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countryside
charity

Fieldwork



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Greener, Better, Faster

CPRE has long called for the countryside to be at the forefront of climate action, so that rural communities do not bear the brunt of the climate emergency. Our new report, **Greener, better, faster: countryside solutions to the climate emergency and for a green recovery**, sets out how the countryside can speed the transformation to a net-zero society while benefiting people living and working in rural communities.

Greener, better, faster was launched at a virtual panel discussion in July featuring environment minister Rebecca Pow MP and youth climate activist Freddie Northcott. Ahead of the event, CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman called for 'proper investment in rural public transport, delivering renewables sensitively

and nature-based solutions. The PM's 'build, build, build' strategy falls far short of this – the government cannot continue to ignore public support for enhancing and protecting countryside and green spaces.' Greener, better, faster sets out how the government can best achieve this while avoiding climate breakdown, making recommendations across a number of sectors.

We're calling on the government to introduce an action plan for the land use sector to deliver net-zero by 2045, with binding interim targets and localised carbon reduction plans. This should harmonise funding, taxation and regulation to rapidly re-wet and restore peatland; expand woodland and agroforestry; drive uptake of agro-ecological practices to boost soil health; and drive down

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Fieldwork

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Greener, Better, Faster

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emissions from inefficient use of synthetic nutrients. We also want the government to commit to implementing an ambitious national food strategy to increase demand for sustainably grown food and reduce food waste.

Enhancing and protecting landscapes

To help create thriving, carbon-absorbing landscapes, we want to see investment in the restoration and planting of hedgerows to achieve at least a 40% increase in their length by 2050. This can make landscapes in England more resilient to the climate emergency in a way that reinforces landscape character. Any nature-based solution must take account of local distinctiveness, such as through the planting of the species and quantities of trees that best suit the character of the individual landscape. We want to see local people given the opportunity to take part in such planting through the creation and funding of training and event programmes within the Nature for Climate and Nature Recovery Network funds.

“We want the government to ensure that all planning decision makers are held to account regarding compliance with the climate change duty in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, with penalties for failing to comply and not meeting binding carbon targets.”

In built development, we want the government to ensure that all planning decision makers, including local authorities and the Planning Inspectorate, are held to account regarding compliance with the climate change duty in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, with penalties for failing to comply and not meeting binding carbon targets. Building regulations must be radically tightened up to ensure that zero-carbon standards are met, with a National Retrofit Strategy to target investment in retrofitting existing buildings, neighbourhoods and whole built-up areas for energy conservation

and generation. Ministers must also optimise the recycling of land by adopting a truly ‘brownfield first’ policy to maximise the protection of green spaces that help mitigate climate change.

Decarbonising energy and transport

Our report calls for the immediate disincentivisation of all exploration and development for coal, oil and gas, through the application a strict energy hierarchy to future supply, prioritising demand reduction and energy efficiency and then renewables. We also want to see a new generation of renewables planned strategically, but with full participation from local people, to minimise impacts on landscapes and wildlife; a specific subsidy stream should be set up to encourage community-owned energy generation.

The government must introduce a legally binding national carbon budget for the transport sector, with projects that do not contribute towards reaching net-zero by 2045 not allowed to proceed. There must be a clear hierarchy for all future transport investment, with money to be spent first on active travel options such as footpaths and cycle lanes, then provision of public transport. There should be no further airport expansion and internal flights should be phased out using higher rates of taxation and other disincentives for frequent fliers. Meanwhile, we recommend the creation of a ringfenced rural transport fund to support public transport services for poorly-connected communities, reallocating the more than £27 billion due to be spent on building new roads.

Labour’s shadow environment secretary Luke Pollard MP said ‘there is much to be supportive of in your report, the energy and urgency that you have put into it reflect the energy that is required to address the climate emergency.’ Former Green Party leader Baroness Bennett also commended CPRE for ‘timing it so perfectly and coming up with a report that really starts to paint a different kind of picture of a different better Britain.’ Read the report at: cpre.org.uk/resources

Break through

How volunteers are making a difference



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A victory for common sense in Hampshire

Countryside lovers in Eastleigh were celebrating in April after CPRE Hampshire helped convince a government planning inspector that the borough council's preferred growth option would see large tracts of countryside disappear needlessly. The plans for 5,300 homes, industrial space and a new road with bridge over the River Itchen were deemed unjustified in such close proximity to the South Downs National Park. A June meeting saw Eastleigh Borough Council's cabinet vote unanimously to delete the damaging option from the local plan, with leader Keith House also pledging to block any speculative development in the affected area.

CPRE Hampshire has been an active participant in the development of the Eastleigh Local Plan, alongside the campaign group Action Against Destructive Development (ADD) and all the local parish councils. Caroline Dibden, vice chair of CPRE Hampshire (pictured raising awareness of the issue), said: 'Common sense has prevailed, and we hope that in their next plan review the borough council will deliver their affordable housing needs in more sustainable locations, close to public transport and other existing facilities. In any event, Eastleigh have sufficient other sites to meet their housing needs for well over 10 years.'

Reprieve for The Fens' landscape heritage

June saw communities secretary Robert Jenrick MP turn down an appeal for an incinerator at Waterbeach that CPRE campaigners argued would have been 20% taller than Ely Cathedral, threatening the setting of nearby Denny Abbey. The secretary of state largely agreed with Cambridgeshire County Council's initial refusal of planning permission on the grounds that it would have a detrimental impact on the landscape and nearby historic buildings.

CPRE Cambridgeshire & Peterborough chairman Alan James welcomed the news, saying the massive structure would also have caused 'significant long term pollution of the local area and an increase in carbon dioxide emissions'. Alan had given evidence at the public inquiry held in Cambridge last winter, making the case that energy-from-waste incineration is an outdated technology which no longer has a place in zero-waste economies or responsible approaches to climate change and health.

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Standing together against damaging deregulation

CPRE were among 18 charities, including Friends of the Earth, Woodland Trust and RSPB, who wrote a joint letter to the prime minister calling for ‘locally accountable and democratic’ planning rather than further deregulation. The letter was timed to coincide with a late July speech by environment secretary George Eustice on his vision for a green recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. It argues that ‘deregulation of the planning system would erode the foundations of any green and just recovery long before the first brick is laid. Nowhere else in the world is such a deregulatory race to the bottom being considered.’

CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman commented: ‘Environmental impact assessments are the foundations for protecting not only vulnerable wildlife and nature but landscapes, our built heritage and our health. Critically, they are the means of scrutinising the potential air quality impact of proposed developments; they give planners the evidence to refuse schemes that would make air quality problems worse – this has never been more important. Any new environmental impact assessment process must be stronger, not weaker, than what we already have. A robust, democratic and locally led planning system will be key to this.’

News round-up

Keeping you on top of the latest relevant issues

A design quality unit for England

CPRE is part of a coalition of groups concerned with the quality of new building who have called on the government to set up a dedicated Design Quality Unit for England.

We joined the Academy of Urbanism, Civic Voice, Design Council, Place Alliance, Trees & Design Action Group and Urban Design Group to build on the work of the well-received National Housing Audit commissioned by CPRE, which has already influenced the design-focused recommendations of the government’s Building Better Building Beautiful Commission. The coalition’s new report, *Delivering Urban Quality, Time to Get Serious*, was launched in May at an online meeting chaired by the BBC’s energy and environment analyst Roger Harrabin. It concludes that it is difficult to see how the commission’s propositions will be delivered without a determined and very public effort by government to harness

the knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment of the sector at large.

The report argues that a design quality unit should work through a partnership and networked approach across the country to monitor what is being built; establish good design as a fundamental pre-requisite; gather and publicise best practice through regional centres of excellence; and ultimately help to deliver the sort of built environment that the nation deserves, engaging local communities in the design process. CPRE’s strategic planning lead Paul Miner said: ‘The government is putting plenty of effort into monitoring the numbers of homes being permitted and built. But poorer areas, and areas further away from London, are too often getting mediocre and poor quality. We now urgently need a national body to help monitor and improve the quality of the building that results.’ Find out more at placealliance.org.uk

Garden communities create car-dependency

Far from being vibrant, green communities, garden villages and garden towns are at high risk of becoming car-dependent commuter estates, according to June research by Transport for New Homes.

The group examined plans for 20 garden community proposals and found that they will create up to 200,000 car-dependent households, generating high levels of traffic on surrounding roads including motorways. The group found that plans for garden communities promise major increases in road capacity to cater for a massive expected rise in car use. Cycle routes from garden villages into nearby towns will often be long and dangerous, while residents will have to walk up to seven miles to access a railway station or go to the nearest town centre. The report recommends an urgent

reassessment of the transport provision of all planned garden communities, with no outline planning permission given until it is clear that sustainable transport elements in each vision are fully funded and specified. It prioritises building close to existing town centres rather than ‘scattering developments around the countryside’, with kickstart funding and other financial incentives to establish local facilities within the development.

Commenting on the new report, CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman said: ‘The irony in the “garden cities” development plans is that access to green space has become an afterthought. Transport for New Homes has exposed that we risk creating a new generation of mediocre housing estates in the middle of nowhere, with too few public transport links.’ Find out more at transportfornewhomes.org.uk



Saving a wildlife haven

CPRE North Yorkshire cheered housing secretary Robert Jenrick’s decision to dismiss an appeal for more than 500 homes on land next to Askham Bog nature reserve, just outside York.

They had strongly objected to the proposal – which would have seen the loss of 40 hectares of agricultural land – and fully supported the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust’s campaign to prevent this rare surviving ancient fenland from being compromised by urban sprawl. Askham Bog has several SSSI designations and is

home to a varied amount of flora and fauna that would have been threatened by the impact of plans to build on adjacent land, earmarked as Green Belt in York’s emerging local plan. Sir David Attenborough had joined CPRE in campaigning against the proposals since 2016, when he argued the site was a ‘cathedral of nature conservation’ and said: ‘It’s extraordinary how many plants and animals thrive here. Despite its small size, Askham Bog is the richest place in Yorkshire for wildlife. Only minutes from the centre of York, it’s a haven for wildlife and people alike’.

What’s the plan?

New research by CPRE has found that fewer than a third of local planning authorities are operating under an up-to-date plan.

Our What’s the plan? report is the most recent complete assessment of local plan coverage across England, and raises questions over ministerial targets for all councils to be operating under an up-to-date plan by the end of 2023. We found that only 30% of local planning authorities can be considered up-to-date if using the definition that the council must be able to demonstrate that it has sufficient land identified in the plan for five years of housing development. Only 40% of local plans are less than five years old or have been updated or reviewed in the past five years, while over 80% of local planning authorities will need to review an existing plan, or adopt a new plan, in order to meet

the government’s proposed 2023 deadline.

Matt Thomson, CPRE’s outgoing head of land use and planning, said: ‘National planning policies and the government’s tests for local plans make it difficult for councils to adopt plans, and even harder for plans to be defined as “up-to-date”. Having an out-of-date plan risks losing local discretion over development proposals, so there’s already a massive pressure on councils.’ The report recommends that the government must give more support to planning authorities, including by: improving the practicability of housing land supply policies; producing clear guidance for councils on how to review and subsequently update a local plan; addressing the barriers faced by authorities in plan preparation and adoption; and simplifying statutory plan documents.

Restoring peatlands

CPRE supported calls from the Committee on Climate Change to restore peatlands and to end the sale of horticultural peat immediately. With good alternatives available, there’s no reason that peat still needs to be extracted and used in gardens. When peatlands aren’t being mined and are in favourable conditions, wildlife can flourish and biodiversity increase. We want to see peatlands restored to their natural state wherever possible, so we’re embarking on a campaign to encourage people to go peat-free like Kew Gardens and the Royal Horticultural Society, assisted by more peat-free alternatives and clearer labelling.

Our use of peat can’t be sustained. As it forms at approximately 1mm a year, at the current rate of consumption it’s simply not a renewable source. It’s even classified as a fossil fuel by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and peatlands drained for crops give out an estimated 7.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent a year. In the UK, it’s estimated that there are over three billion tonnes of carbon stored in peatlands – equivalent to all carbon stored in the forests of the UK, Germany and France put together – which also play an integral part in preventing floods. Only 22% of the UK’s peatlands are in a ‘near-natural’ state, allowing CO₂ equivalent to 5% of the UK’s emissions to escape each year.

Rethinking roads

CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman recently took the unusual step of writing personally to the heads of Central Bedfordshire Council and the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership, and transport secretary Grant Shapps MP, regarding the threat to the Chilterns AONB in Bedfordshire from a proposed link road. He wrote: 'I am dismayed to learn of your continued support for the decision to build the A6-M1 link road across one of our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – the Bedfordshire Chilterns. Furthermore, the complete length of the road and accompanying infrastructure will be entirely within the Green Belt and beside two Ancient Woodlands.

These are vital parts of our "Natural Health Service" – the green lungs for our urban areas. This destruction of our beautiful countryside is out of step with current thinking. We need to be rebuilding our countryside not destroying it, and diverting money to areas that improve people's lives rather than pollute them. I urge you as the decision makers in the process to think again before taking this irreversible step, which will cause immense environmental damage and biodiversity loss. We are on the verge of a green recovery and should be investing in actions that reduce the impact of the climate crisis.'

letter from the field

Words from local campaigners



The threat to the Avon Valley

Chris Caswell of the CAUSE campaign group writes on the ongoing threat to the beautiful environment of the Avon Valley from speculative development.

In recent years the Avon Valley's open space has been eyed up by developers, hungry for cheap land to take advantage of Wiltshire Council's plans for a large expansion of Chippenham. In 2009 the council produced published draft plans which identified Chippenham as 'strategically significant', and suitable for large housing growth. It proposed over 2,500 houses, and a new 'link road', in and across the Avon Valley. No mention was made of the loss of open space or environmental degradation. There was a storm of public protest, including the formation of a residents' campaign group (which later morphed into CAUSE – Campaign Against Urban Sprawl to the East), with members from both sides of the river.

After a formal public consultation in 2011, the Avon Valley site and road were dropped from the final 2012 core strategy submission to the Secretary of State. There followed two Examinations in Public (EiP) by planning inspectors, where developers who had invested in land options and plans for the east of Chippenham predictably opposed the revised plans. CAUSE submitted detailed written documents and oral contributions, successfully opposing any reintroduction of building on the Avon Valley. In 2017 the Inspector wrote his final report and the Avon Valley left bank was preserved from the bulldozers in the formal Chippenham Planning Document. This became Wiltshire

Council policy as part of its overall local plan, which runs up until 2026.

In the meantime the government racked up the pressure on local authorities to build even larger amounts of housing, whether or not on green open space. In response, Wiltshire Council identified Chippenham as the location for a significantly larger expansion in the upcoming revision of the local plan, with minimal democratic input or public consultation. Shortly afterwards, with zero public consultation, the council made an unpublicised bid to the government Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) for £75 million of public money. We now know this is for what are now described as 'distributor roads' around both the Avon valley in the east and also around the south of the town. It is to facilitate 7,500 more houses, a large chunk of which would be on the Avon Valley. The bid was approved by the Homes England agency, despite the fact that none of this is supported by the council's own local plans, approved after searching public examination.

Wiltshire Council has recently bowed to public pressure and declared a Climate Emergency. It sees no conflict between the climate emergency and building two large new roads across green countryside for cars from 7,500 new homes. At the same time, there is growing evidence of the folly of building on flood plains, and of the health hazards of vehicle pollution. CAUSE is working in collaboration with CPRE, Extinction Rebellion, other local environmental groups and many concerned individuals, with the shared goal of saving the Avon Valley. For more information email admin@cprewiltshire.org.uk

Good ideas

Learning from each other



© Kyle Neuhäus Friends of Bocking Windmill

Maintaining a rural icon

CPRE Essex has donated £500 towards the maintenance of Bocking Windmill – a stunning local landmark that became the focal point of a lockdown photography competition. The mill was also bathed in spectacular blue light in April in tribute to the NHS, and was decorated with bunting for VE Day celebrations in May. The donation from the CPRE Essex Mill Fund has been given to the Friends of Bocking Windmill, to help cover the cost of painting and cleaning and ensure this

beautiful piece of our rural heritage can continue to inspire future generations.

The mill has been in Church Street, Bocking, since 1721, having been moved 200 yards up the hill to its present site in 1829. It is a listed ancient monument and was worked until 1929, while the Friends of Bocking Windmill group was formed to help restoration efforts in 1962 – hosting open days and group visits which it hopes will soon return to normal once coronavirus restrictions are eased.

Promoting a community hub

CPRE Hertfordshire has been proudly promoting Wigginton Village Shop – a vital local asset during lockdown and the recipient of their Business in the Community Award last year. This community-owned business has continued to operate throughout the pandemic, offering a delivery service for those who are self-isolating. After two years of hard work by local people, the dream of a village shop became reality in December 2018. Villagers had bought shares in the enterprise amounting to nearly £90,000, and around 80 volunteers now help to run it. 68% of products are sourced within 30 miles – including beer from the nearby

microbrewery. Meanwhile, mouth-watering cakes made in the village will ensure the shop's café swiftly returns to being a vibrant community hub after coronavirus.



Scoring healthy streets

CPRE London is proud to be coordinating the coalition which, for the second year running, has published the London Borough Healthy Streets Scorecard. Tracking council progress on the Mayor's healthy streets indicators year-on-year, the scorecard assesses the implementation of key measures that will dramatically improve air quality and road safety, boost active lifestyles and reduce carbon emissions, including controlled parking, 20mph speed limits, protected cycle lanes and safe walking and cycling routes to schools.

New data published on the 6th July indicates that London's boroughs, the Mayor and Transport for London need to do more to tackle the climate emergency, enable a 'green recovery' and tackle inactivity levels that cripple NHS budgets. However, the scorecard reflects the health of boroughs' streets up to March 2020, and CPRE London recognises that much good work is being done in response to coronavirus such as the Mayor's Streetspace for London plan. The joint manifesto, A More Natural Capital, calls for the implementation of even more transport infrastructure centred on walking, cycling and public transport, as well as car-share schemes, new 'car-free' residential units and smart spatial planning which tackles the issue of open green space deficiency. Find out more at cprelondon.org.uk

Renewables subsidies return

CPRE responded to the government's Contracts for Difference consultation on the return of subsidies for onshore wind developments alongside other renewable generation technologies. While welcoming this as a necessary step towards tackling the climate emergency, our response highlighted how renewables can be done well in a countryside context – including by putting local communities at the heart of shaping the future of their energy landscapes.

We stressed that local communities should have meaningful powers within the planning system to protect their countryside and amenity from schemes which fail to respect the landscape. Planning committees must continue to consider the impact on the landscape before granting approval to renewable projects in the countryside. If a proposal is going to cause undue environmental impacts which aren't going to be properly mitigated by the scheme, then planning permission should not be granted. The government must consider these land-use issues strategically and clearly set out where the potential impacts to our heritage and the integrity of not only nationally protected, but also locally valued landscapes, make these developments unsuitable in certain areas. While awaiting the promised 'tough new guidance' to empower local communities, our

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step by step

How community energy supports people and planet

We think that the gold standard for renewable energy done well means community energy – renewable energy projects proposed, designed, and owned by local people.

We want to see these done in a way that minimises impacts on landscapes, and makes sure that the rural communities who host wind turbines or solar farms get to keep the money these schemes generate. Luckily, there are some great examples out there of community energy in action already – examples of where local people have worked together and are now reaping the benefits, as well as using energy that limits damage to the planet.

Here are six real-life examples that show why community energy is the best answer to the climate emergency for thriving rural communities, and the countryside we all love.

1 It earns money for community projects

Community-run energy schemes make money which can then be used to help local people and to improve the area. A great example is Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy which has paid a total of £45,000 into a community fund making grants to projects in the local area – including awarding £4,750 to Wiltshire Scrapstore, a local charity that takes resources destined for landfill and redistributes them for creative and educational activities. The fund also gave £500 for a wildlife pond.

At South Dartmoor Community Energy, money made by the Portworthy Solar Array near Lee Moor village (built on brownfield land from old china clay works) is given as grants to support the local community in three parishes. Instead of becoming profits for a large commercial company, this money has supported a new community orchard, an upgraded village playground, and helped to fund a local Scout group project.

2 It considers local landscapes

Designing a renewable energy scheme as a community gives local people the power to decide on the right place for a wind turbine or solar panel. This means energy infrastructure can be kept away from the most beautiful areas. The renewable installations run by Eigg Electric on their Hebridean island were carefully placed to minimise visual impact. Their hydro generator is located on a local burn while their wind turbines balanced exposure to wind and accessibility with the least intrusive fit in the landscape, viewed from all directions.

3 It protects nature – by design

Community energy projects can be designed in a way that helps wildlife and actually increases biodiversity. At Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy Chetworth Solar Farm, the largest area of lowland neutral meadow restoration in the country, they've created a diverse grassland habitat in order to maximise wildlife benefits including encouraging more wildflower species.

Grassland is grazed by sheep for part of the year, with a buffer zone of tussocky grassland being developed between the outermost solar panels. There are hedgerows, providing a habitat for butterflies, reptiles, small mammals and other invertebrates and creating good foraging grounds for birds of prey including Little Owls. Birds and bats are encouraged to use surrounding hedgerows and trees for nesting and brooding. And in time, they plan to establish beehives and bug nests, so the solar farm will be a home for pollinators to enrich the surrounding farmland.

4 It helps to tackle rural fuel poverty

Community energy schemes can provide much-needed money for people in rural areas to insulate their homes, keeping them warm and reducing fuel costs.



Westmill energy farm, near Swindon, is the first 100% community-owned scheme in the UK

© Alamy

Buckingham and its surrounding parishes spend almost £20 million per year on energy – almost all of which leaves the local economy. The Gawcott Fields community solar project will produce enough energy for the annual electricity consumption of a thousand homes. Better still, the income from the solar farm has been used to fund a local energy and fuel poverty advice service called Bee Warm. The scheme offers a range of services to the local community, including grants and financial assistance for energy-saving measures such as insulation and boiler replacements.

5 It honours our rural heritage

Small-scale community energy schemes fit in with our long history of using wind and water to generate power in the countryside. Windmills and watermills have become a quintessential part of many of our rural landscapes, and the best community energy schemes simply continue and complement this heritage.

Sandford Hydro is a renewable scheme based on the installation of three hydropower turbines on the River Thames at Sandford Lock. The lock has changed enormously over time, and the new scheme designs have sought to capture and improve upon it. The history is remarkable. A mill was built at Sandford in 1294 by the Knights Templar, although

the lock was broken during conflict between millers and bargemen during the reign of Edward III. The introduction of the hydropower scheme and replacement fish pass and sluice is just the latest incremental change at this site. The project has helped return the Lasher Weir on the Thames to its historic role as a provider of clean energy. The hydro scheme generates a huge 1.6 GWh of renewable electricity per year – the equivalent demand for 500+ households.

6 It kicks off a virtuous circle

The income community energy schemes provide for investing in the local area are also often used to pay for other schemes that reduce the community's greenhouse gas emissions. So one form of decarbonisation pays for another!

Near Bristol, Low Carbon Gordano – two community-owned solar farms – provide the bulk of the income for a community fund that provides grants to reduce the environmental footprint of local communities. Gordano School is being helped to install LED lighting and increase plastic recycling in the school while Pill and Easton-in-Gordano Parish Council are getting funds to accelerate their programme to convert the village streetlights to LEDs. It's expected that well over 50 MWh of power will be saved annually – and more than 12 tonnes of CO₂.

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response issued several recommendations.

CPRE recommends a clear preference for siting new renewable energy projects on brownfield sites wherever possible, and local communities should be given a meaningful say over the location and design of schemes in their area in order to minimise landscape impacts. There must be a shift towards proactive community engagement for new renewable projects that precedes design options and is genuinely responsive to alternative ways of delivering optimal capacity. Local communities must be given access to the full evidence necessary to inform decision making as they shape their energy future, including more accurate and comprehensive noise assessments covering all noise types. They must not be placed under pressure to accept schemes that would cause undue harm to their local landscapes and amenity.

Communities should also be provided with relevant financial and practical support to allow them to plan their energy future. The direct community ownership of renewable energy schemes should be the government's 'gold standard' arrangement for meeting the needs of local people, with subsidies prioritising community energy projects and requirements for community engagement which carry weight within the planning process.

Hope for better housing

CPRE South Yorkshire was delighted that the planning committee of Sheffield City Council rejected the planning application to build houses on Owlthorpe Fields. Having worked closely with the Owlthorpe Fields Action Group and the Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust to raise the issue, our campaigners felt that the councillors asked the right questions and realised that the site deserves much better. They hope the developer can now look constructively at bringing forward a much-improved scheme that will create a far more sustainable, low carbon community that provides more homes but with far less negative impact. Our campaigners also recently helped local people save green fields at Hollin Busk from plans for 78 car-dependent, low density and visually intrusive homes.

Positive planning

CPRE Northamptonshire welcomed two noteworthy decisions made by East Northants Council just prior to lockdown: the refusal of 105 houses at Irthlingborough, which would have impacted on the wildlife areas of the Nene Valley as well as giving rise to access and possible flooding problems; and the refusal of a development at Kings Cliffe – on a site not allocated in the neighbourhood plan – that upheld the values of local democracy in planning.

Parishbeat

Effective solutions for your parish

Supporting a Green Belt parish

CPRE Bedfordshire have succeeded in helping Eaton Bray Parish Council and the Bower Lane Action Group win a battle to protect over seven hectares of Green Belt east of the village, some of Bedfordshire's best and most versatile agricultural land.

The development of 120 homes was proposed for an unsustainable location on the edge of the village, affecting the remnants of a Victorian orchard and garden wall that give valued character to this entrance to the village. Furthermore, the site has not been allocated for development in the neighbourhood plan adopted in 2019. An appeal hearing followed Central Bedfordshire Council's

initial rejection of the planning application, having already earmarked the required five year housing land supply.

The very special circumstances needed to allow development in the Green Belt were claimed by the developers to be the inclusion of a 50% allocation of affordable homes. However, the inspector determined that the development was harmful to the Green Belt and would significantly harm the landscape character of the area, and should therefore not be approved. CPRE Bedfordshire is now using the result of this case as evidence to defend other challenges against similar unsustainable development. Read all the latest news at cprebeds.org.uk

The defence of a rural landscape

The safeguarding of open countryside and farmland were two reasons why CPRE Cambridgeshire & Peterborough welcomed the communities secretary's recent refusal of permission for an 'AgriTech' park near Hinxton.

Chairman Alan James spoke at last summer's public inquiry into the plans for a technology park with up to 112,000 square metres of floor space and with a projected capacity of 4,000 employees. He argued that the proposal represented speculative development, noting that a clear case had not been made for why the park's businesses must be located in this rural corner of the county (adjacent to the Cambridge Green Belt). Other reasons for refusal cited by Alan included loss of arable land; loss of habitat for overwintering birds; light pollution; and the potential for increased flooding downstream of the site. The secretary of state duly cited the negative impact on the landscape and the loss of farmland as key reasons for his decision.

A delighted Hinxton Parish Council told the Cambridge Independent: 'It was

reassuring to see that the appeal inspector, and the secretary of state, agreed with the views of local residents that the scheme would have a substantial adverse impact on the local landscape and would harm the attractive long distance views that characterise the area. The parish council had also made the case that there was nothing to stop this speculative development becoming a standard business park, rather than an agritech park as proposed by the applicants, and this view was also upheld by the secretary of state.'

The secretary of state concluded the development would have an 'enduring adverse effect' on the appearance and character of the area, which he said carried 'substantial weight' against its approval. The grounds for dismissal also cited the close proximity and negative impact the development would have on nearby heritage assets, including the Grade II listed Hinxton Grange, the Grade II* listed Hinxton Church of St Mary and St John the Evangelist, and the Hinxton conservation area.

Campaigner

Don't victimise the newts – we need nature!



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In the week the prime minister blamed 'newt-counting delays in our system' for 'a massive drag on productivity,' CPRE Sussex campaigners joined other charities in the county standing up for our amphibians, saying: 'Great Crested Newts are not to blame for housebuilding delays and they deserve our protection.'

Campaigners compared Mr Johnson's words to a speech made in the House of Lords by Mayfield Market Towns Director, Lord Jamie Borwick, who wants to build 7,000 new homes in Horsham district, near Henfield. Lord Borwick called the newts 'awful amphibians' and accused objectors of "transporting them to controversial sites' to delay development.' However, CPRE Sussex Director, Kia Trainor, says the newts are being unfairly used as a scapegoat for delays, and that we need Nature now, more than ever before.

'The experience of lockdown has highlighted the importance of the natural world and the real value of publicly accessible green space,' she said. 'We must learn from the mistakes of the past and build with more biodiversity not less. Newts are being unfairly targeted anyway, there are loads of development sites across Sussex where there are no newts but the work has been at a standstill for years.' One typical example is a brownfield site in Court Road, Lewes, which is within the South Downs National Park. The land has had full planning permission since 2016 and yet no building works have begun and the site appears abandoned.

Huge benefits for wildlife and people

Sussex Wildlife Trust Conservation Officer Jess Price said the newts are often singled out because they have a high level of protection through the Habitats Directive. 'The Great Crested Newt is a declining species across Europe,' she explained. 'Sadly ecological considerations usually make up a tiny fraction of a development budget and biodiversity is often the last thing considered. The reality is that conserving newts or "newt counting" as Boris Johnson called it, rarely delays development and usually has huge benefits for other wildlife and people. By conserving areas for newts within developments you also get areas of natural green space for people and other wildlife too.'

Ecologists surveying the site near Henfield where Lord Borwick wants to build his new settlement found the area supports a rare metapopulation of Great Crested Newts. 'This landscape, with its abundant suitable habitat and connectivity between the ponds and wet ditches, may prove to support one of the best-known central Sussex populations,' says Wildlife Splash's Jackie Thompson. The government's own review on the implementation of the Habitats Directive in 2012 concluded: 'in the large majority of cases the implementation of the directives is working well, allowing both development of key infrastructure and ensuring that a high level of environmental protection is maintained'.

Biodiversity in new housing

CPRE Sussex has put together guidance for planner and developers on biodiversity enhancement in new housing development in conjunction with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (South East). The document sets out ways in which such enhancements can be incorporated into all new developments, based on building in wildlife friendly features at the construction stage and ensuring appropriate planting of native and wildlife friendly trees, shrubs and plants.

As well as improving the immediate environment of the development site, these measures can also contribute substantially to establishing and maintaining wildlife corridors that support the wider landscape. New developments should be designed to integrate space for both wildlife and people. Structural features can include lighting designed to reduce light pollution and avoid disturbing wildlife; integrated bird and bat boxes/bricks built into new houses; wildlife-friendly green walls and roofs; hedgehog highways maintaining connectivity through gardens; and sustainable drainage systems. CPRE Sussex hopes that that planning authorities will adopt these principles formally as part of their planning policies and guidance. Download the full guidance at cpresussex.org.uk/resources

Norfolk hedgerow reprieved

CPRE Norfolk were heartened to see South Norfolk District Council refuse permission for a proposal for 98 houses off Burgate Lane, Poringland in April. The site is unallocated for housing, outside the settlement boundary and would have resulted in the removal of important historic hedgerows – as highlighted by Poringland Parish Council’s objection. The parish council noted that the applicant had argued there would have been a ‘net biodiversity gain’ as a result of their development, and issued the following response: ‘The applicant proposes to remove part of a valued hedgerow, protected because of evidence of it being shown on the 18th century tithe maps. The applicant proposes to replace this valued 300-year-old hedgerow with new hedgerows. This is not acceptable’. The parish council also questioned a bat survey presented as evidence for the lack of impact the development would have on wildlife. The survey counted 65 bat movements, but the parish council submitted that a survey commissioned by a neighbouring property, closer to the site boundary, recorded in excess of 1,700 bat movements – ‘enough to call into question the accuracy of the applicant’s recordings.’ CPRE Norfolk’s postponed AGM will take place by virtual conferencing on 11th August 2020 – details at cprenorfolk.org.uk

In review

Our perspective on countryside issues

Why we need more hedgerows

Hedgerows are perhaps one the most iconic and nostalgic features of our countryside. Around two-thirds of England has had a continuously hedged landscape for a thousand years or more. But our hedgerows, old and new, are more than a link to our past. They offer a way to tackle a very modern challenge: anthropogenic climate change.

As a hedgerow is essentially a line of closely spaced trees and shrubs, managed through practices like cutting or laying to maintain bushy growth, it can absorb climate change causing carbon dioxide through the process of photosynthesis. While estimates vary depending on characteristics of the hedgerow and its location, research indicates that one hectare of mature managed hedgerow sequesters up to five tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, for up to 20 years. This is almost as much as the yearly carbon dioxide emissions of one person living in the UK (5.5 tonnes, on average). Unmanaged hedgerows can sequester significantly more carbon dioxide emissions, up to around 30 tonnes per hectare annually, but this is unlikely to be maintained for as long. Hedgerows also store significantly more carbon in their vegetation and underlying soils than arable land or pasture, and in terms of overall carbon stock are actually of comparable magnitude to woodland.

Enhancing farmed landscapes

Hedgerows are crucial to consider for mitigating climate change because they are more able to integrate into existing landscapes than other carbon sinks, like peatland or woodland. This is especially true for agricultural environments, which cover 60% of the UK’s land area. Traditionally found in these settings, not only would it be easy to increase hedgerow coverage in countryside (and necessary when we reflect on the urgency of the monumental task to reduce greenhouse gas emissions), but hedgerows can

actually help to increase productivity of arable land by promoting soil conservation and enhancing soil fertility.

As well as mitigating the effects of climate change, hedgerows can also enable our landscapes to become more resilient to its impacts. For example, regulating water flow across catchments to limit drought or flooding, and facilitating species’ range shifts across otherwise hostile environments. In urban areas, hedgerow planting could help to promote low-carbon modes of transport, as hedgerows are incredibly effective barriers against air pollution.

Hedgerows also offer many other benefits to people and nature. Over 600 plants, 1,500 insects, 65 birds and 20 mammal species utilise our hedgerows, including for food, shelter and to move between habitats. With 130 priority species for conservation significantly associated with hedgerows, increasing hedgerow coverage and improving hedgerow health would therefore help to boost populations of some of our most threatened wildlife. To tackle the climate emergency and create thriving, resilient landscapes and communities, we need hedgerows.

But despite this potential, hedgerows are under threat. Overall hedgerow extent has declined by 33% since 1984, leaving just 452,000km of hedgerows across Great Britain. Of those that remain, almost half are in poor health, while two thirds have inappropriately managed margins, making them more susceptible to further decline. We need to plant new hedgerows, especially in denuded landscapes, and invest in traditional skills, like hedgelaying, to restore and properly manage our existing ones. Hedgerows offer a cost-effective way to enhance our countryside not just for climate-change mitigation, but people and nature as well. A true, age-old countryside solution; let’s hear it for our hero hedgerows.

Eleanor Absalom

CPRE campaigns and policy assistant

Q&A

The answers you need

Varying conditions in planning applications

Q What are the potential ramifications of developers in my area seeking to vary the conditions on planning applications already granted – often slightly increasing the amount of housing or the size of an industrial building?

A CPRE North East's Newsletter recently referenced a landmark case that freshly confirms the limits of Section 73 applications, under the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, and could have implications for numerous planning applications across the country. The essence of Section 73 is that the application should relate to conditions imposed in a planning certificate. It does not apply to applications that change the description of the permitted development.

In *Finney v Welsh Ministers* [2019] EWCA Civ 1868, the Court of Appeal addressed

the issue head-on. The applicant had applied for a wind turbine 100 metres tall – that was how it was described in the planning certificate. He then wanted to vary this to build a turbine 125 metres tall. The Court stated that this was not a change of condition, it changed the whole nature of the original planning application. Section 73 was not appropriate. If the applicants now wanted a 125-metre turbine, they must make a new planning application. This decision has now been confirmed in law by the Supreme Court. This fresh examination of the Section 73 tool also brings up a timely reminder that such applications can be two-way streets, and that when applications are re-opened planning authorities might also seek changes to conditions – for instance to control issues that have become apparent since the development started.

Rogue road plans

Q My local council appears to be trying to shoehorn a major new road development into the local plan, even though the planned new housing is already served by good road and rail links. How can such damaging developments be justified in the context of climate change and the rise of homeworking?

A In another interesting case from the CPRE North East, our campaigners were pleased to see road plans in the draft County Durham Plan changed dramatically as a result of the examination in public. The independent inspector, William Fieldhouse, issued a statement in February that offers many potential arguments for challenging new roads:

'The northern and western relief roads for Durham City proposed in policy 23 are not consistent with national policy or justified. The roads are not necessary to facilitate development proposed in the plan, or to safeguard or improve highway

safety. The benefits that the roads, individually and collectively, would bring in terms of reducing the dominance of car traffic, relieving existing highway network problems, facilitating growth, addressing air quality and improving the historic environment would, overall, be limited. On the other hand, both proposed roads would have adverse impacts including on the setting of designated and non-designated heritage assets, valued landscapes, woodland, recreational routes, biodiversity, living conditions in residential properties, and the openness and purposes of the Green Belt. Overall, the adverse impact of the roads, individually and collectively, would be substantial. No mitigation measures have been identified that would reduce the harm to a level such that it would be outweighed by the limited benefits the roads would bring, nor do I consider that any such measures exist. The two road proposals should therefore be removed from the plan to make it sound.'

No need to build on Green Belt

CPRE Oxfordshire has sent a letter to housing secretary Robert Jenrick MP, raising their concerns about the disconnect between the government's stated commitment to protect Green Belts and the reality of what is happening on the ground in Oxfordshire. They believe the current pandemic has shown that urban dwellers need easy access to green space, where social distancing is more straightforward, for healthy exercise. They argued local councils and planning inspectors cannot be allowed to remove Green Belt land, using so-called 'exceptional' local reasons, to contradict the promises of protection made by the government and its ministers.

The Oxford Green Belt is now facing multiple large-scale incursions totalling almost 20,000 new houses, supposedly to meet Oxford's need but in fact equivalent to a new development one third of the existing size of Oxford. CPRE Oxfordshire has asked the government to intervene to help reconcile the current situation with government policy, but has since received a response that continues to justify the loss of Oxford's Green Belt to build houses for a need based on exaggerated assumptions. CPRE Oxfordshire maintain that the figure claimed to be Oxford's housing need far exceeds actual need. Read the latest at cprexon.org.uk

Beating Goliath on Green Belt

On the 8 June the Aireborough Neighbourhood Development Forum received a ruling on their High Court challenge that the Leeds City Council Site Allocation Plan (SAP) was unlawful. The judge, Mrs Justice Lieven, determined that an error of law was made in the process by which the SAP was adopted. The judgement determined that the Green Belt deleted in the Leeds SAP was not adequately justified by exceptional circumstances.

This is an argument that has been consistently made by CPRE West Yorkshire, who await Leeds City Council's next steps. Campaigners suspect that they could choose to reinstate the previous Green Belt boundaries for the time being, but fear the possibility of Green Belt land release will have whetted the appetite of developers, and are certain that further challenges lie ahead. For the moment, CPRE West Yorkshire join the Aireborough Neighbourhood Development Forum in celebrating their success in an epic David vs Goliath battle. They believe it is a huge victory for community-led engagement in the planning process, but also a lesson to local authorities to use the local plan consultation process as a genuine opportunity to listen and review. Read the latest at cprewestyorkshire.org.uk

Campaign spotlight

Countryside at the crossroads

1 July saw CPRE launch a manifesto for a resilient countryside after coronavirus. We urged the government to seize this once in a generation opportunity to protect and invest in the countryside, support rural communities and break down the barriers too many face in accessing the health and wellbeing benefits of time in green spaces.

The manifesto was launched at a virtual debate with leading countryside and political voices, including Rhiane Fatinikun, founder of Black Girls Hike; Philip Dunne MP, chair of the Environmental Audit Committee; Mike Amesbury MP, shadow minister for housing and planning; and Caroline Lucas MP, former leader of the Green Party. The manifesto outlines a vision for a resilient countryside with thriving rural communities that is open to everyone, whether visiting, living or working there. On the eve of the manifesto launch, CPRE president Emma Bridgewater said: 'We are calling on the government to put the countryside and access to green spaces at the heart of the recovery. That means putting the Green Belt ahead of developers profit margins, guaranteeing children's education includes quality time in nature and breaking down the barriers to the countryside for groups previously excluded. But we also need to make sure rural communities don't bear the brunt of the economic fallout by supporting the rural economy and investing in rural social housing.'

Regenerating our countryside and ourselves

Limiting us to our local areas during lockdown, the pandemic was a stark reminder of the importance of quality green space near to our homes. But our Green Belts, the 'countryside next door'

for 30 million people, are being lost to unsustainable housing developments. Instead, we called for the recycling of previously used land through the adoption of a 'brownfield first' policy that will provide housing and amenities where people need them. This would leave our Green Belts and other countryside around towns safe to be enhanced through greener farming methods, paid for by setting aside at least 20% of the new Environmental Land Management funding. Not only would this provide more fresh food for people in urban areas, it could help deliver better-managed countryside that's easier for people to visit and enjoy.

6 We need more funding for the community outreach projects that can enable greater engagement with the countryside for marginalised groups

We believe the health and wellbeing benefits of the countryside should be available to everyone. But huge inequalities exist in accessing it. Many people who are with reduced mobility, from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are not able to enjoy the benefits of time spent in the countryside, while those from black, Asian



Walkers enjoying Manchester's Green Belt



© Getty Images

Community outreach and education can help more people engage with the countryside

and minority ethnic communities often feel unwelcome or face racism. Our manifesto calls for increased funding for the many tried-and-tested community outreach projects that have already enabled greater engagement with the countryside for marginalised groups. We also want to see the education system's role expanded to ensure that the adults of tomorrow understand the importance of the countryside in mitigating, and adapting to, climate change. Furthermore, every child must be guaranteed a night in nature in a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as part of the national curriculum.

Regenerating our rural economies

A thriving countryside is dependent on people living and working in active, sustainable rural communities. Largely populated by small businesses, rural towns and villages have been particularly hard hit by the economic fallout of the virus. Many of these businesses rely on visitors and have been financially devastated. This includes some farmers left particularly vulnerable by coronavirus who need our support. And our rural communities, many with existing high levels of hidden deprivation, have been hit hard by a lockdown that impacted on already frail connectivity.

👉 **Everyday landscapes should become a central part of the government's approach to coronavirus recovery** 🍷

Our manifesto calls for the creation of a rural economy task force working across government to develop a comprehensive strategy for supporting the rural economy, especially farming and tourism, as we emerge from the pandemic. It should focus on the elements that disproportionately affect rural communities, such as support for small businesses and improved broadband and mobile phone coverage. We want to see investment in rural social housing to provide genuinely affordable homes for the key workers who were so vital during coronavirus. Currently these workers are too often priced out of rural areas, undermining the viability of village services. Meanwhile, a ringfenced rural transport fund is needed to support public transport services for rural communities that could thrive with better connections. We called for funding to be found by reallocating the more than £27 billion due to be spent on building new roads, which will only lead to more carbon emissions.

Emma Bridgewater concluded: 'Just as national parks were integral to post-war reconstruction in the late 1940s, so too should everyday landscapes including local green spaces, the Green Belt and the countryside next door become a central part of the government's recovery plan. Public support for protecting and enhancing these spaces is impossible for ministers to ignore – now more than ever we need quality green spaces available to everyone, to make sure young people form lifelong connections with nature.'

Revitalising rail in the north west

CPRE's North West group has called on the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) to prioritise rail infrastructure that better supports the midlands and the north, and which aligns with our climate commitments under the Paris agreement. The group responded to the NIC's call for evidence on rail investment priorities for the north and midlands, calling for further electrification of the region's rail network to benefit freight and passenger services.

They also suggested that several towns in the region should be brought back onto the rail network, including Skelmersdale and Fleetwood, while 'Cinderella' routes such as the Middlewich Line, Preston to Ormskirk, Wigan to Kirkby and the Cumbrian Coast need major upgrades.

Andy Yuille, chair of CPRE North West group, said: 'CPRE is an advocate of more rail usage in England. We want improvements to the connectivity and capacity of the main town and cities across Cheshire, Lancashire and Cumbria and to our rural places. The government needs a serious review of its transport policies to properly respond to the climate emergency. Road building should be an option of last resort with adequate commitment to rail investment to optimise a modern rail system. We trust the National Infrastructure Commission will listen.'

Matter of fact

Support for your case

The economic value of the countryside

CPRE Hampshire recently announced the findings of a major piece of independent research commissioned to explore the value of the countryside in South Hampshire.

The research focuses on the potential benefits to health and wellbeing, the economy, and the value of nature and ecosystems. It is compiled in a report, *Introducing a South Hampshire Green Belt: exploring the socioeconomic and environmental value*, by NEF Consulting, part of UK think tank the New Economics Foundation, and based on the large body of evidence from UK and international research. CPRE Hampshire is campaigning for a new Green Belt to prevent urban sprawl north of the built-up areas of South Hampshire. The research finds that the countryside north of the urban centres of South Hampshire could generate almost £26 million a year in benefits if protected by a Green Belt.

Green Belt benefits

There is a positive relationship between increased wellbeing and living in an area with a high quality or quantity of greenspace. One previous study found that people living in the greenest areas were 7.4% more likely to report high levels of wellbeing than those who lived in the least green area using data collected from the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) as an indicator for mental wellbeing. The new research calculates that health and wellbeing benefits for people living in and around this area of countryside could amount to up to £17 million a year, based on the potential loss of wellbeing if the proposed Green Belt area was built

on. The potential impact of building across the proposed Green Belt area may cost the NHS up to £690,000 in increased GP visits a year. We can consider this to be a conservative estimate of NHS savings as a result of health benefits, as the study did not account for the NHS costs associated with low physical activity, such as an increase in type-2 diabetes.

As well as highlighting the huge value that our countryside and green spaces bring, the findings show what is lost – personally, socially, economically and environmentally – if they're built on

The value of ecosystem services provided by the proposed Green Belt area for food, removal of air and carbon pollution, flood protection and biodiversity are estimated at £7.6 million a year – showing the potential of the Green Belt to help tackle the climate emergency. Meanwhile, the potential economic benefit from tourism and recreation in the proposed Green Belt area is estimated as much as £1.3 million a year. Looking ahead over two generations or the next 60 years, if Net Present Value (NPV) is applied to the annual figures, this could produce well in excess of half a billion pounds in health, wellbeing, economic and ecosystem benefits.

The real cost of sprawl

NEF Consulting's analysis is based on the large body of evidence from UK and international research studies on the physical and mental health benefits of green and open spaces – benefits that are being highlighted even more to all of us during the

coronavirus pandemic. Dee Haas, chair of CPRE Hampshire said: 'A South Hampshire Green Belt is part of our strategic vision for the county. It would provide vital access to the countryside for people living in the larger towns and cities of Eastleigh, Fareham, Portsmouth, Romsey, Southampton and Winchester, and restrict the further sprawl and merging of these urban areas. During the coronavirus lockdown, there's been a surge of appreciation for the countryside and an awareness of the role that green spaces and nature play in our wellbeing. We're realising the value of the countryside nearest to our homes. This value can be expressed in different ways.'

Dee concluded: 'The report findings are relevant to any area of countryside or green space. As well as highlighting the huge value that our countryside and green spaces bring, they show what is lost – personally, socially, economically and environmentally – if they're built on. It's important that these values are considered by our planning authorities when deciding on the location of development – we want to see a genuine "brownfield first" approach. Furthermore, there may be potential for reconsidering the uses of town and city centres, in the light of high street decline.'

Over 14,000 people have signed CPRE Hampshire's [change.org](https://www.change.org) petition urging South Hampshire councillors to include a new Green Belt policy in their local plans – to protect valued landscapes like Eastleigh's Itchen River, the woodland at Bishopstoke and the Forest of Bere. Find out more: read the full report at [cprehampshire.org.uk](https://www.cprehampshire.org.uk)