

CPRE South East Focus



It's Panic not Planning

The economy is at best sluggish. Cue another attack on the planning system. But even ministers admit they do not know whether the house extension free-for-all will boost the economy. Like house building, the main issue will be lack of finance in an era when loans are hard to get and the ability to repay them even harder. My view is that the home extension amnesty is only being brought in to sweep thousands of minor householder appeals from the workload of the Planning Inspectorate 

By all accounts the Planning Inspectorate is going to be busy. It has been told to rush through "major economic and housing related appeals" and to reassess affordable housing commitments for stalled developments. From next year, it will take over all planning decisions in any local council that is deemed to be poorly performing by Eric Pickles. Once legislation is place, inspectors will also decide on planning applications for all manner of major developments. There are no details yet, but no one would be surprised if major housing schemes like the controversial Barton Farm estate will in future get sent directly to the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol on their way to Eric Pickles for rubber stamping. The size of schemes that will be affected is likely to be at the whim of ministers and not defined in legislation.

Announcing the changes, Eric Pickles claimed: "The imposition of regional strategies built nothing but resentment." Maybe, but the unhurried pace of the abolition of regional strategies means that their detested housing targets will be incorporated into the large majority of local plans. Will, for example, Horsham get away with lower housing targets than the South East Plan? Probably not. If it does not get its local plan in place quickly, housing will be imposed on the district by planning inspectors who will cite the presumption in favour of sustainable development and South East Plan targets. Arun District Council has taken the innovative approach of planning for both the South East Plan target of 565 dwellings a year and its own ambition of 400 homes. But will planning inspectors accept its dual approach? It looks unlikely after Salford's core strategy hearing was suspended after an inspector objected to the council planning for lower housing targets than in the regional strategy. The real power in planning, once appropriated by the regional assemblies, now lies in Temple Quay, Bristol.

Does this mean the end of localism? Talking to community groups around the country, I find almost universal enthusiasm for neighbourhood planning. What a shame that that passion is no longer being matched by a government that is increasingly panicking about economic recovery not planning for it.

Andy Boddington

CPRE Surrey reacted angrily after plans for an exclusive golf course and luxury hotel at Cherkley Court were given the final go-ahead by Mole Valley District Council. Director Andy Smith said: "We're talking to our legal advisers and we're in the process of putting the funding in place for a legal challenge. It is quite wrong that the Local Plan can be flouted, the council's own planning officers ignored and the advice of such a wide range of environmental experts completely disregarded. We cannot allow this precious and sensitive area of Surrey countryside to be wrecked for the sake of a few hundred rich golfers" 

CPRE Surrey chairman Tim Murphy wrote to local MPs about proposed planning changes saying: "We are most concerned that existing green belt land in Surrey could be 'swapped' for other land, presumably further from London. This would fundamentally undermine the basis of green belts. There's not a shred of evidence that it's the planning system that slows down the economy or that investors are poised to pour money into the country as soon as planning restrictions are lifted. The whole idea is complete nonsense" 

CPRE Sussex. Roger Smith from CPRE Horsham and Crawley condemned plans for 10,000 houses on fields near Henfield in West Sussex. He warned: "Should this proposal be permitted it would transform a substantial and rural part of our district into a new Milton Keynes, with the consequent loss of much needed farmland and a huge increase in the district's population" 

CPRE Hampshire Countryside Awards. Wildlife friendly farmers **Steve's Leaves** sponsored the 2012 awards, run in conjunction with Hampshire Fare and Hampshire Ambassadors. The awards were:

Voluntary and Community. **Buriton Chalk Pit** was once a thriving industrial site. It is now rich in biodiversity, and managed by a part-time ranger and volunteers for the local community.

Young People. Field to Fork run by Hampshire Country Learning in the North Wessex Downs AONB introduces children and adults to local farmers to learn about food production and countryside management.

Rural Enterprise. **Wildflower Turf** of Overton provided the flowering turf for this year's Olympics opening ceremony. This category is supported by **Smiths Gore**.

The judges decided to make a special award to **Andover Trees United**, recognising its work linking generations of school children with the countryside through the practical work of cultivating trees in their own woodland.



CPRE Hampshire award winners and sponsors

Planning under Attack – Again

Planning gains waived. Legislation will be introduced, to be effective in early 2013, to “allow any developer of sites which are unviable because of the number of affordable homes, to appeal with immediate effect.” The Planning Inspectorate will be “instructed to assess how many affordable homes would need to be removed from the S106 agreement for the site to be viable in current economic conditions” . Developers and councils are at best lukewarm about the changes  . The new planning minister Nick Boles admitted that 10,000 fewer affordable houses will be built as a result of the waiver agreements .

Planning permission extended. The government will allow developers with planning permissions granted on or before 1 October 2010 to extend that permission .

Planning power goes to Bristol. Eric Pickles said the government proposes to legislate to allow planning applications to be decided by the Planning Inspectorate where “the local authority has a track record of consistently poor performance in the speed or quality of its decisions” . The government will also consult on options to speed up planning appeals, including a new fast-track procedure for “some small commercial appeals.” The Planning Inspectorate has been directed “with immediate effect to divert resources to prioritise all major economic and housing related appeals.” The government also intends to review and lower the thresholds for nationally significant infrastructure projects, and to bring new categories of commercial and business development into the regime. This means that small wind farms, local road schemes and even housing developments could be classified as nationally significant and decided by the Planning Inspectorate and Eric Pickles .

Extensions. The government announced that it will bring in a year-long relaxation in planning rules outside conservation areas. Conservatories and single storey extensions will be allowed to extend six to eight metres at the rear of a house without planning permission. Currently the limit is three metres. Shops will be able to expand by 100 square metres and industrial units by 200 square metres, up to the boundary of the premises without planning permission .

Reaction. Richmond on Thames council has agreed to oppose the proposals . Wandsworth, Sutton, East Lindsey and Lincolnshire councils are also angry with the plans   . Eric Pickles dismissed the councils’ objections to what he called a “very reasoned, very civilised and very straightforward change” . More than half the public think the plans for extensions to homes would damage the quality of the design of their neighbourhood  . RTPI president Colin said claims that the planning system is holding back economic growth are a “ridiculous criticism” .

Broadband cabinets and wirescapes. The department for culture announced that broadband street cabinets can be installed in any location other than a site of special scientific interest without planning permission. The new rules, which will apply for five years, will not allow “any conditions being placed upon the construction or design by local authorities except in exceptional circumstances.” The change will also allow overhead broadband lines to be installed in any area without permission. The Local Government Association accused ministers of “riding roughshod” over local views     .

Green Belt under Attack – Again

Green belt swaps. After George Osborne called for more green belt land to be developed, providing substitute land is put in place, the Telegraph looked at Trumpington in the Cambridge green belt. It also suggested that developers are amassing large tranches of green belt in the hope of building on it in the future . In the Telegraph, Ed West said “Bulldozing the green belt is short-termist – England is not just a balance sheet but somewhere to live too” (includes a photo of CPRE Surrey) . The new Green Party leader Natalie Bennett said: “We don’t need to build on the green belt” . Planning academic Alistair Scott commented: “the idea of knee jerk reactions such as the sudden relaxation of green belts creates huge uncertainty – the real enemy of enterprise” .

Policy Exchange. In yet another report attacking the planning system and the green belt, the Policy Exchange said that new urban developments could be built near existing cities “without causing political turmoil.” The think tank claimed releasing 2% of English land for development would allow for the building of an extra 8m homes. It called for self-build schemes, new urban developments near existing cities, and garden cities that are supported by local people to be allowed outside of the existing planning system. To ease opposition to development, residents should be compensated for nearby housebuilding: “Compensation and incentives need to go to the right level. This is not councils. Instead, it should be those who are directly adjacent and in the immediate vicinity”    . Rumours are circulating that if Policy Exchange reports demanding the green belt be built over are placed side by side they would cover an area the size of Slough.

Brownfield priority in green belt. New planning minister Nick Boles, a founder of Policy Exchange, told the Commons: “There are certain sites within the green belt that are currently brownfield, and it is important and right for local authorities to try to bring them forward for development. Not all the green belt is beautiful green fields. Some of it is... a quarry or has some other brownfield use. It is important to focus on bringing those sites forward first before thinking of anything further.” CPRE’s Shaun Spiers said: “We would have hoped for much stronger defence of the green belt”   . Also in the Commons, Eric Pickles said: “The green belt is immensely important. It is a green lung and prevents major conurbations from bumping into one another.” He also highlighted the importance of developing brownfield sites in the green belt . Deputy prime minister Nick Clegg told the Hampshire press: “I really think that the fears that some councils have got that either the government is pointing the finger at them, or that we are trying to get lots of homes built on virgin green belt land, neither of those things are true. All we are trying to do is kick start developments where permission has been granted” .

CPRE South East eBulletin is written and edited by Andy Boddington. To receive a regular copy or to alert us to news, please email cprenews@gmail.com. Views expressed in the eBulletin and its editorial approach are those of its editor and not any part of CPRE.. Just click on [blue text](#) or a button  to read cited articles. Blue buttons link to free articles, brown buttons to sources that require registration, even a fee. Government sources are grey and green groups are equally predictably green.

Planning in the South East

Energy. A bid by Europa Oil and Gas for “exploratory drilling” in Bury Hill Woods, Coldharbour in Surrey has been rejected by a planning inspector **L**. The appeal decision casts doubt over whether exploration, rather than extraction, is allowable in the green belt under the NPPF **PI**. The Financial Times reported that the plan “was initially supported by planning officials. However, a campaign among local residents that was backed by the National Trust and Campaign to Protect Rural England led to the initial go-ahead to drilling being overturned by the county council’s planning committee last year” **F1**. Plans to build a nuclear waste plant on Romney Marsh in Kent have been rejected by Shepway Council councillors after a survey found 63% of residents were against it **BBC**.

Regeneration. An outline planning application drawn up by architect Sir Terry Farrell has been submitted for the redevelopment of Folkestone harbour and seafront in Kent **P O**. Eric Pickles has approved the £650 million Chatham Waters brownfield scheme of homes, offices, hotel and conference centre, food store and landscaped public areas **BBC O**. More than £25m is to be invested in the Solent Enterprise Zone at Daedalus **O**. Whitehill & Bordon eco-town is to open its Eco-station and Exhibition House on 17 October **O**.



Local plans. Planning inspector Michael Moore is examining whether the ban on development within seven kilometres of the Ashdown Forest might lead to the decline of neighbouring towns and villages **L**.

Neighbourhood planning. Cuckfield villagers are “ecstatic” after Mid Sussex District Council threw out plans for 22 houses. The scheme conflicts with the emerging neighbourhood plan and would damage views of the South Downs. Parish council chairman Nigel Page said he thought it was the first time locally and possibly nationally that views submitted by a neighbourhood planning team had been taken into account **L**. A speculative development of 400 homes east of Thame in Oxfordshire also looks likely to be rejected because the emerging neighbourhood plan **L**. Harspden near Henley on Thames is considering developing a neighbourhood plan in the hope of reducing proposed housing levels **L**. Councillors in South Oxfordshire are concerned about the high level of housing proposed in the Chilterns AONB **L**. Adderbury in Oxfordshire is one of the latest villages to commence a neighbourhood plan **L**.

Glasshouses. Horticulture Week said the glasshouse industry fears a spiral of decline following Madestein’s failed expansion bid in at Almodington in Sussex. The Cucumber Growers Association said: “Most planning authorities don’t understand protected horticulture... and won’t give permission on greenfield. But these days you need to be thinking of 4-5ha developments and the old glasshouse sites are usually too small” **O O**.

Planning

Regional strategies. The communities department has published its strategic environmental assessment for the revocation of the Yorkshire and the Humber regional strategy. It says the revocation may lead to a “significant negative effect on the special character and setting of York in the short-medium term due to revocation of the action to define the boundaries of the York Green Belt.” The region’s “biodiversity resource could [also] be adversely impacted by direct or secondary effects from housing development, particularly in relation to loss of Green Belt, and transport.” The government is proposing to retain the part of the plan protecting the green belt until the York Local Plan is adopted. Consultation closes 26 November **GO**. The communities department is still unable to give a date for publication of the strategic environmental assessment for the South East Plan.

Regional data is no more. From the end of October, the communities department will no longer collate or publish data based on the EU’s regions. Data will be gathered for Local Enterprise Partnership boundaries, to complement existing statistics gathered by local authorities **GO**.

Flags. Eric Pickles has announced a liberalisation in the planning regime for flying flags **PP**. The scheme will allow regional flags to be flown.

NPPF £40K ‘cooling off’. The civil servant who oversaw the drafting of the NPPF joined Capita Symonds, which advises major developers on planning and construction, last Autumn after being paid more than £40,000 to sit at home ‘cooling off’ **TC**.

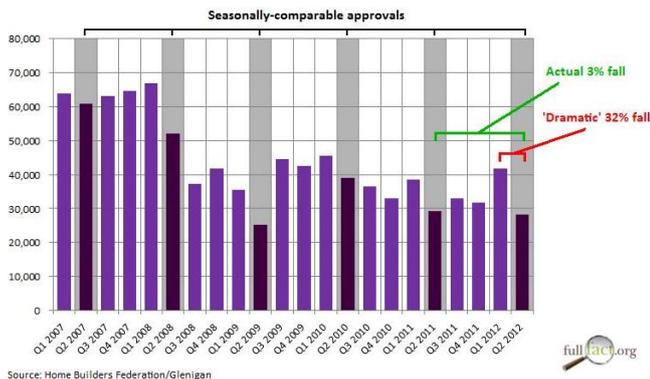
Councils. Planning authorities will now have to include a statement in decision notices explaining “how, in dealing with the application, the local planning authority have worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner based on seeking solutions to problems arising in relation to dealing with a planning application” **GO**. Eric Pickles urged planning departments to merge with adjoining authorities when they “simply cannot cope” **O**.

Local plans. Housing supply continues to dominate hearings into core strategies and local plans. An inspector has suspended the examination of Salford City Council’s core strategy, warning that it is unsound as it does not demonstrate an “adequate and realistically deliverable” supply of housing land” **P**. Wiltshire council has been told to reconsult on its core strategy, including its late and controversial amendment on minimum distances between wind farms and housing **L**.

Best practice. A good-practice guide on sustainable development under the NPPF has been compiled by the Building Research Establishment, the Town and Country Planning Association and the Royal Town Planning Institute **O**. A revised version of the Building for Life design guide has been published to take into account the NPPF and the Localism Act **O**. The Town and Country Planning Association says Strategic Land and Infrastructure Contract (SLICs) are the key to delivering garden cities and suburbs **24**.

Infrastructure. The Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Bill had its second reading. It does not define the size thresholds for infrastructure that will be assisted; these will be defined in regulations **O PP**. Treasury Secretary Danny Alexander admitted that the fund could be used to build a third Heathrow runway **PA**.

Housing



Housing unit planning permissions 2007-2012

Dramatic Slump in Housebuilding? Developers and the spectres of the green belt made hay of claims earlier in the month that housing approvals 'slumped' by 32% in the second quarter of this year. The news neatly coincided with George Osborne's renewed attack on planning rules. However, Full Fact said the fall was just 3%, not 32%. Also on Full Fact, Andy Boddington said that more than 10,000 of the fall was due to a lack of big projects being approved in London, and this was within the normal range of variability in the capital [M](#) [P](#) [FT](#) [I](#).

High-density developments can generate higher feelings of safety and better neighbourly behaviour than lower density housing schemes, according to research published by developer Berkeley Group. Knowle Village, near Portsmouth was one of the case studies [P](#) [O](#).

Initiatives. A report by the Housing Voice alliance called for £5 billion of quantitative easing cash to be used to build homes across England, for a £3 billion increase in funding for social housing, and for the housing minister to be given a seat in the cabinet [H](#) [O](#). New housing minister Mark Prisk committed to trying to set out a longer-term plan for funding housing [H](#).

Housing the South East. Campaigners cheered as a plan for 200 homes on the edge of Basingstoke was unanimously thrown out by councillors [L](#). Cala Homes has finally been given the go ahead to build 2,000 homes, 800 affordable, at Barton Farm, a greenfield site on the northern edge of Winchester [BBC](#).

Campaigning

Social media. After the success of #riotcleanup in dealing with the aftermath of the 2011 riots, instigator Dan Thompson has launched #wewillgather which aims to build community action through Twitter [T](#) [F](#).

Meadows. The Hampshire based Grasslands Trust is to be wound up [O](#). The Bishop's Meadow Trust campaign to preserve a threatened 30-acre beauty spot in Farnham, Surrey has been named winner of the first Open Space Award [O](#).

Break the Bag Habit. A poll found that 56% of English adults think a 5p carrier bag charge is not unreasonable even in a time of austerity. Samantha Harding of CPRE asked: "Why, in the face of hard evidence, public and retailer support is the government still stalling on an English bag charge?" [G](#). Seven in 10 Welsh shoppers support the 5p levy which has raised thousands for charity [H](#). The Welsh environment minister John Griffiths urged England to introduce carrier bag charge [G](#). The Lib Dems voted in favour of a 10p charge on single use carrier bags [O](#) [H](#).

Landscapes, Food and Farming

High streets. In an open letter to David Cameron, the British Council of Shopping Centres called on the government to take action and enable investment on Britain's High Streets, now at "their lowest ebb for 30 years". It said the slimmed down National Planning Policy Framework remained "inconsistent at best" [O](#). Mary Portas has questioned the Government's commitment to the Portas Pilots and her other recommendations: "I question if this is a PR stunt," she said. "Are they genuinely putting town centres first?" [O](#).

Designations Strategy. Natural England has adopted a strategy with the aim of dealing with wildlife and the environment in a more joined up way. It is to review the "extent and diversity of the current series of AONBs and national parks to help establish where there is scope for future new designations." The review will seek to establish if national parks and AONBs included an adequate diversity of landscape types but it is unlikely to lead to a rush of new AONB designations [P](#) [M](#).

Heritage. Protect our Place is a Civic Voice research project to understand the different types of current community action taking place to protect and promote England's local heritage [O](#).

Light pollution. The Hampshire areas of the South Downs and New Forest national parks are to have LED street lights to restore views of star-filled night skies [L](#) [L](#). Chris Lewis, Chairman of CPRE Somerset welcomed the county's plans to turn off and remove street lights [O](#). See also NASA's video of earth at night from space [O](#).

Natural Childhood. The National Trust found that many children hear from parents that the outdoors is dangerous and they shouldn't go out in the rain in case they "slip or catch a cold". It found that council officials and police sometimes have negative attitudes and regard outdoor play as "something to be stopped rather than encouraged" [H](#) [M](#). CPRE President Andrew Motion urged townies to get out into the country and "hug an animal" [H](#).

Woodland. Campaigners are asking why Defra has failed to set up the promised National Forestry Stakeholder Forum [O](#). The Woodland Trust warned deadly fungus in ash trees could be the next Dutch elm disease [T](#). Scotland's native Caledonian pinewoods are threatened by disease. "It is too late for the British native larch" one horticulturalist predicted [BBC](#) [H](#).

Biodiversity. Wildlife charity Pond Conservation announced Phase 2 of its national Million Ponds Project, aiming to create 30,000 clean water ponds over the next seven years [M](#). The commons environmental audit committee is to ask ministers why the mounting evidence of neonicotinoid pesticides causing serious harm to bees is not leading to action [G](#). Natural England issued licences for the badger cull in West Gloucestershire amid arguments between farmers [T](#) [G](#) [T](#) [T](#) [T](#).



A sketch of 'London Britannia Airport' [O](#) [H](#).

Rural Affairs

The Rural Statement. New Defra secretary Owen Paterson sought to boost his department's rural credentials with a new rural contract and a sweep of largely recycled policy announcements [G](#) [G](#). The Rural Statement highlighted superfast broadband delivery, rural business grants and Rural Growth Networks as the route to rural economic growth. Paterson said: "We've created the first 'rural contract' to give rural areas the power to hold us to account on our promise to grow the rural economy and support thriving rural communities" [G](#). Neil Sinden for CPRE criticised the environmental credentials of the statement: "As with much of current government thinking, the statement is limited by its assumption that economic development is unrelated to the natural environment" [RE](#) [O](#).

Neighbourhood planning. As part of the Rural Statement, Defra announced a research project into neighbourhood planning in rural areas. The project will identify examples of communities using neighbourhood planning to deliver positive changes for rural towns and villages [O](#). Villagers in Ampleforth, Yorkshire have voted against large-scale greenfield developments in a bespoke poll organised by Ryedale District Council [L](#).

Enterprise. This year's bad weather has cost rural businesses at least £1 billion [BBC](#). A report for the Carnegie Trust said ministers' plans to revitalise rural areas risk creating a "two-speed economy" in which poor, remote communities are left behind while more affluent areas, such as commuter villages, surge ahead [C](#) [O](#). A survey of local councillors found that local enterprise partnerships are being hampered by low levels of private sector involvement [O](#).

The Roads Protests are Back



Protest camp and rally 29-30 September
Photo: Coombe Haven Defenders [O](#)

Bexhill-Hastings. Protest group Combe Haven Defenders is organising an "animal uprising" against George Osborne's Roads to Nowhere – the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road in particular – outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London this Friday (5 October) at 9.15am [O](#). The Hastings Alliance will be inside the court to hear the results of its judicial review into the scheme [O](#). Over a weekend, 200 people attended the "Stop the Road" camp and rally [O](#).

Twyford Down. Campaigners – 'Dongas' – met to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the campaign to save Twyford Down. They said the "government has forgotten the lessons they were taught at places like Twyford Down. Major road-building is slow, expensive and disastrous for the environment" [G](#) [L](#). The Sunday Times headlined: "Rash of road plans stirs Swampy spirit" [O](#).

Aviation Capacity

A triad of inquiries. There are now three parallel inquiries into aviation capacity:

Davies Commission. Sir Howard Davies has been appointed by David Cameron to head an independent commission into airport capacity in the south east. New transport secretary Patrick McLoughlin said the commission will identify options for "maintaining this country's status as an international hub for aviation" and will examine the "scale and timing" of requirements for additional airport capacity [G](#) [O](#) [PP](#). It will provide an interim report by the end of 2013 setting out the nature, scale and timing of the measures needed to maintain the UK's global hub status. The report will also recommend immediate actions to improve use of existing runway capacity. The commission will publish its final report by summer 2015, after the next election [G](#).

Moylan inquiry. Boris Johnson has appointed his aide Daniel Moylan, a proponent of a Thames Estuary airport, to head a second inquiry [LES](#) [O](#). Howard Davies called on Johnson to work with him rather than separately [O](#).

Parliament. The commons transport committee has announced an inquiry into the Government's aviation strategy which will focus on aviation capacity. Among the questions it will examine is whether the current strategy makes the best use of existing capacity at airports outside the south east [G](#) [LES](#).

Reaction. Adam Corner of Cardiff University said: "We should be asking how we can reduce the need for more airport capacity, not just pondering where we should put the new runway" [G](#). Angie Bray MP for Ealing Central & Acton and Windsor MP Adam Afriyie vowed to fight third runway plans [L](#) [L](#). Zac Goldsmith complained: "Always on the lookout for the quick answer, the government appears to have been seduced by vested interest" [G](#). Richmond-upon-Thames council is to hold a referendum on Heathrow expansion before May 2013 [BBC](#). Boris Johnson suggested he might hold a London wide referendum on Heathrow [G](#) [L](#) [C](#). The 2M group of local authorities claimed that allowing a third runway at Heathrow will inevitably lead to a fourth being built [L](#). See also [BBC](#) [G](#).

High Speed 2

Carbon impacts. Radio decarbonisation of the electricity supply is a prerequisite for HS2 making substantial carbon savings, says an industry sponsored report commissioned by CPRE, RSPB and the Campaign for Better Transport. CPRE's transport campaigner Ralph Smyth warned that if stations were located in greenfield sites poorly served by public transport, the system would not only fail to reduce carbon emissions but would also have lower economic benefits [O](#) [BG](#) [O](#).

Other impacts. The Stop HS2 Alliance has criticised the way that noise impact of the line will be assessed [L](#). The Alliance also claimed that existing train services are set to be axed to deliver £7.7 billion in savings from the existing network as part of the HS2 business case [O](#) [O](#) [O](#).

The consultation. Buckinghamshire MPs David Lidington and Cheryl Gillan urged Patrick McLoughlin to reopen the consultation into HS2 after responses went missing [L](#) [L](#). The DfT confirmed the number of overlooked consultation responses has risen to 1,135 [L](#). Gillan said: "We, literally, cannot afford to pour good money after bad, in the hope of an economic miracle" [L](#).

HS2 Next steps. High Speed 2 chairman Douglas Oakervee confirmed that HS2 remained on track to move ahead with plans for the second, northern extension despite the change in transport secretary in the recent government reshuffle. Justine Greening had been about to produce a hybrid bill for phase 2 before being moved to DfID **O**. Patrick McLoughlin told the commons transport committee he hoped to publish the preferred route of Phase 2 of the project by the end of the year **O**. He has also suggested he could reroute HS2 towards Heathrow if the aviation inquiry recommends a third runway, moving the line away from the Chilterns AONB **T**.

Energy, Water and Waste

People. Lord Deben, John Gummer, has been appointed chairman of the Committee on Climate Change **W**. Lord de Mauley has been appointed parliamentary under-secretary of state at Defra with responsibility for waste and climate change **W**. The 2012 Social Attitudes survey revealed that 76% of UK adults believe climate change is happening & that humans are at least partly responsible **O**. Only 37% think people should be able to fly as much as they like if it means new runways & terminals **O**.

Renewables. "UK renewable energy output jumps by 42%" screams the Guardian headline, before admitting in the small print that output increased by only 6.5%. Capacity however is up by 42% - let the wind blow! **g BG**.

National wind. Energy Secretary Ed Davey announced that communities that host onshore wind farms could benefit from reduced electricity bills and investment in local infrastructure. He launched a call for evidence on how communities can become more engaged in, and benefit from, nearby wind farms. He will review whether wind subsidies are at the 'correct level'. Closes 15 November **W W PP**. CPRE warned the government against promoting a system in which communities were "paid off" to secure planning permission. Tom Leveridge said: "This would fundamentally undermine a core principle of the planning system – that planning permission should not be bought or sold – and put the countryside at greater risk from poorly sited wind developments" **g W T #**.

Local wind. Cambridge Airport is to install wind turbine detecting radar, a technology that will help new onshore wind farms secure planning approval **BG**. Residents in Helmdon in south Northamptonshire have pledged to raise £40,000 to help fund a judicial review of a decision to approve the construction of five wind turbines. South Northamptonshire Council is also to launch a legal challenge **L O L L**. Mountaineering groups are seeking a moratorium on turbine construction on the munros and corbetts of Scotland **O**. Tests on the country's biggest onshore wind farm at Fullbrook in North Devon have shown that it is too noisy **L LG**.

Pylons. At a packed anti-pylon meeting in Shropshire, new Defra Secretary Owen Paterson declared that he had a brief to examine how government policy – especially windfarms and pylons – on the rural economy and environment **L**. Paterson is an acknowledged wind farm sceptic **T**. The National Grid said that the UK could be free of energy imports by the 2020s **BG**.

Green government. The UK Green Building Council issued a critical assessment scoring the Coalition government against 10 policies, including the Green Deal, zero carbon new buildings and the planning system – which was marked at C minus **O BG**.

Solar. The number of homes installing solar panels has fallen dramatically following a cut in subsidy rates by the government **g**. A DECC assessment of the impact of the planned cut in subsidy for large solar installations suggests that gas plants may be built instead of solar farms **BG O**.

Fracking. A report from the Institute of Directors claimed that British shale gas could create 35,000 jobs, reduce carbon emissions and reduce energy prices **O BG**. The Institution of Mechanical Engineers predicted fracking will create 1,300 jobs a year in Lancashire alone and 4,200 jobs nationwide **BBC**. But an industry report suggested that fracking will not be a cheap source of energy and will not transform the economy as it has in the US. Commenting on the report the Financial Times said: "Protests in Lancashire could be dwarfed by those in the south-east: the report reveals rich shale gas potential across the Weald area in Sussex and Hampshire and a broad sweep from Cambridge through Oxford and down to Bath." Licences for the Cotswolds and Somerset are now being auctioned **FT** (see also **i**). A planning application for the UK's first large scale fracking operation near Falkirk has been submitted **O**. In the Guardian, Damian Carrington looked at the arguments for fracking and concluded: "it's not so much a silver bullet as a lead balloon" **g** (see also fracking in the USA **g**).

Gas. Ed Davey announced that twenty gas-fired power stations are planned for the UK **g**. The CBI said large-scale deployment of new gas plants will jeopardise carbon targets **BG**. The Committee on Climate Change agreed, telling the prime minister that a rush to gas would break legally binding climate targets **T BG**.

Coal-fired Didcot A power station, waste from which was once set to destroy Radley Lakes, is to close in 2013 **i**.

Nuclear. The Hinkley Point C examination closed and a decision is expected within six months **O**.

Conference Watch: Lib Dems

Planning. Activists voted almost unanimously in favour of scrapping the latest proposals for planning reform, complaining they go against the spirit of the Localism Act and will encourage more neighbourhood disputes. Local government minister Don Foster said the reforms are "not a done deal" **T W i P**.

Transport. The Lib Dems said no to Boris Island and no to new runways at Heathrow, Gatwick or Stansted airports. They called for better use of existing capacity in the South East and at regional airports to meet short and medium term demand. They want a search for a new hub airport, possibly in the home counties **LES O W**. Transport Minister Norman Baker said that HS2 will be good for the environment and pledged to press ahead **L**.

Housing. Deputy leader Simon Hughes called for 300,000 new homes a year. A 'vacant land tax' would be levied on developers to encourage the use of sites for which planning consent had been granted but where building had not commenced. He said: "We must use planning controls to restrict purchases of homes for investment for profit when they are then kept empty and people can't use them to live in" **g IH**.

Green. Nick Clegg and Ed Davey promised to hold the Tories to green policies **BG BG**. The party adopted motions to decarbonise the energy sector by 2030 and permit the Green Investment Bank to borrow immediately **BG g**.