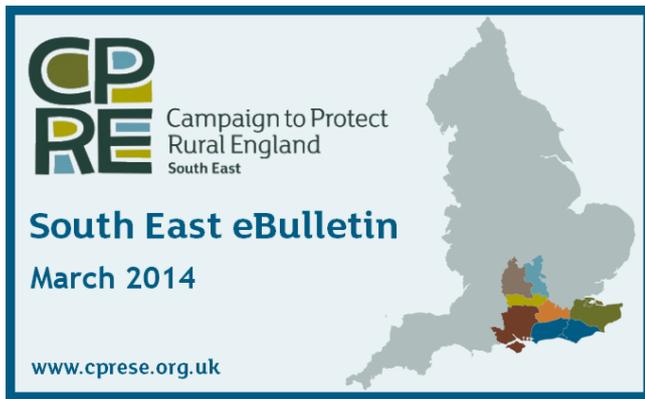


The Reigate Letters



Dear Sir Michael Pitt,
Inspectors' Reports on Local Plans
 I was very troubled by the media coverage of the recent Inspector's report on the examination into the Reigate and Banstead Local Plan. On reading the report, I was disturbed by the Inspector's use of language, which invited misinterpretation of government policy and misunderstanding about the local authority's role in drawing up all of the policies in the draft plan. I am writing to restate very clearly the Government's view of Green Belt policy and Local Plan examinations.

Countryside Chaos?

NPPF impact. A report from CPRE, *Community Control or Countryside Chaos?* said the government's planning reforms are damaging the countryside unnecessarily and are undermining local democracy. At the same time, the reforms are failing to prioritise the regeneration of urban areas [RE] [RE] [P] [C] [L] [L] [YP]. Countryside across England is under siege, with 700,000 houses planned for the countryside and the green belt. Only a minority (27%) of local authorities outside London are setting local targets for the re-use of brownfield land in their area. In 2012, 80,500 homes were planned in the green belt; in January 2014, it has risen to 188,000. Two thirds of appeals for major housing have gone in favour of developers in the last year. Councils are increasingly reluctant to defend an appeal due to the risk of incurring costs.

Plan-making. The report criticises the NPPF for a predict and provide approach to new housing, which "in effect makes planners slaves to market trends, regardless of need or impact." It says neighbourhood planning is being placed at risk by "the legalistic, confrontational environment that the NPPF policies on housing land supply have encouraged." CPRE wants greater weight to be given to emerging neighbourhood plans.

Recommendations. CPRE calls on the government to:

- ◆ Amend the NPPF to stress brownfield first
- ◆ Ensure developers have to demonstrate sustainability under the presumption in favour of sustainable development
- ◆ Amend the NPPF to remove any automatic presumption in favour of planning permission where there is a lack of five year land supply and to ensure land with planning permission is considered part of the land supply
- ◆ Drop the requirement in the NPPF to allocate an additional 20% buffer of deliverable housing sites
- ◆ Issue guidance ensuring development in and around villages should only be in exceptional circumstances and through the local plan or neighbourhood plan processes.
- ◆ Give greater scope for planning applications to be refused on grounds of prematurity.

Shaun Spiers for CPRE said: "This report provides firm evidence but planning reforms are not achieving their stated aims. Far from community control of local development, we are seeing councils under pressure to disregard local democracy to meet top-down targets. Local authorities are having to agree fanciful housing numbers and allocate huge areas of greenfield land to meet them."

Nick Boles dismissed the report as "inaccurate, exaggerated and based on a spurious analysis of the facts."

The letters. In a move that surprised many, Nick Boles intervened in the examination of the Reigate and Banstead core strategy. The planning inspector had found the plan sound subject to modifications, including that the authority should "recognise that some loss of green belt to housing development will be necessary." In a letter to Sir Michael Pitt, head of the planning inspectorate, Boles said the inspector's language "invited misinterpretation of government policy and misunderstanding about the local authority's role in drawing up policies in the draft plan." Boles warned that the secretary of state would consider intervening in local plans where an inspector has recommended a green belt review not supported by the local authority [C] [L] [P] [P] [L]. Further terse correspondence ensued with Boles apparently backtracking in a second letter to Pitt, saying it was the inspector's language he was concerned about. He said his first letter "did not signal a change of policy or approach" by the government. He said that inspectors should continue to assess whether plans to meet objectively assessed housing needs [C] [C].

A Blunt intervention. After the Boles letter, Reigate MP Crispin Blunt met with Nick Boles with the aim of reducing housing targets in the core strategy. Afterwards he said: "I am now optimistic that green fields in the green belt, the so-called urban extensions, will not be made available for development" [P] [GS] [TTL]. The furious chief executive of Reigate and Banstead wrote to communities chief, Sir Bob Kerslake saying; "It is of great concern that an objector [Blunt] to the core strategy can seek to circumvent the plan preparation process in this way, by arranging a meeting with the planning minister and seeking to influence changes to the core strategy that have not been considered through the democratic process... I would be grateful for your reassurance that the plan preparation process cannot be subverted in this way" [LG].

Consequences. The council's adoption of the core strategy has been put on hold until 10 April. Officers say: "The legal advice we have taken is unequivocal. There has been no change in government policy, the core strategy has been found sound in relation to that policy and we should proceed without delay to adopt it to ensure that we protect the green belt by being in control of when and where new development takes place" [L] [LG].

Reaction. Mole Valley councillors expressed hope that their annual housing targets could be cut from 1,100 to 600 in the light of the letter. Andy Smith, director of CPRE Surrey gave "cautious welcome" to the minister's comments. He said: "What we need now is the lifting of the shadow... which has forced authorities to accept the re-drawing of green belt boundaries in order to meet excessive housing figures" [L]. The Home Builders Federation said the letter could hold up the "speedy production of local plans in green belt areas" and have a "potentially disastrous effect" on meeting the housing crisis [P].

High Speed 2

Taskforce. The government issued a report by the HS2 Growth Taskforce on maximising the benefits of the line  . The Taskforce, chaired by Lord Deighton, said locally-led delivery bodies will be needed for each HS2 station, modelled on the mayoral development corporation which is being established in west London for Old Oak Common. It said the government should partner local authorities and establish both a central delivery body to coordinate the local initiatives. The government should appoint a minister with responsibility for HS2-related economic growth and regeneration. Cities in the north and midlands could witness urban regeneration on a grand scale within just a few years of HS2 arriving .

Higgins. The taskforce report was overshadowed by the vision of the new chairman of HS2 Ltd, David Higgins . In *HS2 Plus*, Higgins said construction of the northern section of the HS2 line must be speeded up to allow both phases of the project to be completed early. He called for three changes to HS2 plans:

- ◆ The line to be extended to a new regional transport hub at Crewe by 2027, six years earlier than planned.
- ◆ The bitterly opposed HS1-HS2 link across Camden to be scrapped.
- ◆ More ambitious plans for Euston station to act “as a catalyst for change in helping to regenerate the local area”

Higgins also called for an early consensus among civic leaders, government and transport operators in the north to maximise the transformative effects of HS2, which could then be completed three years earlier than planned.

Reaction. Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin told parliament the HS2-HS1 link across Camden will be scrapped and that the line should be built to Crewe by 2027     . He said the route through Camden had not secured a consensus and involved too many compromises in terms of impacts on freight, passengers and the community in Camden. He agreed that more can be made of rebuilding Euston station: “This work should include proposals for the Euston arch which should never have been knocked down and which I would like to see rebuilt.” West Midlands transport authority Centro is set to petition the government to ensure links between HS2 and HS1 remain part of the plans . The acceleration of the Crewe section is expected to ease pressure on Lichfield in Staffordshire .

Roundup. Boris Johnson has backed calls for a cycle route to be built alongside the proposed HS2 high-speed train line from London to Birmingham and, to Leeds and Manchester. The route would be mostly traffic-free and would be the longest route of its kind in the country, taking in towns within three miles either side of the HS2 line and possibly extending as far as York  . Northamptonshire council voted to oppose HS2, but is hiring a consultant to lobby for an A36 Chipping Warden bypass . A minister admitted that the scale of the flood risk associated with HS2 has not been fully assessed .

Environment. As we go to press, the Commons environmental audit committee warned the government has failed to provide proper environmental protection against HS2’s impacts, which could endanger areas of the countryside, including ancient woodlands and the rare species  .

Permitted Development Rights

GPDO review. The government announced in the budget that it will review the General Permitted Development Order. It aims to allow more development through permitted development rights and prior approval   . A three-tier system will be used to decide the appropriate level of permission: permitted development rights for small-scale changes; prior approval rights for development requiring consideration of specific issues; and planning permission for the largest scale development. The government will consult on specific change of use measures, including greater flexibilities for change to residential use, for example from warehouses and light industry structures. It wants to allow businesses greater flexibility to expand car parks and loading bays within existing boundaries.

Shops and offices. From 6 April, new rights will allow shops and offices with a floorspace below 150 square metres to be converted into homes without planning permission  .

Agricultural. Planning minister Nick Boles announced that up to 450 sq m of derelict or under-used buildings per farm could be turned into a maximum of three houses. Agricultural buildings up to 500 sq m can convert to state-funded schools and registered nurseries. The permitted development rights will not apply in national parks or areas of outstanding national beauty. Nick Boles said: “I believe that these are a practical and reasonable set of changes that will help facilitate locally led development, promote brownfield regeneration and promote badly needed new housing at no cost to the taxpayer”   .

Reaction. The Country Landowners Association expressed disappointment that national parks and AONBs had been excluded from the permitted development rights for conversion of barns to housing  . CPRE said it was “concerned that allowing barn conversions without planning permission could do real damage” to the countryside . The House of Commons Library has issued a briefing note on change of use .

Building Regulations

Housing. The government announced it will consolidate regulations and guidance on housing standards by 2015. It plans to reduce 100 standards to fewer than 10 and reduce guidance from 1,000 to fewer than 100 pages. The Code for Sustainable Homes will be scrapped. Energy efficiency standards will be set nationally and local authorities will not be able to increase them. National space standards will be established but will not be compulsory. The new system will include “optional building regulations”, for example, a water efficiency standard could be applied in areas facing water shortages    . Environmental organisations are critical. The Association for the Conservation of Energy said: “It is bad for the environment, it’s bad for fuel bills, and it’s bad for localism.” The Sustainable Energy Association said the move is “perverse” . The space standards have been welcomed by the RIBA .

Merton Rule. In a letter to the communities secretary, more than 50 green organisations and businesses asked for the Merton Rule, which requires new buildings to use renewables, to continue until full zero carbon standards are introduced to building regulations in 2016 .

Garden Cities

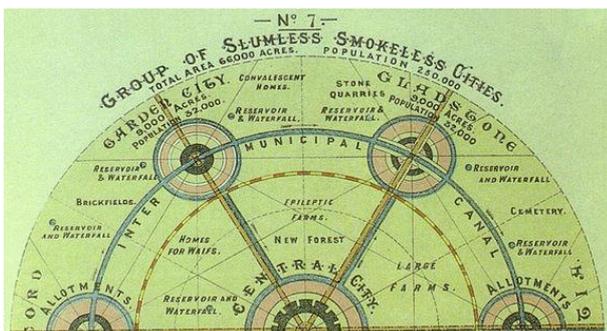
Prospects. George Osborne promised the government would publish the garden city prospectus, originally due two years ago, by Easter [P](#) [T](#). The TCPA is proposing a New Towns Act 2015 to deliver large scale settlements after the election [TCPA](#) [P](#). The communities department again denied that it holds a “secret report” on building two garden cities [P](#).



Ebbsfleet

Ebbsfleet. Osborne announced a new garden city at Ebbsfleet in Kent. The 15,000 brownfield homes will be delivered by an urban development corporation which will “cut through a lot of the obstacles that often happen when you want to build these homes.” Osborne said: “It is a going to be a Garden City Development Corporation, with a mandate to build spacious, attractive, high quality places to live – modelled on popular garden cities like Letchworth or Welwyn Garden City.” CPRE Protect Kent gave a cautious welcome to the scheme. Richard Knox-Johnston said “CPRE has been campaigning for action to unlock sites with planning permission, especially those, such as Ebbsfleet, where the land is designated brownfield” [KO](#) [C](#) [IH](#) [C](#) [FT](#) [P](#) [AJ](#).

Comment. Hugh Ellis head of policy at the Town and Country Planning Association asked: “Can garden cities and new towns work in the 21st century?” [G](#). Janet Street-Porter and Sarah Rutherford looked at the history of garden cities and the potential for Ebbsfleet [I](#) [I](#). Architect David Chipperfield said: “Delivering housing should be different to delivering cars or washing machines, since the manner by which you place houses together has the possibility of creating not only streets and squares, but also the potential to create a meaningful sense of place and community” [G](#). Henley MP John Howell said: “Design must play a key role... We do not just want rabbit hutches and boxes to be built. All eyes will be on [Ebbsfleet] in determining whether communities are willing to participate” [P](#).



Ebenezer Howard's garden city vision

Planning: South East

Go East: Unlocking the Potential of the Thames Estuary is the title of a Centre for London report edited by Lord Adonis [Cn](#). They say progress in developing and redeveloping the Thames Gateway has been disappointing and that it could house much of London’s expanding population. They argue future development should draw on the lessons of Milton Keynes, and should be kick-started with a new town at Ebbsfleet, Kent. Three new crossings should be built at Silvertown, Thamesmead /Beckton and in the Lower Thames area. The report suggests the most important biodiverse areas should be designated a ‘national wildlife sanctuary’. It calls for a new Kew or Queens Park of the east, but pays almost no attention to green infrastructure. Although the report makes reference to the Thames Gateway Parklands Vision, developed by Sir Terry Farrell in 2008, it says: “The natural beauty of the area should not be overdone. Much of the landscape is still scarred by the physical remnants of its recent industrial history and even the wilder parts, though striking, can at times feel unwelcoming.” A chapter on lessons from Milton Keynes fails to acknowledge the role of parkland, waterways and trees in creating a quality environment that have helped attract people and businesses.

Berkshire. The Royal Borough is to remove several flood prone sites from its preferred options for the core strategy. The move may mean that the council will not be able to find enough sites for the planned 12,000 homes [P](#). Wokingham Without parish councillors are calling for the borough council to amend its core strategy to halt further development in Crowthorne [Gr](#). Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale residents voted 2,674 (91%) in favour of the neighbourhood plan with 260 against; turnout 23.6% [LG](#). Bracknell is conducting a survey for its neighbourhood plan [L](#) [LG](#). A high court judge ruled that a planning inspector was correct to reject a town green application for Thamesfield in Wraysbury [P](#) [P](#).

Buckinghamshire. The examination of the Winslow neighbourhood plan was halted last month after legal objections from Gladman. The developer had argued that a neighbourhood plan could not proceed in the absence of an up-to-date local plan. Aylesbury Vale council says the government’s new planning guidance makes it clear that that plans can proceed in these circumstances and the examination will now go-ahead [P](#). Daws Hill Neighbourhood Forum has ended its legal action after the appeal court threw out its case to include the former RAF site at Daws Hill and the Handy Cross Sports Centre site in the neighbourhood area [CPRE](#) [O](#) [P](#).

Hampshire. Zurich Assurance has failed in its legal challenge to the Winchester core strategy. The insurer claimed the council was wrong exclude a site it owned at Micheldever Station. It also claimed housing allocations were too low and the council had failed in the duty to cooperate. The judge disagreed. Zurich was criticised for not revealing that it had used a planning consultancy to argue its case anonymously at the core strategy public inquiry [LG](#) [P](#). Hampshire council is consulting on priorities for rural funding under the EU LEADER programme. Closes end April [LG](#). Housing developers are set to pay a levy of £172 per new dwelling to protect coastal birds [L](#).

Maidstone council has published its core strategy for comment, which plans for 19,600 houses by 2031, though the sustainability assessment suggested that 17,100 was more appropriate. The countryside polices pledge rigorous protection for the distinctive character of the Kent Downs AONB and its setting, and the extent and openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt. The Greensand Ridge, Medway Valley, Len Valley and Loose Valley will be protected and maintained as landscapes of local value. Closes 7 May 2014 [LG](#).

Kent. The final draft of the Coxheath neighbourhood plan has been published for consultation ahead of its examination. Closes 30 April [LG](#). Maidstone's planning committee turned down a proposal for outline permission for an industrial estate dubbed son of KIG. The proposal, close to Leeds Castle and requiring the removal of more than 430,000 cubic metres of sand from the site, was described by objectors as "genuinely grotesque" [KO](#). The government is consulting on removing Walpole Bay from the list of designated bathing waters. Thanet council thinks that displaying signs warning bathers not to swim in dirty water would put off tourists. Closes 11 May [C](#) [LG](#). Janet Street-Porter passed along the Bay raging about litter and dog mess, but seems to have not taken to the waters [C](#). Fort Burgoyne, built to defend Dover Castle, will be opened to the public after the Homes and Communities Agency and the Land Trust reached an £11 million deal to protect the fort [C](#) [L](#).

Oxfordshire. Abingdon has been given £33,000 to create high street business improvement district [C](#). An expert panel has been set up to review significant planning applications in the university city. The Oxford Design Review Panel will consider a range of projects, including housing and civic buildings [DC](#). Campaigners aiming to halt the Barton Park development have been granted a public inquiry into their claim that land at Foxwell Drive should be designated a town green [OT](#). Plans have been resubmitted for green belt housing at Yarnton Nurseries [OT](#). Bloxham is conducting a survey for its neighbourhood plan [C](#). Community groups are trying to register Stansfeld Outdoor Education Centre as an asset of community value [OM](#).

Cherwell council is to proceed with the purchase of the MoD Graven Hill site, south-east of Bicester, as the first stage in establishing the UK's first large-scale, self-build community of up to 1,900 homes. The scheme will include kit homes, group-build schemes and properties designed by the owners but built by contractors [LG](#) [C](#) [RIBA](#).



Graven Hill self-build [C](#).

Oxfordshire housing. One hundred thousand more homes need to be built by 2031 according to the Oxfordshire strategic housing market assessment: a rise of 37%. Oxford needs to build an additional 30,000 by 2031. City leader Bob Price said: "We reckon we have got space for around 7,000 homes if we are lucky." CPRE's Helen Marshall said: "CPRE would fight strongly a review of the green belt. We don't see that it would be necessary." The Vale of White Horse council plans to take a number of villages and 24 sites out of the green belt to boost housing numbers by 7,430 to 20,560 between 2011 and 2031. CPRE Oxfordshire said: "Our concern is that the housing numbers... are strongly influenced by the ambitions of the Oxfordshire LEP, an unelected body driven by business interests" [RE](#) [OM](#) [OM](#). CPRE Vale district said the plans are: "Premature, impracticable, unsustainable, disproportionate, and an affront to localism." It said that the plans had failed to assess whether the housing can be accommodated and that a build rate of 1,460 houses a year is unachievable [RE](#).

Surrey. Planners have been commissioned by Guildford Borough Council to draw up a master plan for the development of central Guildford [L](#). Compton Cemetery near Guildford, designed by **Mary Seton Watts**, has been added to the Register of Parks and Gardens at Grade II* <#> [GS](#). A planning inspector upheld a decision not to allow Reigate Aerodrome a hard runway [TIL](#). Natural England is to assess whether the Surrey Hills AONB boundary should be extended to include areas of Downs, Wealden Greensand and Low Weald within and around the locally designated Area of Great Landscape Value [TIL](#).

Mole Valley, Surrey. The Hands Off The Green Belt group presented a 1,974 signature petition calling on Mole Valley council to halt its plans to remove dozens of sites from the green belt [L](#) [L](#). Ashted Residents Association is objecting to Mole Valley's plans for development of three green belt sites in Leatherhead, including Barnett Wood Lane allotments [L](#). Claims from Conservative members of Mole Valley council that they will join together to save the green belt were derided by campaign groups and opposition councillors [GS](#) [GS](#). MP Sir Paul Beresford has vowed to "save the precious green belt for future generations" [C](#).

Cherkley Court, Surrey. Mole Valley council and the owners of Grade II listed Cherkley Court are appealing against a high court ruling last year in which quashed planning permission for a hotel and golf course. Andy Smith, director of CPRE Surrey said: "I'm at a loss to see how transforming wildflower meadows and ancient woodland into a golf course for the super-rich can be described as beneficial to either the local community or the natural environment" [VIG](#) [GS](#) [P](#) [VIG](#).

South Downs National Park plan. The Park Authority (NPA) is consulting on options for its local plan. Closes 30 April [C](#) [L](#) [L](#). For development outside existing settlements it says it will: "Normally allow development on [brownfield] in relation to agriculture and forestry... farm diversification, tourism, appropriate recreation and the promotion of the understanding and enjoyment of the countryside but put in place strict controls on greenfield land." Residential development will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances, for example rural worker housing; or where development represents the optimal use of a heritage asset; or on a rural exception site."

South Downs National Park. The NPA is under fire for clamping down on the opening hours of the popular Clapham village shop and café [L](#). Planning conditions on a farmers shop at Pyecombe prevent it serving tea [FWI](#). Extra buses are being introduced to cut car use [BBC](#).

Sussex. The parish council and residents of Hassocks say that proposals for 97 homes will make traffic congestion and pollution worse [MST](#). A planning appeal for housing in Lewes has been thrown out by the planning inspectorate because it would not contribute to the distinctive appearance of the town [SE](#) [Crown](#). A planning inspector approved 46 homes at Billingshurst, Horsham saying development beyond the settlement boundaries is acceptable given the lack of five year land supply [WST](#) [Crown](#). Plans for an A27 bypass between Polegate and Lewes are being resurrected by business leaders and politicians [L](#). Cranes will be used to move windfarm parts across the Tide Mills at Bishopstone, leading to concerns over impact on views and the environment [SE](#). Combe Haven Defenders are urging people to contact councillors to prevent the Hollington Valley site of nature conservation interest from being destroyed by a business park [CHD](#).

Sussex plans. Developers failed in a high court bid to get the Wealden core strategy scrapped. They argued that housing numbers were too low and that the planning inspector had given too much weight to protecting Ashdown Forest [P](#) [T](#) [SE](#). Wealden council has submitted its Strategic Sites Local Plan to the planning inspectorate for examination [SE](#) [LG](#). West Sussex council and the NPA have issued a call for sites for inclusion in the West Sussex Minerals Local Plan. Closes 11 April [LG](#). More than 300 comments were received in response to Herstmonceux neighbourhood plan [SE](#) [LG](#). The draft neighbourhood plan for Burgess Hill proposes extensive town centre redevelopment including a new town square. Consultation closes 14 April [Wsg](#) [LG](#). The Planning Advisory Service published a case study of strategic planning in Coastal West Sussex and Greater Brighton [L](#).

Planning: National

Consultation on special measures and S106. The government, having only trapped one council into special measures, now proposes the raise the stakes. Local authorities will have to process at least 40% of major planning applications in three months from October 2014, or developers will be able to submit development plans directly to the planning inspectorate. The government is also asking whether the threshold might be boosted to 50%. It also wants to restrict the use of section 106 planning obligation contributions. Sites of 10 units or less with a maximum combined gross floor space of 1,000 square metres, and residential extensions and annexes will no longer have to contribute towards affordable housing. Developers who bring buildings back into use on brownfield sites will also be freed of affordable housing contributions. Consultation closes 4 May [C](#).

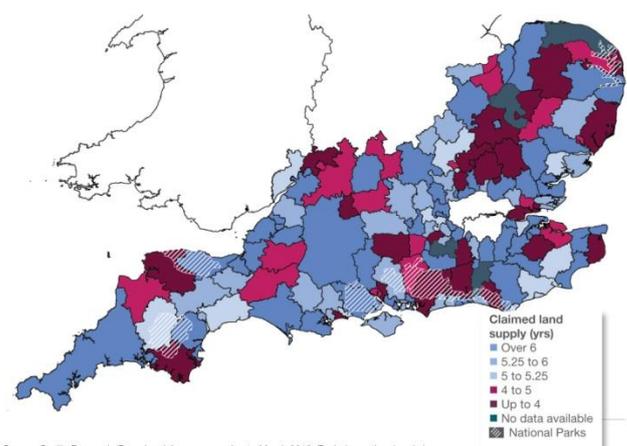
Politics. The Lib Dem spring conference committed the party to consulting on limiting the role of planning inspectors and the secretary of state in planning decisions. Communities will be given a right of appeal if permission is granted for a scheme not in accordance with a local plan. It called for statutory changes to promote new garden settlements and reserving a significant portion of land for small developers and self-builders [IH](#) [P](#).

Three tier planning. The chancellor's budget statement said announced a "new" approach that would use permitted development rights for small-scale changes, prior approval rights for development requiring consideration of specific issues, and planning permission for the largest scale development. The government will consult on specific change of use measures, including greater flexibilities for change to residential use, for example from warehouses and light industry structures, and allowing businesses greater flexibilities to expand facilities such as car parks and loading bays within existing boundaries, where there is little impact on local communities [C](#) [Crown](#).

Five year land supply. A high court judge upheld a planning inspector's decision to approve two housing schemes in Northamptonshire under the presumption in favour of sustainable development [P](#). Two green belt schemes in Bath & North East Somerset were thrown out by Eric Pickles as inappropriate development, despite the lack of five year land supply [C](#). Shropshire planners promised a meeting hosted by CPRE and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust they would raise the issue of the "cumulative impact" of allowing unlimited developments through at talks with the communities department [L](#).

Five year land supply study. A report by Savills says local authorities are overestimating their housing land supply and losing at appeal. Of the 103 most significant planning appeal decisions issued since the NPPF, 69 were allowed: "In 63 of these cases, a deficit in five-year supply was a material factor in the decision." It said 20 appeals were lost in the south of England on land supply, despite councils' claims to have sufficient land. It says that there is currently little prospect of the housing shortfall in London, up to 14,4000 homes a year, being compensated for by surrounding authorities because most have set housing targets below prevailing demand. It is calling for greater cooperation on housing across London and the South East [P](#) [C](#) [C](#).

MAP 1.1
Five-year land supply map for the south of England



Source: Savills Research (Based on LAs own reporting to March 2013. Excludes national parks)

Savills: Five year land supply (red less than 5 years)

Roundup. The Homes and Communities Agency is consulting on plans for 3,500 at Northstowe, north of Cambridge. The town will eventually have 9,500 homes and is aiming to be an exemplar of sustainability and energy use [C](#). The second round of Portas Pilots has spent just 36% of the grant funds allocated 18 months ago to revive high streets [L](#).

Local Plan Progress

Local plans. Planning consultancy NLP said it now takes 13.7 months for a council's development plan to be found sound following submission to the planning inspectorate. Before the NPPF was introduced the process took four months less at 9.7 months . After a review of 109 local plans, NLP said that more than 50% of English local planning authorities outside London have yet to formally publish new local plans since the NPPF. Just 40 of the 109 plans submitted since the NPPF have been found sound. Fifteen plans have been withdrawn, eleven due to criticism of housing assessments. Of the 54 plans currently under examination, 26 need modifications and 18 of these require more evidence of objectively assessed housing need. One third of local plans found sound have had to increase their housing targets. NLP argues that just 13% of local authorities have an NPPF-compliant up-to-date adopted plan, but it has not examined whether plans published before the NPPF are compliant – many are.

London. NLP believes the Further Alterations to the London Plan (FALP), which sets housing levels below projected need, will create pressure on districts in the South East to supply overspill housing under the duty to cooperate (see CPRE London eBulletin for details of the FALP).

South East. In the South East, the report identifies a number of plans based on housing numbers at variance with national household projections:

Aylesbury Vale (-313 dwellings a year; plan withdrawn); Brighton and Hove (-233; ongoing); Cherwell (-18; ongoing); East Hampshire (+42; ongoing); Eastbourne (-440; sound); Gravesham (-210; ongoing); Hart (-164 ; withdrawn); Hastings (-160; sound); Medway (-65; withdrawn); Mid Sussex (-132; ongoing); Milton Keynes (+190 ; sound); Reigate & Banstead (-380; ongoing, see page 1); Rother (-342); Runnymede (-86); Shepway (-210; sound); South Oxfordshire (+107; sound); Southampton (-20); Waverley (-210; withdrawn); Wealden (-270; sound); West Berkshire (-364; sound); Winchester (+30; sound); Woking (-108; sound).

Where plans have been found sound despite having housing targets being below household projections, they have been usually been examined against the housing numbers in the former South East Plan. East Hampshire (1 year 10 months) and Rother (1 year 8 months) have both taken more than a year through examination. Medway has had to withdraw its plan due to its largest site at Lodge Hill being declared a SSSI for nightingales. Hart council is looking how to accommodate housing without damaging the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area .

Neighbourhood plans. Research by consultants Turley Associates found that 75% of neighbourhood plans are concentrated in southern England. Plans also tend to be concentrated in more affluent areas. Nearly a thousand neighbourhood areas have been applied for and 750 neighbourhood plans are underway. Just six plans have been adopted (made). . Nick Boles suggested the government will look at “whether there is not a version of neighbourhood planning that might be more easily accessible and quicker for some communities” . The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors has produced a guide to examination of neighbourhood plans .

NPPF Review

NPPF study. Research conducted by Cambridge University suggested that the government's planning performance targets were masking both good and bad performance . Some local planning authorities (LPAs) spend a lot of time on applications before the formal process begins, while others refuse some initial applications from developers and request resubmissions so they can meet the target times. “Housebuilders and LPAs said that there are some LPAs where it is expected by all parties that an application will go to appeal to get consent, where elected members do not want to make planning decisions and where local nimbysism is strong.” Communities select committee chair Clive Betts said: “A number of local authorities are exemplary according to the performance data but described as horrendous by those with first-hand experience of working with them.” .

NPPF inquiry. Following the Cambridge report, the communities and local government committee will examine how the NPPF has affected planning over the past two years and will look specifically at the impact on planning for housing, town centres and energy infrastructure. Submissions by 8 May .

Housing

Reviews. The government's independent review of the role of councils in housebuilding will be led by Natalie Elphicke, chair of *Million Homes Million Lives*, and Keith House, leader at Eastleigh Council. Their initial work will look at four areas:

- ◆ House building and new housing partnerships
- ◆ New ways of financing housing
- ◆ Accessing information and assets
- ◆ New freedoms, including the setting up of development companies and releasing land for development.

The call for evidence closes 23 May . A review for the Labour party led by Michael Lyons will focus on low-performing areas ‘locked by inertia’ .

Numbers. The Home Builders Federation said planning permission was granted for 52,534 new homes in the fourth quarter of last year, the highest total since the first three months of 2008. In 2013, 174,471 planning permissions were granted in England, the highest annual figure since 2007 . Savills said there will be a shortfall of 160,000 homes in the south of England over the next five years . The charity Empty Homes said the number of empty homes in England decreased by 75,000 to 635,127 in 2013 – the lowest level ever recorded .

Barker Review 10 Years On. The Housebuilders Federation said the housing shortfall has grown to one million homes. To reach Kate Barker's objective of ‘reducing the long-term trend’ and gradually pricing households back into the market would now require 260,000 private housing starts a year. Fifteen of Baker's 34 recommendations have been implemented in full and six in part,. Thirteen have not been implemented or have been since been abolished along with the regional strategies .

Landscapes and Environment

Biodiversity offsetting. The government published its response to the environmental audit committee inquiry into offsetting. It said it backs the [mitigation hierarchy](#). It does not rule out biodiversity offsetting for protected sites, suggesting: “more bespoke assessment approaches would be required where development could affect a SSSI or Natura 2000 site”. The introduction of the scheme is to be delayed until the current pilots are complete [P](#) [🏠](#) [🌿](#). The Guardian reported disappointing biodiversity offsetting results in Australia [g](#). Friends of the Earth said: “Rather than merely delaying its plans for risky offsetting, the government should listen to concerns about the lack of evidence and scrap them altogether” [🗳️](#).

Natural capital. The government’s Natural Capital Committee said the economic benefits of natural assets need to be incorporated into planning decision making. It said the UK needs a 25-year “landscape-scale plan” to take better account of the value provided by nature and reverse the decline in the environment. The committee said it is concerned that National Infrastructure Plan represents a threat to natural capital [P](#) [BG](#) [B&G](#) [👑](#). Friends of the Earth said: “Valuing our natural world means more than simply pricing it up – it’s fundamental to our future well-being, and far more must be done to protect it” [🗳️](#).

Environmental stewardship changes. Defra is consulting on the impacts on the environment of the proposed new Rural Development Programme in England. After much debate, 12% of CAP funds are being put aside for rural schemes; £3.5 billion a year. Of this, £400 million will be directed toward the rural economy and farm competitiveness. The remaining £3.1 billion will go into new environmental schemes. All farmers will have to implement a number of green measures to receive their basic payment from Defra, including maintenance of hedgerows, soil quality and drainage. Depending on the size of the holding, farmers will have to plant more than one crop. They will need to ensure that at least 5% of land is pasture and establish 5% of the holding as an ‘ecological focus area’. Farming leaders are already saying they will resist a rule that insists that farms larger than 30 hectares plant at least three crops, even if it means they get less EU money. Consultation closes 9 April [👑](#).

Bees and butterflies. The government has published for consultation a draft strategy aimed at safeguarding Britain’s bees and other under-threat pollinators. Friends of the Earth said that strategy is weak and fails to tackle extensive farming and insecticide use [👑](#) [🗳️](#) [FG](#). A University of Sussex study showed that roundabouts and road verges can easily be converted into flower-rich havens for bees and other wildlife by replacing grass with wild flowers [U](#). Farmland butterflies thrived last year after benefiting from the best summer weather for seven years [🌿](#). Sheep are being grazed in the South Downs National Park to protect fragile populations of Chalkhill blue and brown Argus butterflies [L](#).

Planning. To cope with budget cuts, the Environment Agency is to stop commenting on the biodiversity aspects of planning applications. Natural England said it did not have the resources to pick up the EA’s role [P](#). The European Environment Agency is proposing a new method for mapping green infrastructure [🗳️](#).

Green belt. The green belt in England decreased by 390 hectares (c. 960 acres) last year. Purbeck district added 400 ha of green belt, including sites where housing plans had been abandoned. Manchester removed 430 ha to expand the airport; Wakefield took 400 ha for housing and employment. Ealing changed 20 ha to Metropolitan Open Land, which has the same status as green belt under the London Plan [🏠](#). The high court ruled that Gedling Borough Council had wrongly failed to treat plans for a cemetery as “inappropriate” in the green belt [P](#) [L](#). Eric Pickles blocked 200 houses at Whitchurch in the Somerset green belt, despite the lack of a five year land supply. He said the plans “would harm national purposes in relation to urban sprawl and countryside encroachment, and the local purpose, in relation to the separate character of villages” [P](#). After discussions with communities department officials over the Boles letter, Gloucestershire planners are pressing ahead with plans to review the green belt for housing [L](#). Cheltenham campaign groups have formed *Save Our Countryside* to fight the core strategy and protect the green belt [L](#) [C](#).

Town greens. Defra has published guidance on village green trigger events, stages in the planning process that will prevent communities mounting a town green bid [P](#) [👑](#). Epping town council has had 170 questionnaires returned by campaigners wanting land in Stonards Hill to be registered as a village green [L](#).

Flooding. A report from the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management said dredging is appropriate in certain locations, particularly in heavily altered environments, but the main effort should be to slow water down in upper catchments to reduce the height and impact of flood peaks [🗳️](#).

Badgers. A report from the Independent Expert Panel on badger culling, said the culls carried out in Gloucestershire and Somerset failed to reach their targets and were often inhumane [FWI](#). Owen Paterson said the cull will continue and but it will not, in the short term, be expanded beyond Somerset and Gloucestershire [FWI](#) [FWI](#). The House of Commons Library has produced briefing notes on the cull and the earlier Krebs trials [🏠](#) [🏠](#) [🏠](#).

Farming. Owen Paterson supported a proposal to allow countries to grow GM crops, while allowing anti-GM countries to opt out. Defra said: “This change will only end the political deadlock that has blocked progress on GM cultivations in Europe for 15 years” [FWI](#).

Trees. The National Trust said the recent winter storms caused the greatest loss of trees in a generation [i](#). The Woodland Trust argued for a robust and open system to accurately record the loss of ancient woodland [🗳️](#). The Trust also launched a petition to protect Surrey’s ancient woodland [L](#). A Trust blog looked back at the roles of English Heritage and Natural England in the loss of part of Oaken Wood ancient woodland in Kent [🌿](#).

Heritage. English Heritage is consulting on the next National Heritage Protection Plan. Closes 2 May [🏠](#).

Pollution. The European Commission has launched legal proceedings against the UK for its failure to cut air pollution, particularly nitrogen dioxide [🗳️](#). A new iPhone app measures the brightness of the night sky. Its creators are working to compile a global, high resolution map of dark places and light polluted areas [🗳️](#).

Energy, Recycling and Waste

Lyveden New Bield. The appeal court refused to overturn a high court ruling that a planning inspector's approval of the Barnwell Manor windfarm in the setting of the Elizabethan landscape was fatally flawed [P](#) [C](#) [L](#) [T](#). Lord Justice Sullivan said at no stage did the inspector expressly acknowledge the need to give considerable weight to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings. The judges were particularly critical of the planning inspector's 'reasonable observer' test, where he had argued that as such an observer could tell the difference between a turbine and centuries old property and landscape, the harm to the setting of the heritage asset must be less than substantial. English Heritage, which had launched the high court action with East Northants council and the National Trust, welcomed the decision <#>. Following the ruling, Eric Pickles rejected a windfarm in Leicestershire which would be 400 metres away grade II listed St Bartholomew Church at Welby [P](#).

Budget. George Osborne announced the carbon price floor will be frozen at £18 per tonne of carbon dioxide until the end of the decade, instead of rising to around £30. A compensation package worth £3 billion will be available to some of the UK's most polluting energy intensive industries, which will not have to pay the renewables obligation or for feed-in tariffs [CB](#) [g](#).

Pyilons. National Grid appointed environmentalist Chris Baines to chair an independent Stakeholder Advisory Group which will identify projects to reduce the visual impact of existing electricity infrastructure in nationally protected landscapes [P](#). Power lines are being undergrounded at Thursley Common, Surrey [GS](#).

Renewables. The European Commission said that Britain is one of the worst performers in producing renewable energy. Britain has increased its renewable energy contribution from 1.2% to 4.2% over eight years but faces an 11.8% gap to meet European 2020 targets [i](#). Offshore windfarms are supported by three-quarters of the public, but fracking only gets 36% support [P](#). The planning approval rate for renewable energy installations in the UK has almost halved to from 77% to 42% in just three years. So far in 2014, 90 onshore wind applications have been decided; 22 were approved (24%). Of the 41 solar installations that were examined; 29 were approved (70%) [P](#). The amount of energy generated by wind grew from 5.5% in the mix in 2012 to 7.7% in 2013. Low carbon generation now accounts for 32.7% of the UK's supply, up from 29.4% in 2012 [P](#).

Climate change. A Mori survey revealed that 75% of people believe it's wrong to say human activity is not significantly affecting the climate. Most believe the benefits of tackling climate change outweigh the risks [CB](#). David Cameron has said that man-made climate change is one of the greatest threats to the UK and the rest of the world [E](#). The IPCC published the second volume of its three-part report on the impact of climate change. It said that everyone will be affected as flooding and rising sea levels impact on the economy, water use becomes restricted, and extreme heat events damage health [P](#).

Fracking. A global study of oil and gas drilling wells by Durham University found that wells do fail and risks of leaks into fresh-water aquifers exist, but there is little data to assess the risks in the UK [G](#). East Kent Against Fracking said applications should not be granted in flood-risk areas [KO](#). The National Trust, the RSPB, the wildlife trusts and others called for protected wildlife areas, nature reserves and national parks to be frack-free zones. They want full environmental assessments to be carried out for each drilling proposal, and for the shale gas industry to pay the costs of its regulation and any pollution clean-ups [C](#) [i](#) [RSPB](#). Sussex Wildlife Trust called for a ban on fracking in national parks and sensitive areas [L](#). Wildlife groups including RSPB have raised fears that fracking could cause water pollution and harm wildlife in Hampshire [HC](#). Legal group Eversheds looked in detail at attempts by Greenpeace and others to implement a "legal block" to stop shale gas extraction by refusing permission to drill under houses [P](#).

Wind. The Scottish government has approved two adjacent offshore wind farm applications in the outer Moray Firth [E](#). Energy companies have abandoned plans to expand the London Array, citing the need to assess the impact of the scheme on the red throated diver under a **Grampian condition** put in place to protect the Thames Estuary special protection area [i](#) [E](#) [P](#) [g](#). Donald Trump lost his legal bid against the Scottish government's approval of a windfarm offshore from his Aberdeen golf course [E](#). North Norfolk District Council won a high court challenge against plans for an 86-metre high wind turbine, which it said would spoil the setting of valued local buildings and monuments [P](#) [T](#). Energy companies are lobbying against plans to ban windfarms from wild land in Scotland [C](#). A study says that tourism in Wales has not been affected by windfarm development [P](#) [T](#). A survey by the Mountaineering Council of Scotland finds two-thirds of people think turbines are making Scotland a less appealing place to visit [C](#) [P](#). The Commons Library has published a briefing on planning for onshore windfarms in England [P](#).

Roundup. The UN said there is a "profound suspicion of non-compliance" with the UN convention on trans-boundary environmental impacts over the planned Hinkley Point C nuclear plant [P](#). The government has announced a major investment in the world's first gas-fired carbon capture and storage (CCS) facility to be constructed in Peterhead, Scotland [E](#). Tidal lagoon power plants placed off Britain's shores could provide renewable energy significantly cheaper than energy sourced from offshore wind farms [B&G](#). Over half of UK adults (51%) said they would be motivated to get involved in a community energy project if it would save money on their energy bill, but only 2% have so far joined a scheme [P](#). Residents of Balcombe, once under threat from fracking, have set up a community company to supply the area with solar energy [C](#) [BBC](#).

Transport

National Networks Policy Statement. In its response to the government consultation, CPRE said the statement does not pay sufficient regard to flood risks. The plan requires new infrastructure to be flood proof, but completely fails to consider the need to upgrade existing infrastructure, in particular the rail network, which is increasingly at risk of flooding, coastal erosion or land slips. Ralph Smyth, transport campaigner for CPRE said: “Why isn’t government seeking to improve infrastructure that already exists before beginning a massive road building programme that is set to tear up the countryside?” He said the government’s new transport strategy must revitalise or build diversionary routes on the rail network to mitigate major disruption caused by floods [RE](#).

Rail. The government announced that Crossrail will be extended west from Maidenhead to Reading [SO](#) [Gr](#) [S](#).

Roads. A survey by road safety charity Brake and Allianz Insurance, found that 78% of people think 20mph speed limits should be the norm around schools, on residential streets, and in village, town and city centres [□](#).

Cycling. The numbers cycling to work in major cities has soared, but 348 local authorities in England and Wales, saw a decline in cycling in 2012, the Office for National Statistics said. Across England and Wales, the number of regular cycle commuters increased by 90,000 to 741,000, but this was balanced by an increase in the working population. The proportion of people who cycle to work remained static at 2.8% over the ten years to 2011 [T](#) [S](#).

Airports

Heathrow. A fourth runway at the UK’s London Heathrow would cause “conflicting arrival and departure flows” and significantly reduce the number of flights in the country’s South East, according to analysis by NATS, the air traffic control service. It says building a fourth runway in West London would reduce the combined capacity of all the region’s airports [T](#). As its consultation closed, Heathrow admitted the airport’s proposed third runway was “divisive” [ES](#).

Gatwick is to offer noise-affected households an annual payment of £1,000 if a second runway is built [S](#) [FT](#) [C](#). It launched *Gatwick Obviously*, a £7 billion plan for a second runway and new terminals [S](#) [X](#). It says that the future lies in short haul and a hub airport is not needed [FT](#). The airport is currently seeking views on second runway options. Closes 16 May [TA](#) [L](#) [X](#). The options are:

Option 1: a new runway 585m south of the existing runway with one runway used for landings and the other for take-offs.

Option 2: a new runway 1,045m south of the existing runway with one runway used for landings and the other for take-offs, and a new terminal between the runways.

Option 3: a new runway 1,045m south of the existing runway with both runways used for landings and take-offs, and a new terminal between the runways.



Kent. Lydd Airport has appointed Capita to design and manage its runway extension [KN](#). Loss-making Manston could close within weeks [BBC](#) [BBC](#) [L](#). Thanet council called for the Discovery Park Enterprise Zone to be extended to cover the airport [L](#).

Notes from the Commons Library look at the history of regional airports [□](#) and historic attempts to build an airport in the Thames Estuary [□](#).

Communities and Campaigning

Community rights. A government report, *Open Public Services 2014*, highlighted that by the end of January 2014, 52% of local planning authorities had adopted a local plan, some 880 communities were working on neighbourhood plans and around 900 communities had made use of the new Community Right to Bid regime. This had resulted in the sale of 57 community assets being put on hold for an initial six-month period. There were six cases where the community had purchased the asset directly [C](#) [LGI](#). Griff Rhys Jones of Civic Voice said too few communities using powers to protect their local assets [□](#). The First-Tier Tribunal has upheld a council’s decision to list a Shropshire pub shut since 2012 as an asset of community value [P](#).

Localism Alliance. Civic Voice, CAMRA, National Association of Local Councils, The Theatres Trust and Supporters Direct have launched the Localism Alliance to help communities embrace the powers available to them to protect local community assets [□](#).

CPRE is seeking nominations for countryside and litter heroes. Closing dates 4/11 April [RE](#). Tom McDonald, chairman of CPRE Worcester from 2003-07 has died [L](#).

The CPRE eBulletins

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