potentially resulting in the loss of another 50,000

acres of protected land. We want the Government to make it clear that councils must not be allowed to change Green Belt boundaries for reasons of 'economic growth' or additional housing which do not in themselves constitute the 'exceptional circumstances' required.

CPRE's *Our Green Belt* campaign is calling on the Government to be more specific on the limited circumstances in which Green Belt boundaries can be changed through local plans; to direct local authorities to refuse damaging developments in the Green Belt that are not identified in existing local or neighbourhood plans; and to target public funding to increase the quality of Green Belt land and access to it. CPRE is currently preparing a major research report to show that in the rare cases where the quality of Green Belt land is poor, the solution is to improve it rather than build on it.

We are also encouraging the public to share stories and photographs showing their Green Belt's value for health and recreation, at www.ourgreenbelt.cpre.org.uk

A 25 year plan for nature

CPRE welcomed the Government's commitment to develop a 25-year plan for a "healthy natural economy", arguing that this could be an opportune time to reinstate the regular Countryside Survey.

Such a survey was last undertaken in 2007, and could create a new benchmark for future monitoring of natural capital assets such as biological diversity and climate change impacts on the countryside. The 25 year plan was suggested by a report from the Natural Capital Committee earlier this year which argued that carefully planned investments

in natural capital - such as woodland planting, peatland restoration and wetland creation - could deliver huge benefits for society and the environment, while generating large economic returns.

The Government says it will use the plan to "deliver on the range of natural capital related commitments, including: putting in place a new 'Blue Belt' to protect precious marine habitats; spending £3 billion from the Common Agricultural Policy to enhance England's countryside over the next five years; planting an additional 11 million trees; and ensuring the value of Green Belts,

National Parks, SSSI's and other environmental designations are appropriately protected."

CPRE's senior rural policy officer, Emma Marrington, said: "With increasing pressure for housing, transport and other infrastructure, it is more important than ever that we appreciate our natural capital and recognise the enormous contribution that distinctive, beautiful, characterful and cared for landscapes make to the nation. We look forward to working with Government and the future Natural Capital Committee to help secure an improved future for our natural environment."

dates of note

Local Green Belt campaigns gain momentum

The launch of CPRE's *Our Green Belt* website has seen hundreds of people share their appreciation for these priceless green lungs, posting their personal stories at www.ourgreenbelt.cpre.org.uk, where you will also be able to find details of local campaigns to save our Green Belts around the country.

As ever CPRE branches are playing a leading role, with CPRE Avonside gaining national press coverage in November for its opposition to a new park and ride site at Bathampton Meadow which would cause serious damage to the Avon Green Belt - a vital factor in Bath's World Heritage City status. CPRE Oxfordshire is facing plans for a 40,000 square metre science park development in the Oxford Green Belt near Kidlington, while South Oxfordshire Council has published a study which proposes removing strategic parcels of land from the Green Belt for housing - despite 75% of respondents to the branch's recent survey saying the whole of the Green Belt should remain open and undeveloped. CPRE London is calling on local councils, MPs and the

candidates for Mayor of London to halt all building on London's precious Green Belt; they have recently produced a sample letter (at www.cprelondon.org.uk) to help the public join them in opposing Bromley Council's plans to build on 17 protected Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land sites, including playing fields, ancient woodland and allotments.

In a county that is 75% Green Belt, the latest threat for CPRE Surrey centres on 600 acres of the iconic Hog's Back landscape - beautiful chalk downland running alongside the ancient Pilgrim's Way - which could be at risk if Surrey University decides to sell the site for housing. The plans, which would see Guildford sprawl out by another 3,000 houses, are likely to come forward if the council re-visits proposals to "roll-back" the Green Belt boundary next year. The branch is supporting the Save Hog's Back action group and has pledged to speak up for local people and their countryside throughout the public consultation and examination of Guildford's Local Plan.

Development pressure remains acute in the north too,

and CPRE Northumberland has helped gain over 10,000 signatures in protest at the sacrifice of the ancient Woolsington Woods in the Newcastle Green Belt for 72 executive homes and a golf course development - a decision that is with the Secretary of State as we go to press. Meanwhile, CPRE Durham is supporting the people of Springwell, near Sunderland, in their battle to stop the loss of thirty acres of Green Belt that gives the village its distinct identity. On the other side of the country, Cheshire East Council has identified 82 parcels of land which make a "limited" contribution to the purpose of their Green Belt - and thus "have the greatest potential to be considered for release". With the council suggesting that evidence of recreational value would count against releasing the sites, CPRE Cheshire are asking the public to help it take photos of these green spaces being enjoyed for their beauty and tranquillity. A link to a map of the sites and contact details for submitting this vital evidence can be found at www.cprecheshire.org.uk

Enhancing our finest landscapes

Following years of CPRE lobbying, National Grid announced the locations of three sites in England that will benefit from funding to bury intrusive electricity lines and remove pylons.

The announcement followed decisions by the project's independently chaired Stakeholder Advisory Group, including CPRE's Neil Sinden. The chosen projects are near Winterbourne Abbas in the Dorset AONB; at Hale in the New Forest National Park, and near Dunford Bridge in the Peak District. The next 12 months will see detailed technical feasibility works which

will include environmental studies, archaeological studies and engineering work 'on the ground'. There will also be further significant engagement with local stakeholders and communities.

Hector Pearson, Visual Impact Provision Project Manager at National Grid said the project represented "a major opportunity to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, cultural and environmental heritage of some Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks." The protected landscapes from an original 'longlist' that have

not been prioritised include the High Weald AONB, North Wessex Downs AONB and the Tamar Valley AONB. These locations will remain under consideration for future work using the £500m fund.

National Grid is also set to use part of the fund for smaller, localised visual improvement projects which can be accessed by all AONBs and National Parks with existing National Grid electricity infrastructure. Set to be launched in the Winter, this landscape enhancement initiative will provide up to £24 million over six years.

Wildlife and Countryside Link 2015 Annual Debate

In or out of the EU: what is best for the natural environment?

Hear the issues debated by a distinguished panel including National Trust Director General, Dame Helen Ghosh; former CPRE Director, Baroness Kate Parminter; and Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP, former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

9 December 2015 from 4pm, WWF UK, Brewery Road, Woking, Surrey

Carols by Candlelight at Cranford

Get into the festive spirit with CPRE Northamptonshire's wonderful event. More details via www.cprenorthants.org.uk/contact_us or phone 01604 780000

10 December, Cranford Hall, Cranford, Kettering

The 2016 Friends of the Lake District hedge-laying competition

Professional and amateur hedge layers from across the north of England will show off their skills in the Westmorland and Lancashire style. To book a place, please contact: ruth-kirk@fld.org.uk or ring 01539 720788

30 January 2016, Holme House Farm, Mansergh, Carnforth

CPRE Hampshire 'Walk to Save the Countryside'

Two sponsored walks through woods and across farmland along part of the three castles pathway. Walkers including local MP Ranil Jayawardena will be raising funds for CPRE Hampshire's campaigning. For registration and sponsorship details, visit www.cprehampshire.org.uk

or email hannahhoustonlancey@yahoo.co.uk

24 April 2016, starting from Cliddesden Village Hall near Basingstoke

Current issues

No to pylons in the Lakes

Douglas Chalmers, Friends of the Lake District director writes: "The Lake District, one of our most unique, important and well-loved landscapes is being threatened by 24 km of pylons and overhead wires. And not just "normal" pylons. The ones you usually see are just over 26 metres high. These would be nearly 50 metres, about the same height as the Statue of Liberty. National Grid went out to consultation last year, and it was unsurprising that the most popular of their offered options was the route that ran offshore. Not only would this avoid the damage to the landscape and wildlife of the National Park, but it was the option favoured by National Grid's own Environmental Statement.

But with NuGen, the Moorside developer effectively vetoing the offshore route on disputed technical grounds, the line has no option but to run onshore. National Grid's offer to date of mitigation is a variation of overhead routes, none of which avoids this unique coastal landscape of the Lake District National Park. Of course, undergrounding is more expensive than going overland, but we believe that National Grid's own estimates have been overstated.

We are now actively campaigning, asking our members and other organisations and individuals to write to National Grid, their MPs and to Government, asking that if these cables are not taken offshore they should be put underground where they run through or adjacent to the National Park."

Find out more: at www.saynotopylonsinthelakedistrict.org.uk

letter from the field



Words from local campaigners

Dr Philip Bratby of CPRE Devon gives his assessment of the various impacts of anaerobic digesters on the countryside

Dear reader,

On-farm Anaerobic Digesters (AD) are renewable energy facilities whose purpose is to extract energy from farm waste such as manure, slurry or chicken litter and produce digestate which can be spread on the land as a fertiliser. Bacteria digest the waste in an oxygen-free environment and produce methane and carbon dioxide. The methane can be cleaned up and injected directly into the gas grid or it can be burnt in a Combined Heat and Power (CHP) unit to produce electricity which can be exported to the local electricity network. Large subsidies are required to make the process viable and because farm waste contains very little energy, huge quantities of fodder crops, such as grass silage, maize silage, beet, wheat and rye have to be added to the waste. Typical on-farm AD plants range in size from 250kW to 2MW, with the annual feedstock being from 5,000 tonnes to 30,000 tonnes.

A typical on-farm AD plant will cover two to three acres and will consist of one or more cylindrical digester tanks about 30 to 45m in diameter and 12m high surmounted by a dome, an intake building, a digestate storage tank or lagoon, one or more silage

camps of length up to 100m, one or two CHPs units and digestate dryers. One in mid Devon was described by a councillor thus: 'This farm looks more like something from the set of a James Bond film. I have lived on farms for all my life and I always thought the end product of farming was food; here the end product is energy. I am not sure why it is viewed as an agricultural site, it should be classed as an industrial site'.

Over the last few years there has been a proliferation of on-farm AD plants which have had a huge impact on the countryside and on the lives of people living and working nearby. One single developer in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset has a total of nine on-farm AD plants in planning, under construction or in operation. Six plants in Devon will consume a total of 35,000 tonnes per year of farm waste (manure, slurry and chicken litter) and an incredible 69,576 tonnes per year of fodder crops, consisting of maize and grass silage, wheat, rye and sugar beet. Several of the AD plants are on farms that are unsustainable in that they factory farm chickens and cows and, in a nitrate vulnerable zone, do not have sufficient land to legally dispose of the waste.

The on-farm AD plants in Devon are on small pastoral farms and thus have to import a lot of the farm waste and most of the fodder crops and have to export most of the digestate. The highway network, as most visitors to Devon know, consists mainly of single track lanes, which essentially are old cart tracks without any foundations. These lanes are totally unsuited to the massive vehicles used to transport the waste, fodder crops and digestate. The result is massive damage to the lanes, making the lives of residents and other users of the lanes a misery and being a danger to all lane users.

CPRE Devon judge each application on their own merits, but in an era of food banks, the subsidising of AD plants which turn fodder crops into energy is damaging the countryside and increasing both food and fuel poverty.

Find out more: See the amount of anaerobic digester applications CPRE Devon is dealing with at www.cpredevon.org.uk/?s=anaerobic and please consider becoming a member of the branch.

GOODideas

Learning from each other

Promoting village shops

CPRE Dorset campaigners have been carrying on their excellent work to promote that threatened icon of rural life: the village store.

After pioneering a Best Village Shop award in last year's Best Dorset Village competition, the branch once again led the hunt to find a great community asset worthy of recognition in 2015. This year, both main contenders were formerly struggling shops faced with closure before villagers rallied round to purchase them. They are both now community shops supported by village shareholders, teams of willing volunteers and a few friendly local staff.

They try very hard to be hubs of the community and offer extra services to encourage footfall, even holding village meetings there. The judges were impressed that both understand the importance of

social media, offer good websites and as comprehensive a range of products from limited floorspace. Another important criteria was that they should provide a showcase for local food and drink, and both the Motcombe Community Shop in North Dorset and the Thorncombe Village Shop in West Dorset ticked all these boxes and more.

The eventual winner – crowned at an awards event in September – was Thorncombe, serving a community of 700. Located down narrow twisting lanes, the shop has to try extra hard to attract passing trade with an attractively painted frontage and a regularly changing seasonal window display. A project team was established in 2008 to enable the parish council to buy and refurbish the existing village shop and post office, and then run it, through an Industrial & Provident Society on behalf

of the village community. The shop is now well established, and is constantly looking for new ways to serve the village – including with an internet café and pop-up restaurant. The shop is run by a management committee (all volunteers), a salaried manager, an assistant and 20 to 30 volunteers from the village working short shifts. Even the local MP, Oliver Letwin, can be seen on certain days behind the counter!

As well as their sponsorship of the award, CPRE Dorset teamed up with Dorset Community Action for a seminar for village shops: 'Rural Retailing – 2015 and beyond'. Speakers included Ken Parsons of the Rural Shops Alliance, who provided ideas on how village shops can compete with chain stores, and Pascal Surret from the 2014 winner Winfrith Village Stores, who shared his tips for success.

Interactive community campaigning

CPRE London campaigners have worked with local campaign groups to produce the *Protect London map* launched in September.

The map shows how London's Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land (which has the same level of protection as Green Belt) is under threat from development as never before, and allows members of the public to get involved by showing support and voicing their opposition. Each pin on the online map can be clicked to reveal more information about the threat, and links to make it easy for people to

contact the relevant councils, sign petitions or join social media campaigns.

"Most people believe that Green Belt land is protected, but this research shows that politicians are allowing land which is much loved and well-used to come under threat from development," said Alice Roberts of CPRE London. "We know that the vast majority of Londoners oppose building on Green Belt land, so we're asking people to support these local campaigns."

Oakfield playing fields in the Redbridge Green Belt are just one of almost 40

threatened sites recorded on the map so far. A proposal for 1,000 homes on 75% of the fields is under consideration, and Chris Nutt from Save Oakfield Site said: "Oakfield playing fields are in constant use by people of all ages and backgrounds: we represent the cohesive and active community that politicians want. We are staggered at Redbridge Council's plans to sell it off for development. There is no gain for the local community whatever. And the proposals don't include affordable homes."

Find out more: at www.cprelondon.org.uk

Hampshire innovations

CPRE Hampshire's latest magazine published a picture showing the tracks of scheduled airline flights over the New Forest, monitored over a ten-day period as part of the work of the joint CPRE, New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA) and New Forest Association aircraft noise group. The group is planning to use volunteers to carry out survey work in the New Forest and South Downs National Park to map the prevalence of commercial aviation, light aircraft and helicopter noise. It hopes to develop a smart phone app to measure the noise level and automate the recording of observations to gain a better understanding of the impacts on tranquillity in these areas, and to establish benchmarks from which any change in such noise over the years can be detected.

The branch has also formed a partnership with Hampshire Farmers Markets (HFM) to help farmers markets better support the rural economy and local foods, while giving CPRE Hampshire the opportunity to talk with local people and rural businesses. Attending a number of markets during the summer allowed branch volunteers to survey members of the public about the threats that they think have the biggest impact on the local countryside and landscape. Anyone who takes part is entered into a free prize draw to win a hamper filled with HFM goods from their broad range of producers. In addition to their summer events, more than fifty artists exhibited their work in at a special exhibition at Swallick Farmhouse, Winslade in November, raising much-needed funds for CPRE Hampshire.

Find out more: about the branch's activities at www.cprehampshire.org.uk

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Current issues

Appeal success

CPRE Hertfordshire welcomed the recent decision of a planning inspector to throw out an appeal against the rejection by East Herts District Council of Gladman's planning application for up to 60 dwellings on open countryside at Braughing.

The branch's honorary director Kevin FitzGerald said: "We are delighted with this outcome as, I am sure, are local residents. Braughing is a very attractive village set in the Hertfordshire countryside which won CPRE Hertfordshire's Village of the Year competition. It has had more than its fair share of development in recent years, some quite out of keeping with the character of the village."

In rejecting the appeal the inspector cited much of what CPRE Herts had written in their letter to the council objecting to this latest threat. In particular he found "that the environmental impact is a significantly adverse one, of a very high order leaving permanent damage to the landscape character and appearance of the area." This good news for all who value the Hertfordshire countryside, and the branch hopes it will set a precedent.

CPRE Hertfordshire has also unveiled its new fundraising calendar for 2016. With each month featuring a different original piece of winning artwork from their 2015 Children's Art Competition - on the theme *Wildlife in our Hertfordshire countryside* - it makes the perfect gift for any nature lover. Calendars can be purchased for £8 or £15 for two.

Find out more: about all the branch's activities at www.cpreherts.org.uk

stepbystep

Guide to good campaigning

Getting started on Community Energy

Community energy is not yet commonplace in England, but CPRE and a growing number of rural communities believe it should be.

The essence of community energy is that - whether it is about saving energy through improving the energy efficiency of local buildings or producing renewable electricity or heat locally - it is led and owned by communities. This means that a range of benefits, including financial payback and reduced energy bills, will go to local people. This is particularly important in rural communities where, on average, energy costs are higher and home energy efficiency lower than in urban areas. Community energy projects will generally be relatively small scale and, if they are well sited and well designed, the negative impacts on the countryside will be low. This is more likely to be the case if the communities where the projects are situated also lead in designing them.

CPRE's summer workshop on community energy identified a number of key ingredients for success in community energy projects: develop a sound and realistic project plan; ensure there is sufficient focus on delivering the community benefits; keep the project simple, at least to start with; communicate how the project is different from the current way energy is 'done' and avoid jargon; take your time and listen to make sure everyone that wants to be included can be; and make it fun and positive e.g. through community social events and keep people posted on progress.

The Ouse Valley Energy Services Company (OVESCO) in East Sussex was formed by members of Transition Town Lewes in 2007 and has installed solar panels on the roofs of two schools, a farm, a nursery and the town's local brewery, with more than 250 shareholders benefitting. It is now dedicated to passing on its know-how to other community energy groups through the Government's Community Energy Peer Mentoring Scheme. It has produced a guide to help other communities to set up their own projects which can be found at www.ovesco.co.uk and is simplified and expanded below:

1 Form a Local Energy Group

This can be done by holding an event such as an Open Space Day about energy efficiency and local power generation for the future. You might have a Transition Town Group, Low Carbon Group or a Parish Council already in place and willing to support the development of a project. Any project will need a governing body of some sort to manage the project. For information on legal structures visit www.planlocal.org.uk

Try to get a wide range of skills on your group. You will need someone who is comfortable negotiating contracts with a certain amount of legal expertise; a great communicator who can enthuse local people; a good project planner who can see things through to the end and keep an eye on important details; and, of course, leaders who can see the big picture, keep everyone motivated and celebrate each successful milestone.

2 Survey your community

Your community will need one or more potential sites for a project. Use local knowledge and support from your council to draw up a map of potential sites for heat and/or power generation or energy efficiency measures. It is also important to make sure you are sensitive to the landscape and wildlife impacts of any site you chose, as well as gaining the full backing of local residents.

A group of residents of Gamlingay in Cambridgeshire have installed a single 33m diameter wind turbine just outside the village, in an open field approximately 1.75 km (1.1 miles) south east from the centre of Gamlingay. The turbine is over 1km from the edge of the village and 500m from any other dwellings.

3 Apply for planning permission

Once you have identified the sites you will need to contact the building or land owner to see if they are willing to work with you as a project partner. You will then need an advice from an accredited installer of the practicalities of your project, and from a financial adviser to make sure your project is financially viable. At some point you will need a solicitor to draw up legal documents such as a lease.

In most cases you will need to apply for planning permission. You can find out more about a planning application through your local council. In some cases (wind turbine, micro hydro, AD and biofuel) you will



The Ovesco community energy group celebrate the installation of solar panels on the roof of Harvey's brewery in Lewes

need additional assessments, such as an Environmental Impact Assessment. When you are considering applying for a planning application you should also consider a structural survey. In the case of simpler technology such as PV panels this may only require a structural calculation for a roof and a roof inspection to check the roof is in a fit state for fitting the PV panels.

4 Finance your project

There are various ways to obtain finance which could include donations, grants, loans and share issues. There are loans for community groups via organisations such as <http://www.pureleapfrog.org>, although Gamlingay's turbine was funded entirely by local residents and businesses. Priority was given to smaller investors to ensure that the opportunity was there to as many local people as wanted to invest. The turbine generates 16% of the village's energy needs, helps offset 300 tonnes of carbon each year and provides £6,000 a year for 20 years to be spent on local charities and community projects.

5 Remember energy efficiency

CPRE believes community energy projects could and should encompass energy efficiency and other demand reduction as well as generation. We would like to see reducing the amount of energy we use become a much stronger part of the community energy approach as well as in our energy system more generally. Community groups can play an important role as a trusted local voice providing friendly energy advice and helping people take action to insulate their homes, improve their heating and use more efficient appliances.

As Fieldwork went to press CPRE was calling on the Government to deliver a significant programme to improve home energy efficiency and get half a million low income households every year up to a minimum of Band C on the Energy Performance Certificate. Such a strategy would require just a small proportion of spending already set aside for infrastructure but would stimulate economic growth, create jobs and reduce the need for intrusive new energy developments across the countryside.

Much more political support is needed for community energy too, and in particular,

the Government needs to reduce barriers. CPRE intends to help identify ways this can be done, for example drawing on the experiences of rural communities to identify possible solutions. More people also need to get involved in community energy projects, which could help convince the Government to do more to support them.

In early November, CPRE signed a joint-letter to the Chancellor from England's community energy groups and supporters. The letter highlighted that changes to the Finance Bill will deny community energy investors access to the tax relief that can make these schemes cost effective. This is potentially a major blow for future projects, and we urged George Osborne to reconsider and "help communities build a competitive, popular, clean energy system for the future."

In more positive news, there is now a new web-based community energy information hub backed by the Energy Saving Trust and Community Energy England. Find community energy groups with common interests, meet potential supporters or partners, share information and promote projects at <http://hub.communityenergyengland.org/>.

Current issues

Top tips on shale

CPRE Lancashire has produced a "top tips" document for the benefit of other CPRE branches and members which highlights key issues from the branch's experience of hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking', for shale gas in Lancashire, following recent planning applications submitted by the energy firm Cuadrilla for permission to frack at two sites in Fylde.

It is important that other CPRE branches consider each application in the context of their local circumstances and make the decision whether to support with conditions or to object outright. CPRE Lancashire has sought to ensure that, if shale gas and oil development is permitted, operations have minimal impact on rural landscapes, avoid pollution and unsustainable use of natural resources, and minimise greenhouse gas emissions. The branch's documents and position relating to fracking can be viewed in the Shale Gas section of its website.

CPRE Lancashire is also looking to refresh its executive committee with a number of people who care passionately about Lancashire's beautiful green landscape. They need people with a variety of skills and experience particularly: membership development, fundraising and the planning and development of appropriate affordable housing to join them.

"The Branch covers 26 Local Authorities throughout Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside sub-regions. We meet in Leyland 8 times a year and we have a very active planning sub-committee. Planning is our core interest and we are building up productive relationships with many MPs of all political persuasions, our message is widely supported wherever we go!"

Find out more about fracking and trustee opportunities via www.cprelancashire.org.uk

Fighting fouling

CPRE Shropshire has challenged Shropshire Council to put real backbone into litter legislation by using their pioneering Model Action Plan on dog fouling, starting in Church Stretton in the south of the County. All dog owners were asked to sign the Dog Walkers' Pledge, which asks them to clean up after their pets at all times, dispose of dog mess in an appropriate bin, carry extra doggie bags for other walkers in need and encourage others also to clean up and sign the pledge. Councillor Mike Walker, Mayor of Church Stretton, said: "The town council considers it a priority to make the town a clean and safe environment for visitors and townsfolk alike – the pledge is an important part of our strategy to work with partners to achieve that goal." Volunteers hope that, if successful, the trial could easily be rolled out to other towns and villages, who can download the Action Plan and Pledge from: www.cpreshropshire.org.uk

Planning partnerships

Patrick Brompton residents were relieved recently when Richmondshire Planning Committee, unanimously refused an anaerobic digester application in October. CPRE North Yorkshire supported and advised the parish council who organised local people in a magnificent campaign. The branch is keen to work with more parish councils and has recently helped Sutton-in-Craven Parish Council respond to an appeal for a development that would close the gap between the parish and Eastburn in West Yorkshire – they are awaiting a decision from the planning inspector as we go to press.

Find out more at www.cprenorthyorkshire.co.uk

PARISHbeat

Effective solutions for your parish

Parishes in successful battle

CPRE Kent and local parishes have been celebrating the dismissal of an appeal against refusal to build the 'Waterside Park' warehousing and office development on greenfield land near Leeds Castle.

Campaigners hope the decision will help protect this area from future speculative development and, crucially, allow Maidstone Borough to complete its Local Plan to help safeguard other sites from speculative challenges. CPRE Kent, in partnership with the Joint Parishes Group (a consortium of 18 local Parish Councils representing 22,000 people), submitted

10 witness statements to the public inquiry, detailing their reasons for opposing a scheme that would have been detrimental to the countryside setting of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural beauty (AONB), as well as that of Leeds Castle.

The fact that parishes agreed a came together to oppose the development with one voice was referenced by the planning inspector: "although the appellants consider that the number of objectors to the development are relatively small, I nevertheless note that it is strongly opposed by all the local Parish Councils, the County Council, the CPRE, the

Kent Downs AONB Executive and Natural England as well as the Borough Council."

The inspector's decision agreed that "considerable environmental harm would result from the loss of this area of countryside to development through the combined impact on the landscape setting of the AONB and the heritage assets." She also cited the "risk of harm resulting from traffic impacts" after CPRE and the Joint Parishes raised concerns about the impact of the traffic generated by the proposed developments during the construction period - 330 loads a week in 17.5 tonne lorries.

CPRE Leicestershire neighbourhood planning event for parishes

CPRE Leicestershire hosted a full day Neighbourhood Planning conference on 20th June, held at Countesthorpe Village Hall. The event was attended by more than 40 delegates including Parish Councillors and Clerks, and has informed the branch's preliminary list of outcomes that communities could seek to achieve and for which evidence needs to be collected:

Identify, preserve and enhance valued green spaces within and between settlements using the Landscape Character Assessment protocol; Review and embrace Village Design Statements to ensure that they have statutory status within the Neighbourhood Plan; Ensure appropriate housing

to meet identified local needs including affordable homes - bungalows and housing for the elderly as well as for younger members of the community; Identify preferred locations for housing, commercial, industrial & leisure developments, using brownfield sites, as appropriate, first; Identify shortcomings with infrastructure and community facilities and require that these are addressed as a condition of any development proposals; Regulate and manage traffic issues arising from new developments within settlements and from developments within neighbouring settlements; and identify how policies (and projects) can conserve

and enhance the natural environment and promote biodiversity alongside meeting development needs.

Leicestershire parishes near Lutterworth have united to form an action group named Villages Against Magna Park Development (VAMPD) in protest at greenfield development including a 'mega-warehouse' what would be the seventh largest building in the world. CPRE Leicestershire is supporting this group in their struggle as it objects to the loss of productive farmland and a deserted medieval village. The branch is committed to fighting these applications and will give its support to groups who see this as a unacceptable endeavour. If you share their concern contact info@cpreleicestershire.org.uk

CAMPAIGNER

CPRE's new award winners



Joyness Hazal receives her Making a Difference Award from Alan Apling and Gerry Sansom of CPRE Bedfordshire

2015 marks the first year of CPRE's new Volunteer Awards to recognise even more of the outstanding voluntary work being done within CPRE groups.

A new range of award types now recognises the huge variety of work done by local campaigners and volunteers: ranging from vital, one-off contributions to outstanding service over many years. We have already been delighted to give out dozens of new awards, and hope the small selection we celebrate here will inspire you to nominate someone in your branch or district group.

Ian Shepherd of CPRE Norfolk has been a worthy recipient of our prestigious Lifetime Achievement award, receiving an engraved CPRE medal and £100 book token. Ian has been a member of CPRE for many years, serving as a trustee and tirelessly campaigning and supporting the campaign efforts of others on planning issues. He has recently led a coalition of campaign groups against

the Northern Distributor Road proposal to the north of Norwich, and his planning expertise is widely recognised throughout the county. Ian's colleague David Hook receives a well-deserved medal and £50 book token for his Outstanding Contribution to CPRE's work on light pollution. After many years of dedicated work, he has produced a policy for future lighting which minimises light pollution which has been widely adopted by local planning authorities.

In Bedfordshire, Joyness Hazal has been presented with certificate for her Making a Difference award signed by CPRE Chair Su Sayer. Joyness has made a very positive contribution to the branch for over a year, sorting out all the direct contacts with HMRC to enable them to register and claim for gift aid, and liaising with the Pensions Regulator on compliance with the automatic enrolment process. In addition, Joyness has investigated a number of ideas to diversify CPRE Bedfordshire's income streams, including setting up

our easyfundraising.org.uk profile.

The terrific efforts of Brian Lloyd on behalf of the Kent countryside have secured him an Outstanding Contribution award, just in time for his well-earned retirement. Since joining CPRE Kent at the end of 2008, he has been at the forefront of tirelessly influencing planning policy across the garden of England by contributing exceptional work to consultations on local plans; providing invaluable support to district and specialist committees; representing the branch at countless inquiries and appeals; and leading on its work on training in planning and neighbourhood planning.

Also in Kent, Barrie Gore has been given a 10 year Contribution award of a medal and £20 book token before he too retires from his distinguished period of service as Chair of the Canterbury District Committee. A member since 2000, Barrie became particularly engaged with CPRE over its 'Night Blight' campaigns in 2003 and campaigned against the unnecessary over-illumination of Canterbury Cathedral.

We want to give CPRE's recognition of volunteers much more prominence, and hope our new award scheme will help do this, by broadening the criteria and increasing the number of nominations we receive. We believe that the awards will bring greater prominence to the role of volunteers by recognising their achievements, great and small, whenever merited. Please put your requests for awards to Antonia White, Senior Branch Development and Events Officer, at antoniaw@cpre.org.uk or find out more at www.cpre.org.uk/awards

Current issues

Northumberland success

CPRE Northumberland report that the county council's strategic planning committee have rejected an application by Mitford Estates to build on land west of Lancaster Park in Morpeth.

The scheme, which would have used greenfield land outside the settlement boundary for the town, was recommended for refusal by the county's planning department. Councillors were clear that the plans set out for Morpeth in the Northumberland Local Plan are on track to deliver all the homes needed in the area, using sites already agreed without the need to encroach on the Green Belt. The decision, which represents a victory for the Morpeth North Residents' Action Group (supported by CPRE), was applauded by over 100 members of the public who attended the meeting at County Hall in early November.

Failing on affordability

CPRE Sussex's Dr Roger Smith has highlighted how housing policy in Horsham is failing to provide affordable housing in its greenfield schemes. Of 300 homes planned east of the A24, west of Horsham, just six are planned as affordable properties - just 2% of the total. Horsham District Council's target for large-scale schemes is 40%. The council say that cuts to Government grants towards affordable housing since 2011 have changed the social housing development landscape "dramatically". Dr Smith called for alternative sources of finance for affordable housing, adding that while "the presumption for local plans is that affordable housing will be funded entirely by developers...the need for truly affordable homes, including rented accommodation, is not being met."

Current issues

Community assets

Summer Fieldwork reported on CPRE Surrey's support for the classification of Barnett Wood Lane allotments in Leatherhead as an Asset of Community Value (ACV). In the Autumn issue of their Surrey Voice newsletter, the branch highlighted two more relevant cases, including the Beryl Harvey Field in Cranleigh that was gifted to the parish in 1970. It is divided up into allotments and a Conservation Area managed but is now being considered as a site for affordable housing. CPRE has therefore suggested that since Cranleigh Parish Council are in the process of producing a Neighbourhood Development Plan, the Beryl Harvey Field should be designated as a Local Green Space. This may help to underscore its unsuitability for housing and the genuine interest of local people who use and appreciate the land.

Stompond Lane Sports Ground in Walton on Thames is another example of a local authority keen to sell off land used for sport and recreation for a housing development. The development would displace Walton & Hersham FC and the local athletics club who will be forced to move to a proposed new 'sports hub' on a Green Belt site. The branch were perplexed as to why Walton & Hersham FC did not apply for ACV status, as football clubs all over the country have been listed as Assets of Community Value in order to halt their land being sold off by councils or private owners for development. It is not just the loss of open green space but the loss of community and local identity that people cherish and value.

Find out more: at www.cpresurrey.org.uk

INreview

Our perspective on countryside issues

Local Plans under the microscope

The rate at which local authorities are finalising plans is now significantly slower than the two year period prior to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) coming into force, largely because of the lack of clarity around the NPPF policies on housing land supply causing constant disputes between developers and planning authorities.

Planning Inspectorate figures show that 27% of local authorities do not have a post-2004 Local Plan in place, and fewer still have had a plan adopted or ruled 'sound' since the NPPF came into force. The implicit encouragement that the NPPF's 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' currently gives to speculative development proposals has direct impacts on the integrity of the planning system as a whole, and on the ability of investors who have 'done the right thing' and followed the plan-led system to deliver properly planned development.

Planning by appeal?

Plan-led developments on the most sustainable (often brownfield) sites can be more marginal in terms of viability than many speculative developments, which tend to be on greenfield sites and subject to a less rigorous approach to identifying necessary infrastructure provision; the result is that the viability of plan-led developments can be undermined by the competition arising from unplanned development. Lack of faith in the plan-led system de-motivates local authorities from putting resources into

development plans, and speculative development proposals divert resources away, particularly where planning appeals are involved.

CPRE's submission to the Local Plans Expert Group of the Department for Communities and Local Government argues that speculative proposals could be discouraged by ensuring the rigorous application of policies on the appropriate scale and strategic location of development, including conservation policies and Green Belt. We also recommend that local authorities should be given more scope to refuse applications on grounds of 'prematurity' (i.e. when an application would compromise policies in an emerging or draft local or neighbourhood plan), and should be supported in refusing any application for 'major' developments in cases that would undermine attempts to prioritise 'brownfield first', or where there would be inadequate infrastructure to support the development.

Planning from the bottom-up

The Government's introduction of neighbourhood planning is a welcome step towards more effective community engagement in planning, but progress in the actual making of neighbourhood plans has been much slower than officials originally hoped. CPRE believes that much of this is due to either the lack of up to date Local Plans in many areas (there is a widespread but erroneous belief that because neighbourhood plans should generally conform with local plans they cannot be put in

place until a local plan is adopted), or direct challenges by developers.

In several cases, neighbourhood planning initiatives have been frustrated or undermined by developers looking to promote large housing sites against local wishes, but encouraged by policies in the NPPF. Since May 2015 CPRE has only been able to find one instance in which Greg Clark has intervened and directly refused a planning appeal for a proposal which would compromise a draft neighbourhood plan. Encouraging communities to participate in neighbourhood planning can help to speed up the delivery of local plans by identifying opportunities and constraints from the bottom-up. The best way to ensure that communities engage with neighbourhood planning is to convince them that their plans will have effect.

CPRE recommends that town and parish councils and neighbourhood planning forums should be given a limited right of appeal, to prevent speculative housing applications in situations where neighbourhood plans are in preparation or adopted. We believe that such a mechanism would rarely be used in practice, but would actively help bring more neighbourhood plans forward, and be a disincentive for developers to pursue speculative planning proposals; this would also allow local authorities to focus more on preparing local plans, rather than reacting to speculative planning applications.

Find out more: read CPRE's Submission of evidence to the Local Plans Expert Group at www.cpre.org.uk/resources

QandA

The answers you need

Conservation areas

Q A development is proposed for a greenfield site on the edge of my town. I've heard that the site is in a Conservation Area but I have always assumed that that status only applied to streets and buildings – to prevent satellite dishes, plastic windows and suchlike. Can Conservation Areas in fact cover green spaces and, if so, do they carry any weight in planning decisions?

A Open green spaces are often part of a Conservation Area, typically as village greens, commons or parks. Many historic canals and rivers are Conservation Areas, and these designations often include a sizeable amount of

the land around them which contributes to their setting, meaning that open countryside can sometimes be included. CPRE Charnwood District Group recent objection to six dwellings in an area without a five year housing land supply was upheld by the planning inspector on account of the harm they would have caused to the Rothley Conservation Area. The site was on open countryside on the edge of the Conservation Area.

Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act) 1990 states that special attention must be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. The NPPF says great weight should be

given to Conservation Areas, and that the loss of any element that makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area should be treated as substantial harm. Only development proposals that “preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably.” Historic England advise that “all the features, listed or otherwise, within the area, are recognised as part of its character” and that planning decisions must “address the quality of the landscape in its broadest sense.”

Landscape definition

Q The Summer 2015 Fieldwork Q&A provided helpful advice on landscape ‘character’, but how can ‘landscape’ itself be defined in planning terms. I am trying to defend a bog-standard field that I’d describe as a patch of green space rather than a landscape.

A The interpretation of ‘landscape’ had an interesting role in the recent refusal of an appeal for up to 240 homes on a 24 acre pasture field on the edge of Southminster in Essex. In an area with a shortage of five year land supply, the inspector’s refusal hinged on the judgment that the housing would “unacceptably diminish the ‘intrinsic

character and beauty of the countryside” – a core planning principle enshrined in the NPPF.

While paragraph 109 of the NPPF states that the planning system should “contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes”, the term ‘valued landscapes’ is not explicitly defined. The inspector conceded that although the site was “clearly valued by local people, it does not include specific attributes or landscape features which would take it out of the ordinary sufficient for it to amount to a ‘valued landscape’ in terms of the Framework.” That said, the inspector ventured that “landscape is about the relationship between

people and place. It provides the setting for our day-to-day lives. This is a landscape in which people spend their leisure time. They experience it both up-close and at a distance.”

The inspector concluded that “as a gateway location on the approach to the village, development on the appeal site has the potential to alter the character and appearance of the locality,” creating “a visually intense concentration of built form which would extend out the hard urban edge of the settlement boundary.” Ultimately, the inspector judged that “the developments would amount to urban sprawl which would not enhance the countryside, but erode its rural character, dominating the natural landscape.”

Mind the gap

CPRE North East Hampshire were delighted that the proposals for 48 homes between Hook and Newnham have been refused following an appeal by the developer. The inspector gave a favourable interpretation of ‘sustainable development’, suggesting that taking a ‘precautionary approach’ to the biodiversity side was essential. Weight was also given to maintaining the two distinct settlements, with the inspector ruling the development would cause significant harm to the local gap. As a result of representations by members of Hook Action Against Overdevelopment during the appeal process, the inspector concluded there was a high risk that the development would cause harm to a protected species (bats) and would have a significant adverse effect on the living conditions of neighbouring dwellings with regard to outlook, privacy, noise and disturbance.

Stonehenge update

CPRE Wiltshire is part of the Stonehenge Alliance campaigning to protect this World Heritage site. Alliance representatives met with UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre’s advisory mission to Stonehenge in October to outline their thoughts and explain their concerns about the widening of the A303. If damaging new engineering works were proposed, the Alliance fears the site’s World Heritage status and the reasons for its designation might be threatened. They argued that the plan for a short tunnel is driven by affordability and economic objectives rather than by the need to conserve the whole world heritage at Stonehenge, which would require a longer tunnel.

Find out more: and sign the petition to save Stonehenge via <http://stonehengealliance.org.uk>

Current issues

Northern Powerhouse

CPRE Lancashire responded to the Department for Transport's blueprint for the 'Northern Powerhouse' which was published in August setting out how Government money will be spent on transport in the north of England. Investment of £13 million will be focused on a major road building programme, local transport/highways and rail schemes in the north.

The Transport Secretary visited the Farnworth Tunnel on 11 August, where major work has started to provide faster, better journeys between Manchester, Bolton and Preston by the end of 2016. The work involves re-drilling the existing tunnel so that the rail line can be electrified, and faster, greener electric trains can be introduced.

In response to the announcement Nick Thompson, acting Chair of the Lancashire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, said: "If the Government wants a northern powerhouse it must ensure that the full £38bn investment programme of Network Rail is implemented, with an integrated transport strategy, which is vital if rail use is to grow and local transport is to benefit. It is true that the North needs better transport connectivity, but public transport ought to be the priority for investment. Rural communities need better services in order to have travel options, and to tackle increasing carbon emissions and other adverse impacts - such as noise and air pollution in the countryside - from car dependency. The Government should devolve transport decisions to the north, rather than impose major road building projects which irrevocably damage the countryside."

Why housing targets are set up to fail

CPRE recently commissioned Housing Vision, housing market consultants, and Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design, to review the methodologies used to determine "objectively assessed need" for housing. They found the lack of clarity in the Government guidance meant there was no clear approach to calculating "objectively assessed need". This has resulted in the Local Plan process being delayed while large sums of money are spent on debating housing numbers at the examination of draft local plans.

Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs) are expected to take account of projected job growth and to adjust for this accordingly. However, projections incorporate aspirations for growth, as well as past levels of economic activity, and therefore raise the question of just how "objective"

the assessment is. Councils are required to show how their local plan will meet the "objectively assessed need" from the SHMA in full, unless other policies mean this is not possible. Constraints such as Green Belt should be taken into account, as should opportunities, but government guidance does not give appropriate clarity on how constraints are to be balanced with meeting housing need.

The consequences of flawed assessments

Given the above, the housing figures in local plans are often unrealistic, and unachievable by the current housebuilding industry. The current policy and guidance also disadvantages rural areas by indicating that local authorities should not take account of constraints such as land availability, viability, infrastructure or environmental impacts when identifying need.

Rural areas have suffered most from the abandonment of survey-based approaches to determining housing need in general, and affordable housing need in particular. The current "predict and provide" approach does not take account of housing needs derived from local assessments such as parish surveys and neighbourhood plans. In turn, the implications of the growing number of older people who want to downsize to smaller

"Local authorities are effectively being required to plan for aspirational housing demand, rather than actual need"



Creating higher than necessary housing targets leads to housing sites being identified on inappropriate rural locations

accommodation but are not able to, are not taken into account. The effect of this is to inflate the need to build additional family housing, often in rural areas and at a wastefully low density, to maintain the existing balance of supply. The specific needs of other demographics, such as younger people who may wish to rent small flats, are also not adequately considered.

It is clear that local authorities are effectively being required to plan for – and are held to account against – aspirational demand, rather than actual need. Creating higher than necessary housing targets leads to identifying additional sites that result in additional housing on inappropriate sites in the countryside. The upshot is that current processes mean the Government, through its planning inspectors, is in practice simply taking a top-down approach to impose and enforce housing targets, despite the stated intentions of ministers for a more localist system in this regard.

“More and more planning permissions are being granted on greenfield sites, but housebuilding rates remain the same”

Although the assessments of housing “need” that result from this process are clearly inaccurate, inflated and unreliable, national policy says that these figures are only a starting point in coming up with a final housing requirement. In reality, erratic “need” figures are not being balanced with sensible planning for infrastructure, consideration of environmental constraints, and realistic assessments of what housebuilders will be able to deliver.

CPRE has analysed the 54 local plans adopted in

shutterstock



Abandoning local need surveys can lead to a glut of larger homes at wastefully low densities

the past two years that have included a new housing target. This research shows that the average housing requirement of the plans is 30% above the Government’s household projections and 50% above the average build rate (taken over the past 15 years). The research also shows that environmental constraints are not being taken into account when determining housing targets – even though ministers insist they should be. The statistics, however, clearly show this is not happening: just seven of the 54 plans (13%) contain housing targets that are in part determined by environmental factors. So more and more planning permissions are being granted on greenfield sites, but housebuilding rates remain the same.

CPRE’s recommendations

Terminology and guidance needs to be reviewed, clarified and expanded to allow for more responsive assessments, providing a clear distinction between “need” and “demand” and giving primacy to meeting genuine housing need, defined as “the number of households who lack their own housing or live in unsuitable housing and who cannot afford to meet their housing needs in the market.”

Surveys of local communities’ housing needs in rural areas should be considered in the SHMA process, along with the implications of ‘objectively

assessed need’ recommendations on the character, infrastructure and services of these areas. There is a need to develop methodologies capable of generating demographic and housing projections at parish level as a counterbalance to “top down” assessment. It is also essential to define and distinguish between different types of housing requirements: affordable, specialised and local housing need on one hand, and consumer preferences and aspirations on the other.

Local plans must be allowed to weigh up all evidence for housing need, demand and constraints on an equal basis and come to a housing target which is flexible and subject to regular review. The NPPF should be amended to say that when local authorities are determining their local plan housing target they must take account of opportunities and constraints, as well as a realistic assessment of how many homes the housebuilding sector will be able to deliver. Local authorities should only be required to plan for the number of homes that are genuinely needed. They may plan for more to meet demand or aspiration if they wish, but it must be made clear that this is a choice. Without these changes, we are likely to see ever greater loss of our precious countryside.

Find out more: Read our *Set up to Fail* analysis of housing targets, and the full research report at www.cpre.org.uk/resources

Current issues

English devolution

CPRE branches recognised that it was important to identify just what devolution could mean for the English countryside. A group was set up, under the chairmanship of the Surrey Branch chair, Tim Murphy, bringing together representatives of various CPRE branches from across England, to examine the opportunities and possible threats to rural areas resulting from future devolution. The group’s report, which was presented to CPRE’s Policy Committee in September, identified two principal concerns. The first is that the implications of devolution for the English countryside are being overlooked with debate concentrated on city regions and urban-centred ‘Powerhouses’. The second is that there is the danger of a democratic deficit emerging, particularly given the importance that the Government is attaching to the role of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in the evolution of devolved authorities. LEPs are private sector-led business/local authority partnerships which have in many respects taken over the function of the old Regional Development Agencies as a conduit for the allocation of central government and European funding.

The group recommended that each devolved authority must have members and paid staff dedicated to the protection of the countryside and the support of sustainable rural enterprise, and that LEP operations need to be incorporated within the remit of democratically elected devolved authorities. If you would like to see the full text of the group’s recommendations, please email cpre.surrey@btconnect.com

MATTER of fact

Support for your case

Our Green Belt in numbers

The Green Belt's primary purpose is to prevent urban sprawl, but in doing so it provides countryside close to 30 million people. Two-thirds of all Green Belt land is in agricultural use; not surprising given its proximity to potential markets in the city. This is a vital economic resource for food security and soil protection.

Green Belts protect some of England's finest countryside (9% of the Green Belt is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). 30,000 km of public rights of way give us access to 89,000 ha of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and 220,000 ha of broadleaf and mixed woodland. In particular, England's Green Belts contain 33% of our Local Nature Reserves and 19% of our ancient woodland, a relatively higher proportion than countryside without the Green Belt designation. Windsor Great Park (which lies in the Metropolitan Green Belt) has been valued by the Government's Natural Capital Committee (NCC) as having environmental benefits worth at least £49 million, or £7,600 per hectare.

Allowing development on the more neglected land will only encourage landowners to neglect it. Leading environmental economist and Chair of the NCC, Dieter Helm, argues that where the quality of Green Belt land is poor, the solution is to improve it. For example, through the Community Forests initiative that has

turned more than 20,000 hectares of often degraded Green Belt land into woodland or other natural habitats since 1990. By contrast, the analysis of the value of Green Belts by the Adam Smith Institute relies on a single study of land near Chester from 1992, suggesting that Green Belt land provided environmental benefits to society worth £889 per hectare. The comparison with the NCC's more recent valuation of Windsor Great Park shows that extrapolating a 23-year-old study from a single location will not give a reliable picture of the true current value – let alone the potential value – of the Green Belt overall.

Avoiding the costs of sprawl

Green Belt policy is designed to prevent sprawl and all the negative costs associated with it. A recent research report from the London School of Economics found that urban sprawl in the USA imposes costs to society as a whole of more than \$1 trillion, through the loss of farmland and ecosystems and more dispersed activity (including reduced accessibility, higher costs of public infrastructure and longer trip distances).

It has been claimed that: 'You can build 1 million new homes on 3.7% of the Green Belt (or 2.5 million homes on just over 60,000 ha of Green Belt) within walking distance of a train station.' Often presented as a more

moderate alternative to abolishing Green Belt policy outright, closer analysis shows that, in many areas, this policy would have much the same effect, defeating the key purposes of preventing sprawl and stopping places joining up with each other. For example, Potters Bar, Slough, and Watford would all end up becoming part of London. The Green Belt would also become less accessible to people travelling by rail from the urban area it embraces.

Green Belts for leisure

Green Belt land is part of the wider countryside, to which there were 1.3 billion visits in 2013-14, according to Government surveys. One-off survey work done in 2009 as part of the same programme found that a majority (58%) of people had visited Green Belt land in the past 12 months, with most having a day out with friends or family, or visiting for peace and quiet. Nearly two-thirds (65%) wanted to visit the Green Belt more often.

A wide range of leisure activities take place in the Green Belt, not only golf but also horse riding and other outdoor sports. These all reflect in some way the value of a belt of open land to the people in the urban areas the land surrounds. Surveys by Natural England in 2009 found that the quality of the landscape is being maintained on more than twice as much Green Belt land (39%) as where it's neglected (18%). In

“Green Belt has a lower proportion of land classed as ‘neglected’ than the national average”

fact, Green Belt has a lower proportion of land classed as 'neglected' than the national average, while just 0.2% of it is described as 'derelict'.

Green Belt critics often draw a comparison between the amount of England's land area taken up for golf courses and that taken for new housing. These comparisons are misleading because they usually make a considerable underestimate of the amount of land taken up by housing. A BBC Radio 4 More Or Less programme, broadcast on 30 May 2014, explored the argument that more of Surrey's land area (2.8%) is taken up by golf courses than housing (2.1%). Most land outside urban areas in Surrey is classified as Green Belt. As the programme went on to highlight, the figures quoted for land area of housing do not include gardens, or access roads. If these are added, then about 14% of Surrey's area is taken up by housing.

Find out more: Read our full Green Belt 'mythbusting' document at www.cpre.org.uk/resources