

The Struggle to Revoke Regional Strategies

The *Coalition Agreement* promised to “rapidly abolish Regional Spatial Strategies and return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils.” That has proved to be a much harder task than expected. For some months the communities department has been working on detailed strategic environmental assessments. The European Court has now decreed that these are legally required. It is likely to be many more months before regional strategies are finally abolished – if they are abolished. Meanwhile, rapidly outdated regional policies and targets are being fossilised in local plans across the country. If revocation is delayed until next summer, for example, I estimate that four-fifths of local plans outside London will incorporate regional strategy targets for housing and renewable energy.

Ruling. In a case relating to the city of Brussels, the European Court of Justice ruled this month that local authorities must conduct strategic environmental assessments (SEAs) when revoking or updating a wide range of plans ([Planning Portal](#)). The government has accepted that this decision applies to regional strategies such as the South East Plan. The ruling probably also applies to all of the documents in the local development framework portfolio.

Impacts of revocation. The government ‘voluntarily’ embarked on the SEA process in April last year after a court action brought by Cala Homes. The SEAs published in January this year, however, were widely derided as inadequate, including by CPRE. Now the communities department is publishing detailed SEAs for each of the eight regional plans outside London for consultation over the next several months ([CLG](#); [Planning £](#)).

East of England. The communities department has already published the [consultation SEA document](#) for revocation of the East of England Plan. It suggests that abolition will have little impact, but there will be some short-term consequences. Chief among these is the impact on economic and housing delivery. Twenty-three planning authorities do not have an adopted local plan (48%). In these areas, the amount of development anticipated “may be lower than if the RS were in place.”

The implications for local plans. In [announcing the consultation](#), communities minister Baroness Harman said: “A local plan document must be in general conformity with the regional strategy... Local authorities can also bring forward proposals (for example on housing targets) which have a local interpretation to them in their plans, based on their own sound evidence base where that is justified by the local circumstances. That evidence base is likely to be more up to date than that included in the Regional Strategies.”

Planning

There is growing evidence that the planning system is slowing, if only temporarily, with councils taking longer to approve major applications and yet more local plans delayed or suspended.

Garden cities. Ashford Borough Council is seeking government support for its plans for a major urban extension of 5,750 homes as a new garden city at Chilmington Green. Oxford City Council is also considering a 4-5,000 home garden city urban extension in the green belt south of Grenoble Road ([Planning £](#); [Ashford BC](#)).

Local plans. Bath & North East Somerset Council’s draft core strategy has been [put on hold](#) while the council aligns it with the NPPF ([BathNES](#)). City of York Council has agreed to withdraw its core strategy following its approval for a community stadium and two superstores at Monks Cross ([The Press](#)). Hull’s core strategy council has been judged unsound and the examination suspended for six months due to problems with provision of housing and gypsy and traveller sites ([Inside Housing](#)). The Local Housing Delivery Group, a body involving the Local Government Association and the housing industry, has published advice for planners on developing viable Local Plans ([Out-Law](#)).

Figure 1: Number of planning applications received, decided and granted by district authorities



Planning permissions. The proportion of major applications decided within 13 weeks in England fell by 13.6% between 2010/11 and 2011/12. Planning applications are still at around two-thirds the level of a decade ago ([CLG](#)).

Neighbourhood plans. The headline of a report on a neighbourhood planning workshop in Sussex caught my eye: “Come on, feel the noise: the tidal wave of neighbourhood planning starts here!” The report of the event will be on the [CPRE Sussex website](#) shortly. In contrast to the refreshing language of Sussex, a report from the Royal Institute of British Architects and think tank ResPublica recommends swamping the neighbourhood planning process in more bureaucracy and drowning it in jargon. It wants the government to appoint “an independent panel of experts to define the metrics and structures required to capture the social value created though the neighbourhood planning process” ([Telegraph](#), [ResPublica](#), [RIBA](#)).

Surrey. The Independent featured the battle to save historic Cherkley court from conversion into a hotel and exclusive golf course, a campaign involving CPRE Surrey ([Independent](#)). Plans for a new library and community space in Cobham have attracted more than 80 letters of objection, including from CPRE Surrey. Vice-chairman Gillian Hein complained: “It is disappointing that residents’ views have been largely ignored” ([Get Surrey](#)).

Change of use (1). A consultation found less than a third of respondents favoured permitted development rights for change of use from commercial to residential use. In response, the communities department backed away from major changes that ministers said could create 250,000 dwellings. It now proposes to include a new policy in the NPPF: local authorities “should normally approve planning applications for change to residential use and any associated development from commercial buildings... where there is an identified need for additional housing in that area, provided that there are not strong economic reasons why such development would be inappropriate” (CLG).

Change of use (2). The government has announced plans to make it easier to re-use existing agricultural, retail and commercial buildings without the need to submit a planning application. Paul Miner of CPRE was critical: “If we don’t get it right we will see a rash of inappropriate development. In many rural areas it will have quite a serious impact as a lot of barns are down narrow lanes and if you put in a big storage unit there would be quite a high impact on traffic. If a farmer saw an opportunity to change the use of a big barn, he could put up another barn elsewhere – you could get a real pox of these big barns” (CLG: consultation closes 11 September; [TI Somerset](#); [Daily Mail](#)).

Appeals. Planners claim the time for the Planning Inspectorate takes to announce an appeal date has slipped from one week to around a month after the NPPF (PTP). The appeal court said Eric Pickles was inconsistent in rejecting a planning application for housing in Sandbach, Cheshire – the need for consistency in the planning process required like cases to be decided in a like manner ([Out-Law](#)).

Roads orders. DfT is proposing to permit applications for a stopping-up or diversion order for roads and footpaths to be submitted at the same time as for planning permission ([DfT](#)).

Population. The population of England and Wales has grown by 3.7 million (7%) in the 10 years since 2001 and is now over 56 million ([Census](#)). London had the highest population growth gaining over 850,000 residents (11.6%). The South East grew by 611,000 people (7.6%). The lowest increase was in the North East, just 56,600 residents (2.2%). The Town and Country Planning Association said England needs a national spatial framework to help redistribute housing pressures from London and the South East to other parts of the country (TCPA). The census data suggest that several local authorities have underestimated or overestimated their current populations in preparing their local plans, but the implications of this are not yet clear.

Climate change & flooding. A progress report by the Committee on Climate Change found that development in the floodplain in England increased by 12% over the past ten years compared with a 7% increase outside the floodplain. Around 21,000 homes and business premises have been built in the floodplain every year (13% of all new development). One in five properties built in the floodplain were in areas of significant flood risk. The report also considers water scarcity and calls for greater demand management, including metering (CCC). Reporting the floods before the current heatwave, Damian Carrington said “Caroline Spelman’s deep cuts to flood defences begin to look foolish” ([Guardian](#)).

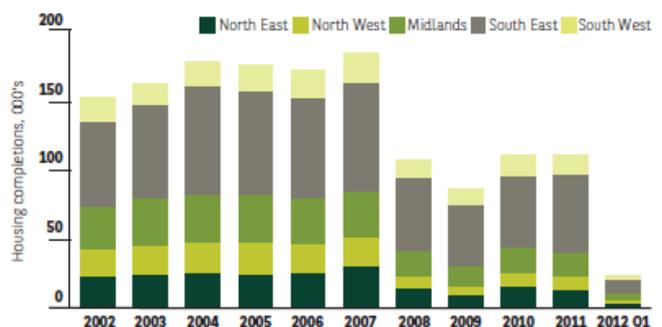
Housing

There are three main reasons why housing developments are being approved by the Planning Inspectorate or Eric Pickles against local council wishes or in contradiction to emerging local plans. They are: five-year land supply; five-year land supply; and... five-year land supply. Land supply is almost the only game in town in planning appeal and call-in decisions on housing schemes. The old PPS3 rules required a five-year supply of identified and available housing land. This has been increased by 5% by the NPPF – 20% for authorities with a poor track record in housing. Even if councils have their core strategies in place they are likely to fall victim to the five-year-plus rule if their site allocation process is not well advanced.

Call-in decisions. Eric Pickles agreed with a planning inspector that permission should be granted for 274 dwellings on the edge of Wokingham. He decreed that it was not necessary for the council to have a legally binding agreement for infrastructure across the North West SDL before permitting the first phases of development, especially as the council did not have an identified five-year supply of housing land. Wokingham council is considering a judicial review of his decision ([Planning Portal](#); [Out-Law](#); [Get Wokingham](#)). Five year land supply was a principal factor in Eric Pickles approving 1,000 homes at Bishop’s Cleeve in Gloucestershire and again at 350-dwelling scheme at Worsley, Manchester where Eric Pickles overruled the planning inspector’s decision to approve the scheme ([Out-Law](#); [Planning Portal](#)).

House numbers. In its third [Housing the Nation](#) report, developer BNP Paribas said that local authorities in England have now reduced their housing targets to around 160,000 per annum, a reduction of 13% from the Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) housing targets for England (19% in the South East). This equated to around 185,000 new homes per year, revealing a large discrepancy between the three figures of over 70,000 homes. The company is calling for release of green belt land in the South East including in Kent, where CPRE Protect Kent said: “The reason the targets have not been met is because local authorities get to decide their own housing numbers according to local needs. We believe the idea put forward to release greenbelt land is disgraceful” ([BNP Paribas](#); [Kent News](#)).

Annual housing completions



Affordable housing. The National Housing Federation Save Our Villages campaign, which made the case for more affordable homes in rural England, has ended with 50 local authorities backing the campaign (NHF).

Around the South East. Basingstoke council refused outline permission for 450 homes north of Marnel Park, despite officers recommending approval “given the shortfall in deliverable housing sites against the NPPF” requirement for a five-year supply. Edward Dawson, planning adviser to Sherborne St John parish council said: “This was an epic moment for Basingstoke and the local community... I believe there needs to be an inquiry into how the planning officers were so out of step with the members” ([Planning £](#)). Horsham councillors rejected a 550 home development east of Billingshurst against their officers’ advice ([WSCT](#)). Horsham councillors reluctantly approved a development of 35 affordable homes despite being told by John Steele of the Horsham Society: “No matter how it is dressed up, this will remain a ghetto of affordable housing bolted on to the very margin of the overall development” ([WSCT](#)). Briefings by CPRE Lewes District have helped persuade a developer to withdraw a plan for housing on Newick Hill ([CPRE Sussex](#)).



North West Bicester

Oxfordshire. The first phase of Bicester’s eco town (above) has gained final approval. It will consist of 393 homes constructed to level five of the Code for sustainable homes; 33% will be affordable ([BBC](#); [Inside Housing](#)). Oxford’s chief planner Michael Crofton-Briggs told a public inquiry that building 1,200 homes on green belt land west of Barton is a rare and exciting opportunity. He admitted that residents some residents “may not have appreciated what [the Barton Area Action Plan] meant to them.” CPRE Oxford believes the plans feature too few green spaces ([Oxford Mail](#); [CPRE Oxon](#)).

Roundup. The planned upgrade of the A14 will facilitate the development of the 10,000 home [Northstowe new town](#) north east of Cambridge, the masterplan for which has now been approved ([HCA](#); [Out-Law](#)). Ireland is beginning to bulldoze ghost housing estates built during the boom years ([Bloomberg](#)).

Forests “Not For Sale”

A couple of years ago the mainstream environmental movement missed a beat when the proposals for selling the public forest estate were announced. While many established campaign groups initially failed to condemn the sale, it was left to the new kids on the block, [38 Degrees](#) and [Save Our Woods](#) among them, to give a clear message to the government: our woods are not for sale. The Independent Panel of Forestry set up in the wake of the outcry has now given the government the same message after receiving 42,000 representations. Earlier this month, Caroline Spelman agreed that public woods would remain public woods, ending one of England’s most successful environmental campaigns.

Report. The Independent Panel on Forestry was asked by the Government to find a consensus on the future of England’s forests following the sell-off furore ([Report](#); [Telegraph](#); [Country Life](#); [Guardian](#)).

Vision. “For England’s national woodlands to flourish, policy and investment decisions need to be linked to woodland, rather than electoral, cycles.” The panel called for England’s woods and forests to be re-valued for all the benefits they provide, including areas for recreation, clean air, clean water and habitats for wildlife. It envisages a “new woodland culture in which woodlands and wood as a material and fuel are highly valued and sought after.”

A public forest. The panel said England’s public forests should remain in public ownership. Pointing out that 82% of our woods lie outside the public-forest estate, the report urges the creation of a new trust answerable to parliament to manage the remainder. The trust would have a statutory purpose to “sustain and build the social, natural and economic value of the estate for the long term, for the benefit of the nation.” It would be governed by a 10-year legal charter which sets out its mission to provide public benefits. The new body would lead tree planting, ensure access to walkers and encourage more small businesses or public authorities to install leisure facilities and renewable energy, ultimately creating up to 7,000 jobs and improving the management of woodlands.

New woodland. The panel said woodland cover should be expanded from the current of 10% of England’s land to 15% by 2060. CPRE called for a second National Forest for England ([CPRE](#)). The panel also said more must be done to protect ancient woodlands, only 15% of which are protected as sites of special scientific interest.

Access. The panel called for greater public access to privately owned woodland. England contains about 1.3m hectares of woods and forests – an area about four times the size of Oxfordshire – but the 82% in private hands provides just half the accessible woods. “If private woodland owners benefit from grants there should be a condition that their land is accessible.”

Government reaction. The environment secretary Caroline Spelman, said England’s publicly owned forests and woodlands will not be sold off. “We’ll be talking to all those who are passionate about our forests to decide how we will manage our forests for the future”.

Reaction. The report was widely welcomed. [38 Degrees](#) said: “What a relief... Not long ago, we were all told that this was impossible” ([38 Degrees](#)). The National Trust’s natural environment director Simon Pryor said the panel has “got it right... The nation’s protest last year will not only have saved the public forest estate, it will have triggered a step change in the way we treat woodland in England.” The RSPB’s Mike Clarke, a panel member, said the report has “filled a vacuum in the national discussions on forestry, taking the debate out of its traditional box and examining it in terms of its wider relationship to society.” CPRE welcomed the report and Ben Stafford said: “The real test now is how the government will act to take forward these ambitious recommendations... We need to maintain momentum on this issue” ([CPRE](#)). Director of the CPRE Surrey Andy Smith called the cancellation of the sell-off “very good news indeed” ([Get Surrey](#)).

Landscapes and Environment

Indicators. Defra has launched a consultation on a new set of Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs), which will provide an overview of the UK's progress towards a more sustainable economy, society, and environment. The 12 headline indicators are: economic prosperity; long term unemployment; poverty; knowledge and skills; healthy life expectancy; social capital; social mobility in adulthood; housing provision; greenhouse gas emissions; natural resource use; wildlife and biodiversity; and water availability. The WWF complained that only five of the 41 measures of wellbeing are environmental, downplaying the contribution of the natural environment to quality of life ([Defra](#); [Click Green](#)).

Green planning. The Wildlife Trusts and the Town and Country Planning Association, in partnership with a wide range of organisations including CPRE, have published a new guide: *Planning for a healthy environment: good practice for green infrastructure and biodiversity*. The guide offers advice on how green infrastructure and wildlife can be protected and enhanced through local plan policies, working within the NPPF ([Wildlife Trusts](#); [Report](#)).

Character areas. Natural England have published key facts and data for all 159 of England's National Character Areas (NCAs), in the first phase in a project to "equip communities with the tools needed to understand and develop the surroundings they want in future." It has published full profiles for six NCAs ([Natural England](#)).

Green belt. Protests against revised plans for expansion of Pinewood Studios into the green belt are growing. Stop Project Pinewood said: "It is time to demonstrate that along with the National Trust and the Council for Protection of Rural England [sic] we are in the words of Caroline Spelman the Environment Secretary 'implacable on the Green Belt'" ([Stop Project Pinewood](#); [BFP](#))

Efra. The Commons environment, food and rural affairs committee said the prime minister must lead a programme of action to put nature at the centre of the country's economic decision-making. More than one year on from publication of the Natural Environment White Paper, *The Natural Choice*, Defra has failed to set out clear plans to deliver its commitment to ensure that government decision-making fully values the services nature provides. It urged the government to give planners and developers guidance on how the National Planning Policy Framework can be used to protect Nature Improvement Areas ([EFRA Report](#); [Planning £](#)).

Wildlife. The Badger Trust is appealing against the decision by the High Court last week to allow the proposed badger cull in England to go ahead ([Wildlife News](#)). The Welsh Government is to launch a Welsh Pollinator Action Plan following Friends of the Earth's *The Bee Cause* campaign ([FoE](#)). Network Rail is facing investigation for chopping down trees in Islington during bird nesting season ([Telegraph](#)).

Light pollution. Following the publication of new satellite images of light pollution, CPRE's Emma Marrington wrote to the Times: "Light pollution blots out our view of the stars, blurs the distinction between town and countryside, and disrupts the sleeping patterns of both humans and wildlife. More should be done to stop this waste of light and resources" ([Times £](#)).

Heritage. More than 2,000 miles of historic canals and rivers across England and Wales were handed over to the Canal & River Trust which will have 15 years of grant funding ([Cabinet Office](#)). Bomber Command Heritage is stepping up its campaign to create a museum and education centre at RAF Bicester which has been up for sale by the MoD. It needs to raise £2 million ([Bucks Today](#); [Oxford Mail](#)). English Heritage is surveying farmers across the country to identify threats to ancient monuments from farming practices ([EH](#)). The Heritage Alliance said it is extremely disappointed that the government has refused to reconsider its Budget proposal to remove zero rating of VAT on approved alterations to listed buildings ([HA](#)). Stonehenge is at long last to get a £27m facelift with a new visitor centre and closure of the nearby A344, ending a 'national embarrassment' ([Guardian](#); [Guardian](#)).

Litter. In a [letter to the Telegraph](#), the [Greener upon Thames](#) group, led by Zac Goldsmith called for a plastic bag free Olympic Games. CPRE, David Attenborough, Richard Branson and Vivienne Westwood are among the signatories (also [Guardian](#)). Wales recorded a 22% fall in bags last year after charging for single use bags was introduced ([Edie](#)). Lord Marlesford introduced a Private Member's Bill to fine car owners up to £80 for rubbish thrown from their vehicle ([Telegraph](#); [Daily Mail](#); [Edie](#)).

Food, Farming and Retail

Local shops poll. A survey by YouGov found that two in five British people use local shops less than once a week, preferring to do most of their shopping at larger stores and supermarkets ([YouGov](#)):

40% say they use local shops less than once a week

32% are happy with the choice of products available

26% state they can usually get what they want at local stores

14% of people say that they are happy with the prices charged.

Protecting local services. The Commons has given the first reading to a bill drawn up by Cambridge MP Julian Huppert which aims to help local communities protect their shops and pubs ([Hansard](#)). A planning inspector rejected an appeal to convert a second Cambridge pub to housing ([Cambridge News](#)). The Campaign for Real Ale, which is encouraging its members to press their councils to adopt pro-pub policies, has published model policies for local plans ([CAMRA](#)). Communities minister Andrew Stunell said new Community Rights will give people greater control over local amenities including pubs ([Guardian](#)).

Green food. The initial report of Defra's Green Food Project has identified the challenges that will need to be overcome if food production is to increase: using less energy and water in food production; increasing crop yields; introducing more innovative technology; improving conservation management; and boosting numbers of entrepreneurial young people making careers in the food industry. Ian Woodhurst for CPRE said: "We need to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past that created higher yields by sacrificing the environment." The WWF said trying to ramp up food production was a "fool's errand" as it was not the UK's role to feed the world but to address problems in its own food system such as waste, access and diets ([Smallholder](#); [Farming UK](#); [CPRE](#); [Defra](#)).

The milk crisis. As we go to press, farmers have been blockading dairies in protest at the price they receive for milk from supermarkets and milk processors ([Guardian](#); [BBC](#)). When retailers and processors announced cuts in the farm-gate price of milk earlier in the month, Farmers for Action predicted that one in 10 dairy farmers will be driven out of the business by Christmas ([FWI](#); [Telegraph](#); [Telegraph](#); [Guardian](#); [BBC](#); [Independent](#)). Environment minister Caroline Spelman admitted that the future of the entire dairy farming industry is “at risk” ([Telegraph](#); [Caroline Spelman](#)). In [letter to the Telegraph](#) CPRE and the Women’s Institute called for dairy farmers to be paid fair price for their milk ([Telegraph](#)). CPRE and the World Society for the Protection of Animals set up a joint campaign to pay for fair milk prices. Bill Bryson, CPRE Vice President said: “For too long dairy farmers have been at the mercy of opportunistic price cuts that have driven more and more of them out of business” ([CPRE](#)). CPRE Sussex is encouraging people to write to their local newspaper to highlight the milk crisis ([CPRE Sussex](#)). Dairy Crest, Arla and Wiseman are to abandon price cuts after the protests ([Telegraph](#); [FWI](#)).

Portas Review. The communities department and GLA approved 15 new Portas Pilots including in Ashford and Brighton. Communities minister Grant Shapps issued a call to the 392 unsuccessful towns to sign a ‘national pledge’ to become a Town Team Partner, gaining access to £5.5million package of support ([BBC](#); [CLG](#); [Planning Portal](#)). Shapps also announced a “web-based encyclopaedia” – 100 Ways to Help the High Street – run by the Association of Town Centre Management ([100ways.org.uk](#)). The communities department issued a guide to “re-imagining urban spaces to help revitalise our high streets” ([CLG](#)).

Windscares

Local plans. Wiltshire County Council made a late amendment to its core strategy to outlaw turbines more than 25 metres high within 1km of homes, and to introduce a minimum distance of 1.5km for 50 metre high turbines and 3km for turbines greater than 150 metres ([Advertiser](#)). Milton Keynes is set to approve a Supplementary Planning Document that limits how close tall turbines can be to housing, despite threats of legal action from prospective developers nPower ([Citizen](#); [MKDC](#)). Daventry Council is consulting on its refreshed policy for approving wind turbines. It will not approve turbines that have a significant adverse impact ([Policy](#)).

Offshore. The developers of the Navitus offshore wind farm have pledged it will create 1,000 jobs. Bournemouth planners have suggested that the micro climate could be affected, and raised concerns about noise, beach replenishment and traffic caused during construction ([Echo](#); [Echo](#)). Research by Bournemouth University for the BBC suggested that some turbines could look three times as tall as the Isle of Wight ([BBC](#)). The Department of Energy and Climate Change has given consent for two wind farms off the Norfolk coast with a combined capacity of more than one gigawatt at Race Bank and Dudgeon. However, DECC refused permission for a third project off the Norfolk Coast at Docking Shoal due to the potential impact on seabirds ([DECC](#); [Business Green](#)). Up to 440 turbines could be erected in an offshore wind farm off the Isle of Man ([Telegraph](#)).

South East. A five turbine wind farm near Polegate in East Sussex has been withdrawn after Wealden Council officers recommended its refusal. It is likely to be resubmitted ([Herald](#)). Controversial plans to build five 100m turbines on farmland on the Isle of Wight been thrown out by councillors after concerns about impact on landscapes and residents. Vectis is set to appeal ([BBC](#); [Ventnor Blog](#)).

Elsewhere. A planning inspector approved a five turbine wind farm in south Northamptonshire on appeal because it had “wider economic and environmental benefits.” Chris Heaton-Harris MP labelled the decision a disgrace and said the decision should have been made locally. Andrea Leadsom MP said: “the Planning Inspectorate, who know nothing about our local area, have gone against the wishes of the local community and approved this application. This decision is completely contrary to the localism agenda” ([BBC](#); [AMA](#)). Four wind turbines will be built in Dorset after a planning inspector overturned Purbeck District Council’s decision to refuse the Alaska project. The inspector agreed that “there is no doubt that the industrial appearance of wind turbines of the size proposed would be stark and unexpected features in the heathland” but felt that other activities in the area had already spoiled the view and “the overall level of harm would remain relatively small” ([BBC](#); [Decision](#)).

Roundup. The LSE has published a guide examining the case for and against onshore wind energy ([LSE](#)). Wind farms can wipe tens of thousands of pounds off the value of homes, cases judged by the Valuation Office Agency suggest ([Telegraph](#); [Daily Mail](#)). Terence Blacker nailed wind farm myths: “There is the downright weird argument that, for many people, giant turbines actually enhance the rural landscape” ([Independent](#)). Excellent photographs accompany Victoria Allen’s attack on the blighting of Scotland’s scenery and landmarks by turbines ([Daily Mail](#)).

Cooking the Energy Books with Gas

The battle over subsidy cuts. It is has not been an easy month for energy policy. George Osborne told energy secretary Ed Davey in a [letter](#) that he would back a 10% cut in wind subsidies if Davey in turn backed a massive expansion of gas plants and issues “a statement which gives a clear, strong signal that we regard unabated gas as able to play a core part of our electricity generation to at least 2030 – not just providing backup for wind plant or peaking capacity” ([Business Green](#); [Guardian](#); [James Kirkup](#)). The [Daily Mail](#) quoted government sources that said a 25% subsidy on onshore wind farm subsidies “would be struck down in court” and suggested that Osborne was pushing for changes to the planning regime to allow communities to block wind turbines. Greenpeace rolled its eyes and claimed that Britain now has two energy policies ([Independent](#)). The Green Alliance and Greenpeace urged Cameron to intervene ([Guardian](#)).

The outcome. A compromise was reached allowing a statement to be issued on 25 July. It delivered a 10% cut in subsidies in the short term and the promise of an expanded longer-term future for gas ([DECC](#); [Business Green](#)). The deal allowed Ed Davey to somewhat improbably claim that the coalition is “the greenest government ever – at an affordable price” ([LibDemVoice](#)).

Subsidies. The new rates of subsidy are guaranteed until 2017, except for onshore wind:

Onshore wind farms will face a 10% cut in support, guaranteed only until 2014; a review of costs to determine the future subsidy will be launched at the end of this year. The government will also consult on how local communities can be given more influence over onshore wind farms and how they can derive more economic benefits from them, but gave no details.

Offshore wind farms subsidies will fall 5% in 2015, and by slightly less in 2016.

Solar. Large scale projects maintain current subsidies, but subsidies for smaller projects may be dropped.

Coal-fired stations will get improved subsidies to convert to “sustainable biomass fuels”. Drax has since announced it will go coal-free ([Business Green](#)).

Gas. The government heralded an expansion in gas power. It “sees gas continuing to play an important part in the energy mix well into and beyond 2030. We do not expect the role of gas to be restricted to providing back up to renewables, and in the longer term we see an important role for gas with CCS.” The government will publish its gas strategy in the autumn.

Smaller renewable energy projects look likely to suffer and the government will consult on dropping solar, wind, anaerobic digestion, and hydro-electric projects between 50kW and 5MW from the Renewable Obligation scheme in April 2013 ([Business Green](#)).

Reaction. Friends of the Earth said that DECC had bowed to pressure from chancellor George Osborne: “Ed Davey has won the battle over wind subsidies – but at what price? Treasury arm-twisting has forced him to give his backing to new gas-fired power stations, which is completely at odds with his fuzzy rhetoric on clean British energy.” RenewableUK welcomed the changes but said the cut to onshore subsidies will cut onshore development by £2 billion (10%). Greenpeace was condemning: “The Energy Secretary and Chancellor will both claim victory on the size of the rate cut for onshore renewables but the Treasury are calling the tune on all the big shots... Mr Osborne has rebranded himself Mr Polluting Gas. It's up to Nick Clegg to stick what's left of Lib Dem principles back into this process” ([BBC](#); [Independent](#); [Guardian](#)).

Energy and Climate Change

Public opinion. Nearly eight out of 10 respondents to a DECC survey said they supported using renewable energy while just 5% opposed it. Three per cent voiced support for solar power; 76% backed offshore wind projects; 75% wave and tidal arrays; and 66% onshore wind farms. On nuclear energy, 29% of respondents thought the benefits outweighed the risks, 30% thought the contrary and 32% said benefits and risks were evenly balanced. Only a fifth of people said they were very concerned about climate change. Twice as many said climate change was mainly or entirely caused by human activity (38%), while 42% said it was caused by both human activity and natural processes ([Business Green](#); [Survey results](#)).

The colour of growth. The CBI has launched a report urging ministers to bolster support for the green economy, saying a change in policies could help add £20bn to annual GDP by 2015 ([Business Green](#); [Report](#)).

Draft energy bill. The Energy and Climate Change Select Committee said the draft energy bill, which is designed to drive cost-effective low carbon generation, will instead impose unnecessary costs on consumers, hamper competition and deter investment. It accused the Treasury of holding back renewable energy developments by refusing to back investment in nuclear, wind, tidal and carbon capture and storage projects. Tom Leveridge for CPRE said: “The lack of consideration given by the government to reducing electricity demand is alarming, particularly given the controversy over new energy infrastructure in the countryside.” Davey rejected the committee’s criticism ([Business Green](#); [Planning £](#); [Independent](#); [BBC](#); [Damian Carrington](#); [CPRE](#)).

Pylons. Ofgem has released initial plans to upgrade the UK’s electricity and gas networks over the next eight years at a cost of 22bn. National Grid complained that the proposals are not ambitious enough and will put the UK’s grid reliability and environmental targets at risk ([Business Green](#); [Ofgem](#)). CPRE welcomed Ofgem making available £470m for undergrounding new power lines. However, Ofgem proposes to allow only £100m to underground existing power cables in National Parks and AONBs. CPRE derided this sum as “lacking in ambition”, estimating it will only allow for between four to 10 kilometres of lines to be undergrounded. Tom Leveridge for CPRE said: “Although we welcome the increase in funds to allow undergrounding of up to 10% of new power lines, we are disappointed at the lack of ambition to get pylons out of our most valued landscapes” ([CPRE](#); [Daily Mail](#)). In Powys, anti-pylon campaigners are battling the ‘industrialisation’ of rural Wales ([Guardian](#)).

Nuclear. The Financial Times reported that after Fukushima the price of electricity will have to at least double to underpin a new wave of nuclear reactors in the UK ([FT £](#)). GE-Hitachi submitted a feasibility report to the UK Nuclear Decommissioning Authority on burning Britain’s radioactive nuclear waste as fuel in a next-generation reactor ([Guardian](#)). China may build up to five nuclear power plants in the UK ([Guardian](#)).

Fossil fuels are not running out as environmentalists have long predicted. George Monbiot declared: “Peak oil hasn’t happened, and it’s unlikely to happen for a very long time... The problem [environmentalists] face is not that there is too little oil, but that there is too much.” In a [Guardian](#) article last October, Dieter Helm made similar points: “the problem is there may be too much fossil fuel, not too little” ([Monbiot](#); [Helm](#)). After Regen South West announced that the quantity of renewable electricity produced in Devon more than doubled over the past year, Dr Phil Bratby of CPRE Devon said renewable electricity was “inefficient”. He added: “We should continue burning coal, we should continue burning gas, continue having nuclear power... It’s a long time before we will run out of these things and we’ll have plenty of time in the meantime to do something about it” ([BBC](#)).

Roundup. Ireland is to export electricity to the UK from hundreds of wind turbines in the Irish Midlands ([LSE](#)). The UK has taken top spot in a new energy efficiency ranking of the world’s major economies ([EEN](#)). Consumer Focus called on the government to have a “tighter focus on costs” as it pushes through subsidies for companies to build nuclear power, wind farms and other renewable energy ([Telegraph](#)).

Renewables. The government is to make £8 million available to community energy projects focused on installing renewable heat technologies, such as solar heating systems, heat pumps, biomass boilers and heating networks ([Business Green](#)). The government confirmed new feed-in tariff rates which see support for small wind turbines cut, and hydro and micro combined heat & power increased ([Business Green](#)). Installation of solar panels on houses has halved since the subsidy was halved in April ([Guardian](#)). Britain's biggest solar farm covering 224 acres could be built in the Cornish countryside ([Daily Mail](#)). Geothermal heating projects are getting underway across the country ([Independent](#); [Business Green](#)), but the industry fears that subsidy reductions will threaten investment ([Business Green](#)).

Waste, Recycling and Water

Water. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee condemned last year's water white paper, *Water for Life*, as lacking ambition and urgency. It told the government to tackle the environmental effects of over abstraction and called for it to double take up of water metering by the end of the decade: "It's hard to see how the White Paper's call for water to be managed as a precious resource can be reconciled with the lack of any clear target to increase metering levels" ([EFRA](#); [Business Green](#)). The draft Water Bill was published on 10 July 2012. It is focused on market reform, business choice, water trading and controlling abstraction. It does not address compulsory metering ([Defra](#); [EFRA](#)). 'Leak intelligent' water meters being installed by Southern Water will save up to 5m litres of water a day once by 2015 ([Edie](#)).

Incinerators. When the leader of East Sussex County Council described the Newhaven incinerator as an elegant building which fitted in well with the landscape, a local resident retorted: "You're at the foot of the South Downs National Park and what do you see? A massive silver slug" ([Sussex Express](#)). Although Leicestershire County Council twice rejected Biffa's application to build an incinerator capable near Shepshed, Eric Pickles overturned the decision ([BBC](#); [Decision](#)). The communities secretary also approved plans for a controversial £120m waste incinerator in the green belt at Hartlebury, Worcestershire ([BBC](#), [Worcester News](#); [Decision](#)). However, he said Cheshire East Council was correct to refuse planning permission for an incinerator in Middlewich ([PNW](#); [Chronicle](#); [Decision](#)). Leeds City Council must pay Veolia up to £930,000 if it refuses planning permission for an incinerator ([YEP](#)). Plans have been submitted for an incinerator at Desborough, Northants ([BBC](#)). A council's legal challenge to a controversial £500m waste incinerator at Saddlebow, King's Lynn is continuing after being rejected at the high court ([BBC](#); [NEN24](#); [LGL](#)). [Cornwall Waste Forum](#), which is fighting for more recycling instead of incineration, has been refused leave to take their case to the Supreme Court ([TIC](#)).

Transport

Rail upgrades. The government announced a £9.4bn programme of improvements to the rail network to meet the needs of intercity passengers, commuters and freight over the next decade ([DfT](#); [Business Green](#); [Telegraph](#)). A new 'Electric Spine' project will link Yorkshire, the Midlands and the South Coast. Schemes in the South East include electrification between Southampton and Reading; Paddington to Newbury, Banbury and Swindon; Reading to Basingstoke; Maidenhead to Marlow; Slough to Windsor. A major development at Waterloo will take longer trains from the South. Oxford Station will have a substantial upgrade. The Western Rail Access to Heathrow ([WRATH](#)) project will connect locations as far away as South Wales and the South West, in addition improving access to the Thames Valley. The government also announced funding for [East West Rail](#) between Oxford and Bedford to enable the line to be reopened to passengers by 2017 ([HCA](#); [Travel News](#)).

High Speed 2. The [HS2 Action Alliance](#) (HS2AA), with the [51M group](#) of councils, Aylesbury Golf Club and [Heathrow Hub](#) have been granted an eight day high court hearing in December. They have won a protected costs order, which will limit their costs if they lose the judicial review. If they win, the Government could have to rerun the entire consultation process ([Telegraph](#)). HS2AA learnt from HS2 Ltd that their detailed responses to the 2011 consultation got lost along with 412 others due to 'processing errors' ([HS2AA](#)). The Public Accounts Committee said the business case for the controversial HS2 rail line must be reassessed to avoid the "costly mistakes" that marred the development of the UK's first high-speed rail line. The committee said that HS1 has only realised a third of the passengers originally predicted in 1995 and taxpayer support for the 68-mile rail line will reach £10.2bn by 2070 ([Business Green](#)).

South East rail. South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) is calling for more goods to be transported by freight and wants to play a greater role in monitoring train services ([TI Kent](#)).

Rural speed limits. In a significant victory for a long-term CPRE campaign, the Department for Transport announced a consultation on allowing councils to reduce speed limits on rural roads to 40mph ([DfT](#); [road.cc](#); [Telegraph](#); [Daily Mail](#); [BBC](#)). CPRE [applauded the move](#). The scheme will normally only require one sign at the start of the zone and another when it ends. The DfT identifies two types of rural road where councils should consider cutting the speed limit to 40mph to protect vulnerable road users: **Single carriageway A and B roads** "where there are many bends, junctions or accesses, substantial development, a strong environmental or landscape reason, or where there are considerable numbers of vulnerable road users." **C and Unclassified roads** "with a predominantly local, access or recreational function, for example in national parks or areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), or if it forms part of a recommended route for vulnerable road users. It may also be appropriate if there is a particular collision problem."

Roads. The Department for Transport has awarded £3.8m to Hampshire County Council, the New Forest National Park and South Downs National Park for initiatives to reduce the impact of traffic on the national parks ([Journal](#)). Government plans to upgrade the A14 are expected to include a toll road. Residents are worried their villages will become rural rat runs ([BBC](#); [Daily Mail](#); [DfT](#)). CPRE condemned a Commons Transport Committee report as failing to recognise that over two-thirds of road deaths now occur on rural roads and, in particular, that the risk of being killed cycling on rural A-roads is now 15 times higher than on urban roads ([FarmingUK](#); [CPRE](#)).

Signage. Jeremy Hunt launched a scheme to replace county boundary signs with ones that are colourful and striking, perhaps including full colour photographs. His department is also reviewing the guidelines for brown tourist signs ([DCMS](#)). Following the intervention of the [CPRE Mid-Sussex district](#), inappropriate and unsightly advertising has been removed from the side of the A264 at Crawley Down (below).



A264 signs before removal

National Trails. The Ramblers has launched a Campaign for National Trails. Natural England wants to hand control of the routes to local trail partnerships, and campaign aims to persuade the government to put in place a national overseer of partnerships ([Grough](#); [Ramblers](#)).

Aviation

Feverish lobbying for new aviation capacity in the South East reached fever pitch earlier in the month in anticipation of publication of the government's long awaited aviation policy. To widespread disappointment, the government has put off any consideration of increased airport capacity until later in the year. Meanwhile, the prime minister ruled out any moves on a third runway at Heathrow until after 2015.

Aviation framework. The Department for Transport published a draft Aviation Policy Framework for consultation. It is designed to replace the previous Government's 2003 Air Transport White Paper and related guidance, including the DfT's 2004 guidance on preparation of airport master plans. The framework sets out measures to deliver operational improvements within existing airport capacity constraints, including noise reduction measures and £500 million towards a new rail connection between the west and Heathrow ([WRAtH](#)). Expansion of capacity through a third Heathrow runway or Thames Estuary hub has been deferred until a further round of consultation towards the end of the year. Jonathan Riley of law firm Pinsent Masons criticised the draft framework for falling "far short of the standard of the national policy statements that exist for other vital national infrastructure," such as those for energy or water projects ([BBC](#); [Draft Policy](#); [Out-Law](#); [politics.co.uk](#)).

Heathrow. The Financial Times said that David Cameron has changed his mind on the third runway and will execute a u-turn after the 2015 election ([FT1 £](#); [FT2 £](#)). Challenged by business leaders yesterday, David Cameron ruled out a third runway at Heathrow until after 2015 ([Daily Mail](#)).

Kent. The Kent Green Party have called for Lydd and Manston airports to be closed and converted to all-weather leisure centres ([Kent News](#)). Lydd Airport Action Group have called for plans for expansion of Lydd to be halted because of a review of accidental aircraft crash risk set up by the Office of Nuclear Regulation ([BBC](#)).

Thames estuary. A new lobby group, Demand Regeneration in North Kent (DRINK), urged political leaders to have a "grown up" debate on the estuary airport ([Kent News](#)). Former shadow transport secretary Philip Hammond said "I've changed my mind – we do need a new airport". He also backed a third runway at Heathrow ([LES](#)).

Gatwick Airport unveiled its masterplan for growth up until 2020, including plans to handle up to 40 million passengers a year. The airport said it is focused on making the best use of a single runway and two terminals but: "We believe that there is a possibility that a second runway may be needed sometime in the future." CPRE Sussex is already gearing up to oppose any second runway plans ([BBC](#); [Masterplan](#); [CPRE Sussex](#)).

Campaigning

Ideas and inspiration. CPRE Oxfordshire is inviting local artists to produce a work of art in response to threats to several of the city's green spaces ([CPRE Oxon](#)).

Consultations. Government consultation periods are set to be cut from the current 12 weeks except in the most complex policy cases after the Cabinet Office issued new guidelines ([LGL](#)).

People. Georgia Wrighton has taken up post as Director of CPRE Sussex. Malcolm Avery has started work as CPRE Devon's first Branch Director ([CPRE Devon](#)). Its all change at CPRE Cornwall, where Tedd Venn is retiring to one of the wind farm capitals of Britain, the north west Highlands of Scotland. President Michael Bruton also steps down ([TI Cornwall](#)).

CPRE. CPRE's new brand has been short listed for a [Third Sector excellence award](#). Andrew Motion took over from Bill Bryson as President of CPRE ([inaugural speech](#)).

Protests. Campaigners arrested at Drax power station in 2008 have been invited by the director of public prosecutions to appeal their convictions ([Independent](#)).

About the CPRE South East eBulletin

The CPRE South East eBulletin is issued monthly. We cover planning and environmental news with a relevance to the remit of CPRE. Any views expressed are those of the editor, not of any part of CPRE. Our audience is CPRE and its friends. Please feel free to circulate this eBulletin.

Andy Boddington, Editor. cprenews@gmail.com