

## Affordable Housing Challenge

**Judicial review.** West Berkshire and Reading councils have jointly applied for a judicial review of the government’s decision to exempt developments of under ten homes from paying a contribution towards affordable housing [LG] [O] [P]. The controversial policy was introduced in December. In national parks the threshold is five homes (see the December CPRE SE eBulletin [RE]). Councillor Tony Page from Reading said:

*These changes would amount to pure profit for landowners and developers at the expense of people looking for affordable places to live. At a time when policy should be moving towards creating more affordable housing, this is yet another slap in the face for residents.*

The communities department responded: “These reforms are helping the country’s small housebuilders and overnight in many part parts of England it will be cheaper to build an extension, a family annex or a home.” An online poll by *Get Reading* suggests most people back the challenge [Gr].

## Noise and Light

**New noise guidance may let bells ring out.** On Christmas Eve, the communities department published updated planning guidance on noise impacts. The new rules on “character of locality” will help block complaints against the noise of church bells but at the same time will make it harder to take action against other long standing sources of noise, such as industrial sites [C].

**Lights switched off.** The Labour party found that 106 out of 141 councils in England it surveyed are turning off or dimming streetlights to save money. It said 50 of the councils that responded were switching off some streetlights, 56 were dimming some lights and 42 councils were taking both measures. Thirty-five councils are taking no action. Shadow communities secretary Hilary Benn said the safety of people walking in the dark could be put at risk [G] [BBC]. The *Guardian* disagreed [G]:

*The worst aspect of light pollution is that it erodes the difference between night and day and masks the constellations, depriving us of that nightly reminder of how unbelievably vast the universe is, and how small we are by comparison... Better dim the lights than dim the stars.*

**Dark skies.** CPRE Norfolk has begun a light pollution survey after being awarded almost £10,000 from the National Lottery’s Awards for All [L] [RE]. Campaigners are hoping that the Isle of Man, which has 26 designated Dark Sky sites, may become the first Dark Sky Nation [BBC]. As reported in the last eBulletin, the South Downs National Park is aiming to become a Dark Sky Reserve [RE].

**Cities at Night.** NASA and other organisations have launched a crowdsourcing project to classify half a million images taken from the International Space Station, with the aim of mapping the world’s light pollution [ ] [ ]. Artist Nicholas Buer Blackout City has created a video showing London without light pollution [ ].

**Year of light.** The United Nations has designated 2015 The International Year of Light [ ] [ ] [f] [t].

## Pickles rejects 6,000 Bucks homes

**The appeals.** At the beginning of last year, a planning inspector said the Vale of Aylesbury Plan could not be found sound because it did not provide for enough housing and Aylesbury Vale council had failed in its duty to cooperate [RE]. As the council began work on a new plan, developers continued to appeal large scale housing plans around the town. More than a year ago, Inspector David Rose heard simultaneous appeals from developers wanting to build 3,000 homes at Hampden Fields, 2,745 homes at Fleet Marston, and for two schemes of 120 and 220 homes north of Weedon Hill. Now Eric Pickles has accepted his inspector’s recommendations and rejected all the schemes despite accepting that Aylesbury Vale does not have a five year land supply [C] [AV] [DC] [P] [O] [RE].

Aylesbury Housing Plans



**Reasons.** At **Fleet Marston**, Eric Pickles said the development would “fail to contribute to the protection and enhancement of the natural and historic environment and so would not be consistent with the environmental dimension of sustainable development” [RE]. For **Hampden Fields**, Mr Pickles said it did not make sense to approve an urban extension when transport problems had not been resolved. He agreed with the inspector that the scheme would lead to coalescence with nearby settlements, and the loss of the countryside setting of those settlements, including the loss of historic field boundaries [RE]. For **Weedon Hill**, the inspector said: “The proposals have the hallmarks of an ill-conceived and opportunistic response to the absence of an up-to-date local plan and a corresponding shortage of housing land” [RE]. Eric Pickles agreed and said the developments: “would have significant impacts on the character of the landscape and cause identifiable harm to its appearance.”

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## Polegate Windfarm

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**Polegate turbines approved.** In a decision that goes against recent trends, a planning inspector gave permission for three wind turbines at Polegate, East Sussex despite acknowledging that the scheme would have an “adverse visual impact” on local views and the setting of listed buildings  . Jessica Graham said the main issue was “the effect that the proposed development would have upon the character and appearance of the area [and] impact on views to and from the South Downs National Park and the Pevensy Levels.” She gave a moderate weight to the impact on the levels and considerable weight and importance to the less than substantial harm to the settings of four listed buildings.

*Clearly, the erection of three 115m high wind turbines on the appeal site would have significant and wide-ranging impacts on the surrounding landscape...*

*Historically, the Pevensy Levels were characterised by a number of windmills. [Some] still remain... Clearly, the wind turbines would be structures of vastly greater scale than the earlier windmills. But against the background of this historic use of windpower to keep the land from flooding, in the light of the current environmental threat posed by climate change, and in the context of this wide, open landscape where the trees are few and windswept, there would be a certain functional and visual logic to their presence, harnessing energy from the wind.*

Polegate town council said it was disappointed with the decision. It said: “A Brighton-based activist group were in favour but none of them live in Polegate as far as we are aware” . Andrew Durling from [Yes to Polegate Wind Farm](#) said: “It is great news that Sussex will be hosting much more production of energy from a renewable source”  .

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## Eric Pickles Tackles Wind

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**Eric Pickles** has been busy rejecting windfarms again. According to *Planning*, he would have approved fifty more turbines in 2014, had he accepted his inspectors’ advice . The latest row over his interventions was stirred by RenewableUK which organised a letter to the RTPI by 40 members saying: “The level of intervention by the secretary of state in planning for wind energy projects is excessive.” The letter calls on the RTPI “to more forcefully defend the planning system”  . The secretary of state received support from the high court which ruled that he was entitled to overrule his inspector’s advice in rejecting six turbines on fields in Burton Agnes, Yorkshire   .

**Bucks wind farm rejected.** Eric Pickles rejected a plan for four turbines at Dorcas Lane, Stoke Hammond. He said the scheme should be approved under the NPPF given the lack of a renewable energy policy in the Aylesbury Vale local plan but the adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. He said the turbines would cause less than substantial harm to five listed buildings. Visual impacts would extend for five kilometres and local visual impacts would be so unpleasant at a nearby farm as to render it an unsatisfactory place to live   . More details in the CPRE Bucks eBulletin .

**Other appeals.** Eric Pickles dismissed an appeal for three 126m-high wind turbines at Hempsall, South Norfolk. He gave greater weight to heritage than his planning inspector, who had recommended approval. Pickles said the harm to a church, a conservation area and the character of the landscape meant “the impacts of the proposals are not, and cannot be made, acceptable.” He also said the turbines would have: “A significant adverse effect on the character of the landscape... and would undermine the tranquillity of the area”    . He blocked a single turbine near Daventry citing heritage concerns  . Retrospective planning permission for two wind turbines near Fowey, Cornwall was refused. Eric Pickles said: “These two wind turbines detract from the scenic qualities and natural beauty of the AONB”  .

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## Fracking Restrictions

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**Government manoeuvres.** The Guardian reported that last September, George Osborne wrote to fellow ministers demanding “rapid progress” on fracking, including lobbying Lancashire council to approve the “asks” of fracking company Cuadrilla  . Environment secretary Liz Truss refused to publish the full version of a heavily redacted report on the potential impact of fracking on rural areas. The published report says “rural communities face three major social impacts associated with shale gas drilling activities” but the details of those impacts are redacted .

**Moratorium call.** The Commons environmental audit committee called for a moratorium on fracking because it is incompatible with climate change targets and could pose significant localised environmental risks to public health   .

**Partial ban.** Faced with a Labour and Lib Dem rebellion, and pressure from many Tory MPs, ministers agreed a ban fracking in national parks, AONBs, Special Areas of Conservation and SSSIs. This will remove the provision that shale gas exploration is allowed in these areas in “exceptional circumstances”. The government will also ban fracking in areas where drinking water is collected. The new regulations are set to slow down exploration by requiring a year of background monitoring before drilling can begin. The thirteen Labour changes accepted by ministers include independent inspection of the integrity of wells, monitoring for leaks of methane and informing residents individually of fracking in their area. A government proposal to allow “any substance” to be used in fracking wells was rejected    .

**Reaction.** Green party MP Caroline Lucas said the Labour amendments as weak. “When it came to a freeze on fracking, Labour abstained. Instead they served up their own superficial tweaks, lacking in detail and riddled with loopholes” . The move was however welcomed by the National Trust which called the decision a hugely important moment for the natural world and landscapes. It said: “We now need to continue to fight for strong regulation to protect our wider environment against the impacts of the shale gas industry” .

**Scotland** announced a moratorium on granting consents for unconventional oil and gas developments in Scotland while further research and public consultation is carried out  .

## Berkshire and Buckinghamshire

**Aylesbury Vale** council approved 260 homes at Haddenham despite the scheme conflicting with the almost complete neighbourhood plan [\[B\]](#).

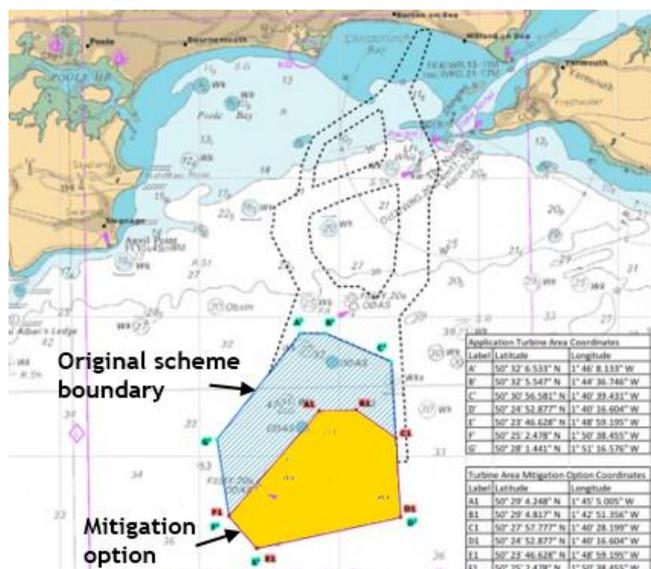
**Greenham** parish council and residents are objecting to plans to store thousands of accident damaged vehicles on Greenham Business Park [\[L\]](#).

**Wokingham** council is to compromise over unauthorised expansion of a garden centre into the green belt [\[GS\]](#) [\[L\]](#).

**Reading** council is asking Ikea, which is seeking permission to build at Calcot in West Berkshire, to contribute £100,000 to ease traffic around the town [\[L\]](#).

## Hampshire

**Navitus windfarm**. The planning inspectorate has agreed to consider an alternative smaller scheme for 105 offshore turbines as part of the current examination of the main proposal for 194 turbines [\[A\]](#) [\[B\]](#) [\[C\]](#) [\[T\]](#). Christchurch MP Christopher Chope has introduced a private members bill that would ban offshore windfarms within 15 miles of the shoreline [\[L\]](#).



Navitus: original and revised schemes

**Hampshire** councillors and MPs are campaigning to get improvements to the county's railways [\[L\]](#).

**Basingstoke**. The inspector examining the Basingstoke and Deane local plan has called for more housing. The council has been proposing 750 homes a year but the inspector said that 850 dwellings would be more in keeping with the strategic housing market assessment [\[LG\]](#) [\[L\]](#). Mountbatten House, built in the 1970s and popularly known as the 'Hanging Gardens of Basingstoke', has been given Grade II listing by English Heritage [\[L\]](#).

**Horndean**. East Hampshire council has refused plans for 135 homes on White Dirt Farm, one of the last green spaces between Horndean and Clanfield. It said the proposals would significantly harm and urbanise the landscape and character of the area [\[L\]](#).

**Rownhams**. Protest group *Say No to Parkers Farm* says that developers have been landbanking sites with planning permission for homes, creating a five year land supply shortage [\[L\]](#).

## Kent

**Maidstone**. CPRE Kent has been granted "rule 6 status" at the forthcoming public inquiry into a business and industrial park being built at Waterside Park off Junction 8 of the M20 [\[KO\]](#).

**Sittingbourne**. CPRE Kent is protesting against plans for 5,980 greenfield homes by Gladman Developments at Sittingbourne [\[KN\]](#) [\[KO\]](#). Brian Lloyd said:

*This is an attempt by the developer to undermine the new Swale local plan by seeking to get planning permission for a greenfield site that has been rejected by the council in its new plan. With food security and the ability to feed a growing population an increasingly important issue, there is no justification for giving up precious high quality land for development.*

**Solar approval**. A 212-acre (86-hectare) solar farm near Herne Bay has been given planning permission. It will be one of the largest solar farms in the country and will supply 48MW of power [\[KN\]](#) [\[L\]](#) [\[P\]](#). Planners had initially recommended the scheme for refusal saying:

*It is considered that the adverse impact upon the character and appearance of the countryside by the introduction of a large solar photovoltaic farm would outweigh the benefits that would be associated with the development.*

Officers made no recommendation after the scheme was reduced in size and councillors approved the scheme.

**Thanet**. More than 400 residents turned out to hear and protest against plans for more than 1,000 homes proposed in the draft Thanet local plan [\[KO\]](#). Hilary Newport of CPRE Kent warned:

*Every authority must have a local plan in place and if Thanet refused to have one then applications are often ruled in favour of development. You need to get involved with the public consultation to tell your council that you do not want this and then the planning system needs to say no we cannot handle this development. Sustainable development is difficult to achieve in a crowded area and you need to make that known by engaging with this.*

## Oxfordshire

**Rally**. The Rural Oxfordshire Action Rally held a protest against a planning system which "allows a rash of rampant cynical developer driven building projects which would have been refused permission under the traditional planning criteria" [\[itv\]](#) [\[L\]](#). Chairman Peter Jay wrote to West Oxfordshire MP David Cameron saying:

*The feeling here is one of total powerlessness in the face of a development juggernaut unleashed upon local communities by the government's effective declaration of open season for rampant development, disregarding and overriding all normal considerations of good planning and of democratic accountability [\[OT\]](#).*

**Cherwell** council, faced with a lack of five year land supply, has approved 350 homes adjacent to the historic Salt Way outside Banbury. The draft local plan allocated the site for 150 homes [\[L\]](#) [\[P\]](#) [\[O\]](#). Gladman Developments is planning to build 75 homes in Kirtlington [\[OT\]](#). Plans for the eco-town quarter in Bicester have been submitted for planning permission [\[Aj\]](#).

**Crouch Hill victory.** Plans for more than a hundred homes on the western outskirts of Banbury have been rejected by a planning inspector [\[C\]](#) [\[24\]](#) [\[P\]](#). The development would have swept down from the summit of Crouch Hill, a non-designated Civil War heritage asset, and closed a “Green Buffer” between Banbury and Broughton. The inspector based much of her arguments in rejecting the appeal on the character of the landscape and she concluded that the benefits brought by the housing did not outweigh the harm to landscape and heritage. CPRE Oxfordshire director Helen Marshall said: “It is good to see such a sensible decision from the planning inspectorate. This site is an important landscape feature, providing a rural backdrop to the town, as well as being of cultural importance in relation to the Civil War.” Cherwell council accepted that it lacks a five year land supply [\[OM\]](#).

**Oxford.** The owners of a former greyhound racing track and speedway stadium at Blackbird Leys have failed in a challenge to the city council’s decision to designate it as a conservation area, despite the judge describing the buildings as “mundane quality at best” [\[P\]](#). Wildlife habitats are being restored at Trap Grounds, a former tip saved after it was registered as a town green [\[OT\]](#).

**Port Meadow.** Oxford city council has challenged Oxford University to justify its refusal to remove a floor from the Roger Dudman Way flats and reduce their impact on the city skyline and Port Meadow. CPRE Oxford chair Sietske Boeles said: “We are pleased that the council has flexed its muscles” [\[OM\]](#).

**Henley.** A developer has taken a rejected plan for 10 homes to appeal, despite the scheme conflicting with the adopted Woodcote neighbourhood plan [\[L\]](#).

**Thame.** Plans for 203 homes are being brought forward in line with the neighbourhood plan [\[OT\]](#).

**Bridge.** A feasibility study is underway into a third bridge across the Thames in South Oxfordshire or Berkshire [\[L\]](#).

**Solar farm rejected.** A 30MW solar farm near Abingdon has been rejected by a planning inspector, who said it would have an adverse impact on the landscape [\[C\]](#) [\[OM\]](#). He said: “The effects of the scheme on views from local roads would be significant, and that the proposal would harm the visual amenity of the area.” An argument by CPRE Oxfordshire that agricultural land should not be used for other than food production was rejected as most the site was Grade 3b. Although the scheme would improve biodiversity and be reversible, the inspector concluded:

*The harm to the local landscape would be significant [and] the benefits of the proposed development would not be sufficient to outweigh its disadvantages.*

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## Surrey

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**Chobham.** Fly-tipping in Chobham is costing charities money to clear and is even blocking roads [\[GS\]](#).

**Runnymede.** Outline plans by Royal Holloway University to expand by 3,000 students by 2031 were given the go-ahead despite a last minute objection by Natural England. That objection was based on concerns over the proximity of the college to Chobham Common and the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, which Natural England worries will be affected by an influx of people using the area for recreation [\[GS\]](#) [\[U\]](#).

**Guildford** council is making a plea to deal with its housing backlog over the full plan period (the Liverpool approach), rather than in the first five years as dictated by the Sedgefield approach. It says that this will allow it to take advantage of more brownfield land, easing pressure on the green belt [\[GS\]](#) [\[L\]](#). The University of Surrey is planning 3,000 homes in the green belt and AONB near the Hogs Back. Campaign group **Save Hogs Back** said: “In putting forward this plan, the university has shown no respect for Guildford’s landscape or its history, destroying nationally important views into and out of the area of outstanding natural beauty” [\[GS\]](#). The Save Guildford’s Hogs Back petition has gained more than 2,000 signatures [\[C\]](#). Plans have been submitted for a 2,100 home new town at Wisley Airfield. **Wisley Action Group** said the proposal is illogical, ill-conceived and a massive assault on Guildford’s green belt [\[GS\]](#).



Plans for Wisley Airfield

**Tandridge** council has approved a seven-foot high noise barrier around an off-road motorcycling track in the green belt. Eric Pickles must give final approval [\[L\]](#).

**Waverley** councillors refused an application for 425 greenfield homes in Cranleigh. Eric Pickles had warned he would call the application in if the council had approved the scheme [\[GS\]](#) [\[P\]](#).

**Woking.** Formula One team McLaren has submitted plans for major expansion of its technology centre on green belt land north of Woking. Horsell Common Preservation Society has objected saying it will damage land it manages. It wants McLaren to build under its existing planning permission on the other side of the A320 [\[GS\]](#) [\[GS\]](#).

**Politics.** The **Guildford Greenbelt Group**, which registered itself as a political party last year, has selected its leader Susan Parker to challenge Anne Milton MP for the Guildford seat in the general election [\[GS\]](#).

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## Sussex

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**Brighton** and Hove council has launched its first low emissions zone [\[S\]](#). Lottery funders have awarded Brighton and Hove council and the South Downs National Park £4 million to restore Stanmer Park [\[TA\]](#) [\[BBC\]](#).

**Chichester.** A plan to build 160 homes in Bracklesham Bay has been rejected by a planning inspector, who criticised the development for being “mediocre and unimaginative” [\[C\]](#) [\[L\]](#).

**Copthorne.** Mid Sussex council has deferred a decision whether to sell a 1.5 acre area of ancient woodland to become an area of open space in a 500 home scheme [\[L\]](#).

**Petworth.** Seven sites for 140 homes around the town have been identified in the South Downs National Park Authority’s strategic housing land availability assessment (SHLAA) [\[MAP\]](#) [\[NP\]](#).

## Green Belt

**Uckfield.** Plans have been put on show for 1,000 greenfield homes at Ridgewood Farm on the outskirts of Uckfield. A proposed Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGS) has been moved offsite. An outline planning application is expected imminently [SE](#) [L](#).



Ridgewood Farm, Uckfield

**Haywards Heath.** Campaigners said they have “sad and heavy hearts” after a planning inspector approved 210 homes between Haywards Heath and Cuckfield Farm. Mid Sussex does not have a five year land supply. The inspector said that direct visual impacts on the AONB would be limited, saying: “Although visually very attractive this part of the AONB cannot be described as either remote or tranquil.” There would also be no impact on heritage assets including Borde Hill Park [C](#) [C](#) [MST](#). A council archaeologist is recommending that Mid Sussex council rejects plans for 48 homes on the edge of Haywards Heath, saying the proposals for Birchin Fields will “adversely affect a remnant of medieval assart landscape” [MST](#).

**Henfield.** Horsham council has lost its high court bid to block 120 greenfield houses at Henfield. The council had argued that the planning inspector had not given sufficient weight to harm to the landscape, damage to views from a footpath and to poor design. The judge said the inspector had not misunderstood or misapplied government policy in [paragraph 64](#) of the NPPF, which requires good design. He said that even if a better design could have been found for the scheme, that was no reason for refusing the development that was taken to appeal. Moreover, the council had not put forward an alternative scheme [L](#) [P](#).

**Horsham.** Writing to the West Sussex County Times, Ronald Smith for CPRE Sussex criticised the recent decision by a planning inspector to insist on higher housing levels in the Horsham local plan [WST](#). He said:

*Even though the target imposed by the inspector is dependent on untested and questionable presumptions and assumptions it will be the council, not developers, who will be held accountable by the planning inspectorate should it not be achieved and communities will be vulnerable to developer-imposed development at appeal, as they are now.*

**South Downs National Park.** The Park Authority is to produce an analysis of the views within, to and from the park as part of the evidence for local plans [L](#) [L](#). North Sompting parish council has abandoned plans to clear an eyesore site through a Community Right to Build order after the park authority demanded an environmental impact assessment [L](#).

**The Adam Smith Institute** said in a report that the release of just 2% of land from England’s green belt could provide sites for the 2.5 million homes the country requires over the next 10 years [L](#) [C](#) [P](#). It argued that the protection of green belt land has inflated house prices, increased the need for transport and encouraged urban densification. This has placed pressure on valued green spaces in urban areas. The institute said that much of the land within the green belt was intensively farmed and of low environmental quality compared to the more biodiverse urban green spaces being lost in order to preserve it. Each hectare of city park is estimated to be of £54,000 benefit per year, compared to a mere £889 per hectare for green belt land on the fringe of an urban area.

**Incinerator refusal overturned.** Veolia has won a high court challenge against a decision by Eric Pickles to refuse permission for an incinerator in the green belt in Hertfordshire. Veolia argued that insufficient account had been taken of the local plan, which allocates the site for waste management [MW](#) [C](#) [P](#) [BBC](#) [L](#).

**Extension challenge rejected.** A high court judge has dismissed a challenge by Luton council to plans to build on 262 hectares of green belt at Houghton Regis, on the north edge of Luton. Mr Justice Holgate said the case was “most unfortunate” as it was delaying “much needed development and nationally important infrastructure.” He dismissed as wholly unarguable four of the ten grounds in Luton council’s challenge to Central Bedfordshire’s approval of the plans and threw out the rest of the claim [P](#) [L](#) [L](#) [L](#).



Plans for Houghton Regis

**Inappropriate development.** The appeal court has ruled that a cemetery and crematorium in the green belt at Gelding, Nottinghamshire is inappropriate development. However, the court could not agree on whether other development, such as sports facilities, would be inappropriate development [L](#). Eric Pickles rejected plans for a 500-home residential-led, mixed-use scheme in the green belt in Essex [C](#) [P](#). Despite a lack of five year land supply he concluded:

*The combined weight of the contribution of the proposal to housing land supply and the limited weight that can be afforded to the provision of some affordable housing and the education contribution does not clearly outweigh the substantial negative weight he attaches to the green belt by reason of inappropriateness, loss of openness and permanence and the additional limited weight he attaches to the character and appearance of the area.*

## Planning

**Brownfield.** The communities department is consulting on plans to resume collection of data on brownfield sites and to introduce measures to support local authorities in developing brownfield land. It is also proposing to remove planning powers from councils that fail to put local development orders on brownfield land. Alternatively, it suggests the presumption in favour of sustainable development could apply on brownfield land lacking an LDO. Closes 11 March  . CPRE planning campaigner Paul Miner said:

*The proposal to resume the collection of data from local authorities on brownfield land suitable for housing is a really positive move in the attempt to tackle the housing crisis. But we also want local authorities to do more to identify contaminated sites that would benefit the public through housing or the management of wildlife .*

**Opinion gap.** A poll by ComRes found that half of respondents oppose building on the green belt but 60% cannot correctly define what the green belt is  . Nearly 90% of the population have no knowledge of, or do not understand, the NPPF. The online survey of over 2,000 adults also found:

- ◆ 60% believe the green belt is not built on.
- ◆ A third think building on the green belt is banned.
- ◆ 30% of people say the green belt is green.
- ◆ 58% overestimated how much of the UK's land is urbanised.
- ◆ 68% wanted it to be easier for people to get involved in the planning process.
- ◆ 77% said they did not know how to get involved in planning.

**Infrastructure Bill.** A Labour amendment, advised by the Town and Country Planning Association, would have committed new towns to sustainable development and community participation. It was withdrawn after the government said it would conflict with the NPPF . Another amendment from the TCPA sought to ensure that local plans must include policies for accessibility. It also failed  . Zac Goldsmith and other MPs tabled amendments to abolish the planning inspectorate and to introduce a community right of appeal for major developments. . Green groups and trade associations have called on MPs to strength standards for zero carbon homes  . The House of Commons Library has published a guide to planning provisions in the bill .

**No new right of appeal.** In a Westminster Hall debate, Newton Abbot MP Anne Marie Morris spoke in favour of a community right of appeal, but was rebuffed by communities minister Brandon Lewis . Lewis said:

*We do not... support the proposal for a community right of appeal; this would create a further opportunity to challenge development proposals in a system that is already geared towards ensuring that the views of third parties are heard and understood... We believe that the best way for communities to have a voice in the planning system is for them to be engaged in the development of local and neighbourhood plans at the beginning, not to wait till the back end of the process... A community right of appeal at the end of the process is too late to allow meaningful engagement.*

**Local plans.** A report on housing land supply from Birmingham and Solihull LEP is expected to say that areas around the city will have to make up the city's housing shortfall. This has led to fears that neighbouring councils will suddenly find themselves without a five year land supply . Research by *Planning* suggests having an up-to-date development plan appears to make little difference to how many of a council's decisions are overturned at appeal .

**Neighbourhood plans.** Eric Pickles refused 100 green belt homes on the edge of Rolleston on Dove against inspector's advice due to impact on neighbourhood plan, which has passed examination subject to modification .

**Green gaps protected.** Eric Pickles rejected 550 homes in North Yorkshire despite a lack of land supply. He said they would close the green gaps between villages,   . He rejected 880 homes Cheshire on similar grounds, saying also that allowing the scheme would prejudice the examination of the local plan which seeks to extend the green belt around Crewe   .

**Statutory consultations.** The government is to press ahead with plans to reduce requirements for planning authorities to consult with Natural England on impact on developments on SSSIs and with the Highways Agency on traffic levels .

**Housing land supply.** The appeal court confirmed that NPPF has "effected a radical change" in the way that councils must assess housing land supply. Ruling on the Solihull local plan, the judges said that when authorities are preparing their local plans for examination, a two-step approach is required. The objectively assessed housing need must first be identified, before the local authority considers whether other NPPF policies require a lower housing target to be set. Planning experts say the ruling means that local authorities can no longer rely on housing estimates that predate the NPPF. The judges also said that proposed changes to beginning boundaries were not properly justified   .

**Housebuilding.** Stocks of bricks are at the lowest level "in living memory" in the UK . Brandon Lewis told housebuilders they should embrace new technology to build houses in weeks not months. Lewis ruled out reintroducing targets for building new homes if the Conservatives were re-elected . National Grid and housebuilder Berkeley Group have launched a joint venture to build up to 14,000 homes at sites in London and the South East by 2030 .

**Guide.** The communities department has published a plain English Guide to the planning system .

**Gypsies and travellers.** The high court ruled that Eric Pickles discriminated against gypsies by automatically calling in and frequently refusing applications for pitches in the green belt. A large number of rejected appeals may now have to be re-examined. Shaun Spiers said local authorities should make adequate provision for travellers. He continued: "Eric Pickles' duty is to defend the green belt from inappropriate development of any kind, and it would be worrying if this decision made it harder for him to do so"  . Under plans to be published in February, gypsy and travellers will have to prove they are nomadic before getting permission for pitches  .

## Town Centres

**Permitted development rights.** Chief planner Steve Quartermain that office to residential conversion rights would deliver 32,000 new homes; 19,000 homes had already been created, including 6,000 in London. He said that local authorities could use Article 4 directions or draw up policies in their local plans to protect certain areas from the impact of the permitted development rights [P]. The Countryside Land and Business Association is asking Brandon Lewis to act over what it calls the “scandal” of local councils refusing prior approval of conversion of barns to homes under permitted development rights [P] [Q].

**Tesco** has dropped planned for 49 very large stores, most on out of town greenfield sites. It is closing 43 other stores [BBC] [G] [C]. Tesco’s decision not to redevelop a neglected street in Dartford, Kent was criticised by the local MP [BBC].

## Flooding and Drainage

**Coastal erosion.** Almost 7,000 homes and buildings will be sacrificed to the rising seas around England and Wales over the next century, 280 of them in Southampton, an Environment Agency report suggests. If funding for shoreline management is not maintained, up to 74,000 properties could be lost [G].

**Flooding.** Belief in the reality of climate change has risen partly because of the 2013 floods, according to University of Cardiff researchers. Britons named climate as a major issue facing the UK alongside crime and education [BBC].

**SuDS.** The government confirmed that sustainable drainage systems will be managed through the planning system, not through SuDS Approval Bodies as previously proposed. The requirement for SuDS will become a material consideration in planning decisions and new planning practice guidance will be issued [BBC] [P].

## Landscapes

**Landscapes for Everyone.** CPRE joined a coalition of 27 national and regional organisations, including the National Trust, British Mountaineering Council and Wilderness Foundation to launch a vision for the future of landscapes [CPRE] [RE]. The report intends to raise the profile of landscape. It emphasises the importance of landscapes to our wellbeing, environment and economy ahead of the general election. The campaigners are calling for:

- ◆ Improved public transport and rights of way to improve access to the countryside.
- ◆ Strengthened protection for landscapes in the planning system.
- ◆ Integration of the European Landscape Convention into government policy, including the NPPF.
- ◆ Restoration of impoverished and degraded landscapes around towns and cities.
- ◆ Sufficient resources for national parks, AONBs, parks and green spaces.

Shaun Spiers, chief executive of CPRE said:

*For far too long, England’s landscapes have been undervalued given the understandable focus on economic recovery. But beautiful landscapes and a strong economy go together. CPRE believes that government at all levels needs to do more to ensure our diverse landscapes survive and thrive, and to support local communities in safeguarding them.*

**A wealth of space.** Around 2.93 billion visits are made to English green spaces a year and visitors spend more than £17bn during their trips, according to research by Natural England, Defra and the Forestry Commission [BBC] [Gr]. The TCPA said planning and public health must come together to create and shape places that enable healthier lifestyles. It published new guidance and recommendation on planning healthy weight environments [tcpa].

**Pylons to go.** The High Weald AONB, the New Forest National Park and other protected areas will see pylons removed under the National Grid’s Visual Impact Provision project [L].

**Stewardship.** Defra has published a guide to Countryside Stewardship, the new Common Agricultural Policy environmental land management scheme [BBC].

**Litter.** Cigarette butt litter has dropped by 71% since CPRE Cheshire and a tobacco company installed 32 butt bins around Middlewich [L].

## Energy and Climate Change

**Solar farm subsidy withdrawn.** Solar farms are no longer able to claim the Basic Payment (Single Farm Payment) under CAP. Liz Truss told *Telegraph*: “English farmland is some of the best in the world and I want to see it dedicated to growing quality food and crops. I do not want to see its productive potential wasted and its appearance blighted by solar farms. Farming is what our farms are for and it is what keeps our landscape beautiful” [T].

**Solar row.** Planners have given permission for a 25MW a solar farm at Rampisham Down, a SSSI in West Dorset. The developers claimed that the lowland acid grass was of poor value and the solar station would create a “fabulous, stable habitat”. Councillors suggested the former BBC transmitter station was brownfield. The Dorset Wildlife Trust said the area was home to rare plants and fungi, and supported a range of wildlife including adders and skylarks. Natural England strongly opposed the scheme for creating “unacceptable and avoidable major adverse impacts” [BBC] [i] [G] [L] [T] [P]. Nearly 5,000 people have signed a petition calling on Eric Pickles to call in the application [M].

**Recycling.** Councils have been urged to back more street-side recycling points after a survey found just a quarter of people recycle on-the-go [Q]. The communities department is consulting on whether local authorities should be allowed to introduce charges for residents using local recycling centres. Closes 18 February [C]. The European Commission has dropped ambitious proposals for a “circular economy” package, which would have introduced a 70% recycling and reuse target for 2030 [E]. A study by WRAP and the Green Alliance found Britain could create up to 517,000 jobs through developing the circular economy [R]. The environment, food and rural affairs select committee said the government and retailers must do more to reduce unacceptable levels of food waste [R] [M].

**Incineration.** Eric Pickles has overruled Gloucestershire council and approved the controversial Javelin incinerator. He said the energy produced and the management of waste outweighs damage to the landscape and heritage assets [L] [L] [BBC] [P] [C]. The King’s Lynn incinerator project ended its labyrinthine journey after developer Cory Wheelabrator withdrew the planning application [L].

## Transport

**Cycling and walking.** A coalition of cycling lobbyists, including Sustrans, CPRE, CTC, Living Streets and Campaign for Better Transport have succeeded in getting provision for walking and cycling added to the Infrastructure Bill [S](#). Transport minister John Hayes told the Commons: “It would be ironic to have a road investment strategy without having a walking and cycling strategy alongside it” [M](#). The proposed cycling and walking strategy has four parts:

- ◆ A long-term vision to increase walking and cycling, in rural as well as urban areas.
- ◆ A Statement of Funds for the next five years to be spent specifically on cycling and walking.
- ◆ An Investment Plan of programmes and schemes, such as improved cycle-rail integration, retrofit safe walking and cycling paths along busy roads, exemplary public spaces and a roll out of London-style cycling schemes.
- ◆ A Performance Specification of measures and targets.

**Rail infrastructure.** The Commons’ public accounts committee said the DfT lacked a clear strategic plan for the rail network. It questioned whether HS2 would be value for money. The MPs also asked why other major rail proposals, such as HS3 linking northern cities and Crossrail 2 had not been considered by the department earlier [FT](#) [M](#) [S](#).

**Total transport.** The government has launched a £4 million scheme to pilot new and better ways of delivering joined-up local transport in rural and isolated areas [S](#) [M](#).

**Gatwick.** West Sussex council has withdrawn its support for a second runway at Sussex. Cabinet member for transport Pieter Montyn said: “Councillors believed that Gatwick has not, to date, put forward sufficient evidence to counter the very serious environmental and noise fears of local residents and so voted to now oppose expansion.” Kent county council withdrew its support for expansion in November [S](#) [LG](#) [L](#) [BBC](#) [P](#).

**The Airports Commission** has been consulting on the business case and sustainability assessment for expansion plans at Heathrow and Gatwick [M](#) [C](#). HACAN has produced a short summary of the assessments [M](#). The Commission said that all the proposed options will cost more than their proponents’ estimates. The most expensive, a third runway at Heathrow, would cost nearly £4 billion more than the £14.8 billion that Heathrow had itself suggested. The commission estimated construction of a second runway at Gatwick would cost £9.3 billion, against Gatwick Airport’s estimate of £7.4 billion [BBC](#) [GWL](#). The commission said a second runway at Gatwick Airport could require up to 18,400 homes across fourteen local authorities for airport staff and people working in industries associated with the airport. These would be deliverable over the period to 2030, with “land availability unlikely to be affected by green belt issues.” At Heathrow, the northern runway extension would require up to 60,600 new homes, while a new north west runway would require up to 70,800 new homes. A north runway extension at Heathrow would take approximately 238 hectares of land from the green belt. A new north west runway will remove around 431 hectares. A second runway at Gatwick will require just nine hectares of green belt land.

## Communities and campaigning

**Community assets.** Ministers pledged to introduce secondary legislation that will protect pubs listed as Assets of Community Value (AVC) from national permitted development rights. This will ensure that planning permission for change of use will be required [M](#) [C](#).

**Rural economy.** Defra secretary Liz Truss said economic productivity in rural England is catching up with urban areas. She claimed: “Investment in broadband and transport links, together with improved mobile phone signals, is unlocking the huge potential for growth in the countryside where entrepreneurial activity is outstripping many parts of the UK.” Currently rural productivity is 17% lower than in urban areas [C](#) [C](#) [M](#) [BBC](#). The Rural Services Network warned rural communities will be hit hard by the latest round of government cuts: “Rural residents receive £153 less in government grant compared to urban areas and their council tax is on average £81 higher” [M](#). Defra has confirmed it will continue to fund rural community councils [M](#).

**Broadband.** BDUK, the company set up to manage delivery of the government’s broadband strategy and the rollout of broadband in rural areas told MPs that many areas would not get beyond 70% coverage until the second phase of rollout begins in 2017 [M](#) [M](#). Research from the Federation of Small Businesses found half of rural small businesses are dissatisfied with the quality of their broadband provision (49%). The survey showed nearly double the level of dissatisfaction compared to urban small businesses where 28% are dissatisfied.

**Mobile.** The government has agreed a legally enforceable deal with the big four mobile phone operators to cut mobile not-spots by one third [M](#). Neil Sinden for CPRE warned: “This should not mean erecting any more badly designed masts than we already see in our countryside. We should require companies to engage in national roaming – fully sharing existing and future phone masts” [C](#). The Country Land and Business Association said the announcement was “deeply disappointing” and would still leave swathes of the countryside without mobile phone coverage for the foreseeable future [M](#) [M](#).

**High court action** will become more expensive for charities after MPs voted down Lords’ amendments to the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill. Charities will only be able to apply for a protective costs orders later in the proceedings. Where they act as a third ‘expert’ party they could be liable for much larger costs if the case fails [M](#). The appeal court said that parliament must clarify domestic law over Aarhus Convention legal claims. Legal rules are, it said, systematically flawed in some areas [P](#).

### The CPRE eBulletins

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