



## Defoliating the "Greenest Government Ever"

*The notable shift to the right in yesterday's cabinet reshuffle surprised no one. It brings with it very mixed news for those passionate about the countryside, environment and climate change. Labour called it the "no change" reshuffle but the reality is that the coalition has been stripped of almost all its remaining green leaves.*

*Campaigners will be keen to see how Owen Paterson steers Defra after the sacking of Caroline Spelman. He is the "Farmers Friend" and a rural champion. But he is also a stranger to sustainability and deeply sceptical about the problems of climate change. Spelman at least had a clear grasp of the importance of biodiversity and green space and the urgency of the threats posed by global warming. Paterson has vocally opposed pylons across his constituency but has remained silent over the progressive industrialisation of farming practices and out of centre supermarkets on his patch. The appointment of a climate change sceptic may well herald a radical change in government direction on environmental resources.*

*Patrick McLoughlin is the latest through the revolving door at the transport department – the eighth transport minister in eight years. Justine Greening's eviction is widely seen as clearing the way for a change in Tory policy on Heathrow. On BBC Radio 4 Today this morning, Grant Shapps, now co-chairman of the Conservative party, declared that Northolt should also be expanded. A formal statement in favour of a third or fourth runway is not expected ahead of the 2015 election. Those clamouring for the government to define a policy direction are unlikely to welcome such a pedestrian pace. The muffled reaction of green groups to speculation in recent weeks about a third runway will only add to the view of many MPs that now is the time to seize the moment and set Heathrow expansion plans on an irreversible course.*

*Mark Prisk steps into Grant Shapps' shoes at housing. He has good green credentials but inherits a portfolio that has already seen a stampede of radical changes in the last two years. Will he continue that gallop or give the housing system time to settle down? He is a fan of the green belt, but its protection is not his job.*

*Nick Boles has become planning minister, or as the Daily Mail puts it this morning, minister for the green belt. He is an enthusiast for planning reform and a believer in the mantra that planning inhibits economic growth. George Osborne could not have hoped for a better ally.*

*Andy Boddington*

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## Environment: Cabinet Changes

**Environment Secretary.** Owen Paterson replaces Caroline Spelman, who is sacked from the Cabinet. Known for his opposition to pylons across his Shropshire constituency, his appointment has been welcomed by the National Farmers Union in the county. Farmer's Weekly agreed that he is "likely to be a popular choice among farmers" . The green lobby is less than happy. Geoffrey Lean in the Telegraph thinks Paterson "will not have much sympathy with the regulatory approach that underlines much environmental policy" . The Telegraph also called Paterson a "climate change sceptic" and highlighted his enthusiasm for fracking . The Guardian's Damian Carrington was rather more critical: "Paterson lists trees as an interest but is no treehugger, supporting the badger cull and opposing renewable energy... He reportedly told the Cabinet that it should end all energy subsidies, such as those for wind and solar power, and fast-track shale gas exploitation" . The recycling and fishing industries welcomed Paterson's appointment .

**Transport.** Patrick McLoughlin takes over from Justine Greening. McLoughlin was transport minister twenty years ago under Margaret Thatcher, and trade minister and employment minister in John Major's government. Boris Johnson was scathing: "There can be only one reason to move [Greening] – and that is to expand Heathrow airport." Zac Goldsmith also condemned the move: "Greening's appointment 11 months ago indicated the PM's position on Heathrow was solid. Yielding so easily suggests panic, not principle" . Airlines predictably welcomed McLoughlin's appointment .

**Culture Secretary.** Maria Miller takes over from Jeremy Hunt at DCMS. The Guardian said Miller is an "unknown name for culture professionals" .

Eric Pickles remains at the head of the communities department and Ed Davey keeps his post at the head of energy and climate change.

## Environment: Ministerial Changes

**Minister for planning.** Greg Clark, one of the key drivers of the NPPF, is replaced by Nick Boles, a 'moderniser' who believes the planning regime inhibits the economy. During the NPPF planning battle last year he said: "Business investment is deterred by the bureaucratic rigidity of our out-dated planning regime.. It is essential that we press on with our planning reforms and do not allow the hysterical scare-mongering of latter day Luddites like Simon Jenkins to strangle developments that will boost living standards" .

**Minister for housing.** Mark Prisk takes over from Grant Shapps in the communities department. A Chartered Surveyor, Prisk was previously a minister in the business department where his portfolio included the low carbon economy and deregulation. He has been co-chair of the Green Construction Board and Shadow Minister for Cornwall. The Home Builders Federation and the National Housing Association welcomed his appointment . In 2005, Prisk promoted a private members bill seeking to protect the permanent character of green belt .

**Other ministers.** David Heath: farming. John Hayes: energy and climate change, replacing Charles Hendry. Simon Burns and Stephen Hammond: transport. Paul Deighton: infrastructure and economic delivery.

*Full list of Cabinet members and Ministers:* .