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Campaign to Protect
Rural England
SOUTH EAST

CPRE South East eBulletin

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1. New Legislation

Planning Bill. The Planning Reform Bill is currently passing through the House of Commons and received its second reading on Monday 10 December. A key aim is to speed up decisions on major infrastructure projects by creating the Infrastructure Planning Commission. Hazel Blears said that "The changes are expected to bring the average time for decisions on major projects down to under a year ending years of unnecessary delays on the infrastructure the country needs to tackle challenges of a modern world and help tackle climate change" (FT: <http://tinyurl.com/2arzfd>; DCLG: <http://tinyurl.com/2qmoud>). But Friends of the Earth disagree: "the Planning Bill will not tackle climate change as Hazel Blears would have us believe. It will fast track roads, airports and incinerators—substantially adding to the UK's carbon footprint" (FoE: <http://tinyurl.com/29udql>). The RSPB complained that developers will be allowed to gloss over environmental concerns if the planning bill is not strengthened, (RSPB: <http://tinyurl.com/2zals6>). The Planning Disaster Coalition, which includes CPRE, said that "The decision to press ahead despite these concerns suggests that the Government is not interested in being fully accountable for major decisions. We are also concerned that the right to be heard is limited—hardly encouraging when the planning process should be about listening to and taking account of the views of individuals and communities, and ensuring that all the evidence is fully examined" (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/2r2w7f>). CPRE complained that Gordon Brown had dumped his policy of prudence. Neil Sinden said "Government proposals for a new quango to make decisions on major developments could save money for developers but leave the taxpayer with a higher bill" (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/2axepq>).

Community Infrastructure Levy. Yvette Cooper announced plans to allocate £732m to local councils in the government's 'Growth Areas' and 'Growth Points' to boost the provision of schools, health centres, parks and transport. The Community Infrastructure Levy, part of the Planning Bill, is designed to support the construction of the three million homes that the government plans to build by 2020 in 68 towns and cities that have volunteered for housing growth (eGov: <http://tinyurl.com/29xcj3>). The National Housing Federation warned that the Community Infrastructure Levy could divert money urgently needed social homes (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/2z4993>).

Housing and Regeneration Bill. The Bill, designed to deliver the government's housing targets, will create a new organisation, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), which will bear the responsibility for achieving Brown's three million new affordable homes target. It will also set up a watchdog for social tenants, the Office for Tenants and Social Landlords. The Bill was opposed by Tories, who tabled an amendment claiming the HCA will be "unaccountable" and will "ride roughshod over local communities" (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/ytzjx2>). The Local Government Association said it is important that the Homes & Communities Agency strikes the right balance between delivering new homes and regenerating places. It must develop strong working relationships with councils, and not impose its own agenda which may run contrary to local opinion (LGA: <http://tinyurl.com/23vsba>). Developers will be required to complete a sustainability assessment has been completed. The assessment will show how carbon neutral and environmentally friendly new homes are (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/yqmjnu>). "There is a legitimate debate to be had about where and how these homes are

built. However - though it hooks in my green guts to admit it—built they must be", George Monbiot argued in the Guardian (<http://tinyurl.com/22szh2>). In reply, Neil Sinden of CPRE said we need a robust planning system that prioritises the use of brownfield sites (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/2cq9tv>).

2. South East Campaigns

South Downs National Park. The pre-meeting for the inquiry took place last week, with the main inquiry scheduled for February. CPRE has been advised that unless the case for the inclusion of the Western Weald as proposed by Natural England is thoroughly addressed, the whole inquiry could be vulnerable to judicial review (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/23cc79>). Campaigners are particularly concerned they will not be allowed to speak on behalf of the western Weald. John Venning, of Hampshire CPRE said: "If we are not allowed to speak then there will be a terrific row and that's the point when people will start looking for their lawyers" (Petersfield Today: <http://tinyurl.com/2qmbo4>).

Oxfordshire. After protests from CPRE Oxfordshire and civic groups, including a letter to The Times (not online), Oxford City Council rejected the **Bodleian** Library's plan to build a book depository which threatened famous views of Oxford's skyline (Oxford Times: <http://tinyurl.com/2hylfd>; <http://tinyurl.com/ywo3sd>; BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/2bs6y5>; Oxford Times: <http://tinyurl.com/2zktso>). The campaign to save **Warneford Meadow** in Oxford, backed by CPRE Oxfordshire, has had a major success. The NHS has withdrawn its planning appeal after the campaign and will not submit a new planning application until the outcome of the town green inquiry is known. Campaigners will press on with the bid for town green status to ensure that the meadow is protected in perpetuity (Oxford Mail: <http://tinyurl.com/yu87bx>). Protesters fighting to save **Radley Lakes** called in a leading expert on town green law to review the recommendation from a public inquiry earlier this year that the town green application should be rejected. The view, by George Laurence is that the inspectors' report is "unsound" and needs further consideration (Oxford Times: <http://tinyurl.com/yvaem7>).

Sussex. CPRE Sussex is objecting to proposals to install advertising on the county's roundabouts, saying they will be unwanted additions to the rural scene and compromise road safety (Argus: <http://tinyurl.com/26wjms>).

3. Thames Gateway

Campaigners, MPs, architects and developers have queued up in recent weeks to attack the government's flagship Thames Gateway project, which is meant to deliver 160,000 houses and 180,000 jobs by 2016. The chief executive of the project has departed suddenly, and Yvette Copper has issued a delayed and rewritten delivery plan.

Gateway management criticised. The House of Commons Public Accounts committee cautioned that the project could become a public spending calamity and said it suffered from weak management (Inside Housing: <http://tinyurl.com/23atan>). Hilary Newport, for CPRE Kent backed the findings: "We have been listening to the rhetoric about the future of the Thames Gateway since the publication of the Sustainable Communities Plan in 2003; but on the ground, those who live within the Thames Gateway are rightly concerned that the focus seems to have shifted from regeneration to growth, that their remaining open spaces will be lost in the headlong rush to deliver housing growth, and that the cost to their environment and quality of life will be too high" (Kent News: <http://tinyurl.com/25vb5f>). CPRE Kent also joined the MPs in lashing the official department in charge of the Thames Gateway scheme—Communities and Local Government—as "not up to the job" and having "weak" management (CPRE Kent: <http://tinyurl.com/245dys>; BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/yrfwvb>). The Gateway could turn into a wasteland unless strict design criteria are put in place, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment said (CABE: <http://tinyurl.com/29mdt2>). The project could produce "cheap" and "isolated" estates, according to a developer (Kent News: <http://tinyurl.com/yrx4ba>).

CPRE report. Gaps in the development of the Thames gateway region were identified by CPRE in a study, *Focus on the Thames Gateway Two*, which finds up to half the boroughs in the region show either regression or no progress on five out of ten key indicators. "This report shows there is still a long way to go in delivering our shared aspirations for the Thames gateway," said Hilary Newport for CPRE. "The government likes to talk about its ambitions for the Thames gateway, but what really counts is what changes in the daily lives of ordinary people. We welcome progress in some important areas, but no

amount of fine words can cover up important failures elsewhere." Access to green spaces was identified by CPRE as lacking in many areas, but it reported success in the use of brownfield land for housing and for business development. (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/25o4lt>; DCLG: <http://tinyurl.com/2qoj3b>)

Delivery plan. Plans to construct a new "eco-quarter" and spend money greening existing homes in the Thames Gateway have were announced by Yvette Cooper. The government also pledged "a major step-change" to the quality of the public transport network serving the Thames Gateway by 2016 (Evening Standard: <http://tinyurl.com/2b3rzg>; 24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/2xcrp3>; Building: <http://tinyurl.com/2ahvho>). CPRE welcomed the delivery plan. "We particularly welcome Gordon Brown's commitment to protecting the Green Belt, the Parklands project and the re-use of brownfield sites for new housing" (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/ywe84q>). Judith Armit, the chief executive of the Thames Gateway Delivery Unit, has quit her post (Times: <http://tinyurl.com/22dxn5>).

Water. The Thames Gateway could use the same amount of water in 2016 as it does now, providing the ambitious programme is put in place soon (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/yt3zgz>).

4. Housing

Calcutt Review. In his review of housing delivery, John Calcutt, former head of English Partnerships, said a renewed focus on towns and cities was preferable to building on greenfield sites—although some development in rural England was necessary. In a challenge to ministers, he warned "unless we continue to regenerate our towns and cities they will decline and, in turn, force more development to the edge of town and out into our countryside." Callcut said the industry and its supply chain were 'perfectly capable' of building the 240,000 new homes the prime minister wants built annually. But his report warns that developers will fail to do so unless they build most of those homes on derelict brownfield sites in deprived urban areas which they may consider unviable. "The real challenge we face is not simply making a total supply, but making that supply where it's needed and to the people that need it," he said (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/2836wz>); Inside Housing: <http://tinyurl.com/yr2x8v>). Yvette Cooper responded by announcing that the government would: introduce a new legal definition of what constitutes a 'substantial start' by a developer to avoid major sites being held up by long delays; introduce new 'fast track contracts' to help speed up the development of new homes on public sector land; create a new body to co-ordinate work on delivering the target to make all new homes zero carbon by 2016; closely examine proposals for an annual independent customer satisfaction survey on new housing; and agree a 'new industry standard' to increase transparency of developers' land holders held for future housing (DLCG: <http://tinyurl.com/yt8rrp>). Welcoming the news that Mr Calcutt did not believe the greenbelt would have to sacrificed to build houses, Neil Sinden for CPRE said: "Planners are seriously underestimating the amount of brownfield land that can be redeveloped" and called for a target of 75% of new homes to be built on such land by 2011 (Assetz: <http://tinyurl.com/yt9a4g>). The Royal Town Planning Institute complained: "The Government is in danger of delivering targets not quality places. Planners will take the launch of the Callcut report as an opportunity to warn Government not to repeat the mistakes of the past which will create the sink estates of the future." (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/ywqms0>).

South East housing. South East local authorities built an average of 30,600 homes a year over the past five years. The figure matches the commitment made by the SEERA at hearings into the South East Plan. Keith Mitchell said: "The region still has a challenge in building the right type and size of homes and we must keep pushing for new infrastructure investment to support homes because this remains a high priority when delivering growth. Delivering affordable housing remains a huge challenge for the South East and this can only be tackled through significant public funding. Just building more homes will not solve this issue" (Crawley Observer: <http://tinyurl.com/2ajps5>).

Affordable housing. SEERA has claimed that limits on how funds can be used could rule out innovative projects and it is urging the Government to "think outside of the box" and not just deliver affordable homes through its usual Housing Corporation channel. Assembly Chairman Keith Mitchell said: "If the Government is really committed to deliver more affordable housing, it needs to broaden its horizon and work with the region on overcoming the barriers that prevent us building the homes we all want to see." (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/2clmnl>). The Commission for Rural Communities said that proposed levels of investment in affordable rural housing by Regional Assemblies will result in 5% fewer homes being

provided in each of the next 3 years than annually during 2006–08 (CRC: <http://tinyurl.com/2rny6q>). Matthew Taylor MP, commissioned by Gordon Brown to investigate the rural housing crisis, hinted that he will recommend local communities are allowed to bypass councils to build affordable homes in their area and that the government gets tough on tackling second homes (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/236ftu>).

Audit threat. Local authorities would be condemned as failing by inspectors if they are building too few homes, the Audit Commission warned. The regime will be introduced when the commission introduces its area assessment performance system in 2009. Kate Gordon for CPRE said the approach paid too much attention to numbers rather than the needs of an area and "not paying sufficient attention to where they go in terms of creating sustainable patterns of development" (Inside Housing: <http://tinyurl.com/28rrur>)

Housing and the economy. "The Government's plans are late in the game and would serve only to send house prices plummeting even further than anticipated, risking a similar downturn to that experienced in the United States" according to the Globalisation and Economic Policy Centre at Nottingham University (PA: <http://tinyurl.com/ytl47f>; Daily Mail: <http://tinyurl.com/ysl9wz>).

Zero carbon homes. A review of the use of off-site renewables to meet the zero-carbon homes target for 2016 has been launched (Building: <http://tinyurl.com/ywv3u4>). A report says DCLG should change planning policy to require zero-carbon homes immediately on large developments to promote the build-up of a huge industry for the future, it said (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/2hedda>). Barratt has been contracted to build UK's first eco-village near Bristol (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/yoy4vg>).

Surrey. CPRE Surrey is opposing housing development on a former brickworks at Cranleigh as "a new settlement which is not sustainable and which destroys what has been open countryside". Natural England is currently considering extending the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty up to the boundary of the site (Surrey Advertiser: <http://tinyurl.com/2yzvne>).

Sussex. Lindfield Preservation Society is seeking legal advice after an inspector told villagers to expect new homes at two greenfield sites (Argus: <http://tinyurl.com/yr6az7>).

5. Eco Towns

The government's plans for ten eco towns has captured press imagination and generated much public scepticism and criticism. Fifty-seven proposed schemes have now been lodged with the government but a list has not been released. Several of the known proposals are on airfields, some on brownfield and others on green field or green belt sites. Ten will be chosen by February, with up to five eco-towns to be built by 2016 and the other five by 2020.

Eco towns criticised. Neil Sinden said CPRE was concerned about the decision-making process for the new homes. "Many of the proposals we have heard about have already been turned down through normal planning decisions. It is not clear how the process can be transparent if the [department] does not release the list of options" (Times: <http://tinyurl.com/2bbldb>). The Federation of Master Builders said the focus should be to improve existing housing stock, rather than new properties. "The real challenge is not with new buildings—the government has done quite a lot to improve standards of new build—the challenge is actually what you do with the existing buildings" (About Property: <http://tinyurl.com/yv8jvb>).

Eco towns proposed in the South East

- ◆ **Buckinghamshire.** Developer Greenway may be considering an eco-town on greenfield north of Winslow (Buckingham Advertiser: <http://tinyurl.com/28thc9>)
- ◆ **Hampshire.** Ministry of Defence land at Whitehill and Bordon is being promoted as an eco town site by East Hampshire District Council (Petersfield Post: <http://tinyurl.com/2fu4uk>)
- ◆ **Oxfordshire.** Plans for an eco-town at Shipton Quarry is a "once in a generation" opportunity to solve Oxford's housing crisis according to a local councillor (Oxford Times: <http://tinyurl.com/28sbyj>)
- ◆ **Surrey.** A bid has been made for 2,600 homes at Dunsfold Park, a former airfield with a monorail link along the Downs Link to Cranleigh and Guildford. Opponents of the plans say they will need to raise up to £300,000 to fight the proposals and local MPs have added their objections (Surrey Advertiser: <http://tinyurl.com/282adm>; <http://tinyurl.com/22e6xd>; <http://tinyurl.com/2d3ptd>).

- ◆ **Sussex.** Two bids have been submitted for development on 860 acres of land at Ford Airfield near Arundel. One will build a town with 5,000 homes and 4,000 jobs. The alternative Ford Enterprise Hub will provide a mix of housing, new business opportunities including a high-tech science park, and a "Parkway" railway station, but the developers have been slammed for touting their plans as a "community-based initiative" (Argus: <http://tinyurl.com/227bfbw>; Mid Sussex Times: <http://tinyurl.com/27fjj7>; Littlehampton Gazette: <http://tinyurl.com/ystmrg>; Chichester Observer: <http://tinyurl.com/2c9qlv>; Argus: <http://tinyurl.com/287g5f>).
- ◆ **Hampshire.** The proposed 'Micheldever Station Market Town' would provide 12,500 new homes, including around 5,000 affordable homes. The Dever Society called it "the same, tired old scheme, but with an opportunist edge" (Daily Echo: <http://tinyurl.com/263x2o>; <http://tinyurl.com/2k4lmw>; This is Basingstoke: <http://tinyurl.com/yoqd7u>; This is Hampshire: <http://tinyurl.com/2bzrdu>; <http://tinyurl.com/2glh4h>; Daily Echo: <http://tinyurl.com/2e7o8m>).

Other proposed eco towns. Nantwich, Cheshire: <http://tinyurl.com/29bbby>; Houghton on the Hill, Leicestershire: <http://tinyurl.com/2hy2no>; Grovewood, Derbyshire: <http://tinyurl.com/2axfse>; <http://tinyurl.com/24t78r>; Coltishall, Norfolk: <http://tinyurl.com/2dypp3>; <http://tinyurl.com/23c2ke>; Kingston Estate, Nottinghamshire: <http://tinyurl.com/yqwbvx>; Curborough, Staffordshire: <http://tinyurl.com/2g8ocn>; Long Marston, Warwickshire: <http://tinyurl.com/2ynxr4>; Throckmorton, Worcestershire: <http://tinyurl.com/yrsqzy>; Rossington, South Yorkshire: <http://tinyurl.com/2bjsvz>; Clifton Moor, North Yorkshire: <http://tinyurl.com/yvlp7x>; <http://tinyurl.com/2zkbx2>.

6. Green Belts

National Trust. VAT rules that encourage developers to build new homes on greenfield instead of reusing brownfield sites should be scrapped, according to the National Trust. Under the current system properties that are built from scratch are exempt from VAT, unlike existing buildings that are converted into accommodation or renovated. On average building a new house used six times as much CO2 as refurbishing an old one, and that demolition debris accounts for 17% of Britain's waste (Telegraph: <http://tinyurl.com/23es28>). The Trust has been accused of hypocrisy after it emerged that it has sold a parcel of greenbelt land for development (Times: <http://tinyurl.com/yqowqc>).

Green belt loss. An area of Green Belt land the size of central London has been concreted over the past 10 years. CPRE said the new figures, which are much higher than previously thought, revealed that the health of the Green Belt was under serious threat in some of the most congested parts of the country. The already congested South East, including London, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Essex, lost 604 acres (Telegraph: <http://tinyurl.com/28djgb>; CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/22dl52>).

Nottingham green belt threatened. A planning inspector has suggested removing of the green belt to the north, south and east of Nottingham. CPRE expressed shock at proposals (This is Nottingham: <http://tinyurl.com/2fj5ln>; CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/ytokpz>).

7. Planning

South East Plan. SEERA said that government proposals to transfer strategic planning powers from assemblies to regional development agencies are anti-democratic and will delay delivery of the South East Plan. Keith Mitchell said: "Government's proposals bypass the valid democratic role of local councillors who currently lead strategic planning through the Assembly. We have spent eight years successfully building consensus across councils and stakeholders to plan for a sustainable South East and we don't want planning powers to fall in the hands of unelected development agencies." Assembly members voted to drive forward delivery of the South East Plan and to ensure Government infrastructure support for housing growth (This is Hampshire: <http://tinyurl.com/2ayy9e>).

South East Local Development Frameworks. Mid Sussex District Council recommended 15 sites for housing but an inspector has agreed four additional sites; 80% of extra housing will be on greenfield sites (Argus: <http://tinyurl.com/2aaylp>).

Polytunnels. Tuesley farm is a cause célèbre for those opposed to polytunnels in the countryside. The farm was served with enforcement notices to remove polytunnels and mobile homes in 2004. The need

for planning permission for them was confirmed at a public inquiry in 2005, a decision that was held up following review in the High Court in December 2006. Now council planners have executed a major U-turn on green belt policy by giving planning permission for the polytunnels. The decision came just hours after a rejection of an appeal by the CPRE to have the application called in by the Secretary of State and judged on a national rather than local level. Colin Hall, vice chairman of the Waverley district committee of the CPRE, said the group was "horrified" as it had worked so closely with the council to fight the original application (Surrey Advertiser: <http://tinyurl.com/29g56j>; <http://tinyurl.com/24z3wq>; Tuesley Farm Campaign: <http://tinyurl.com/2ss7ba>). David Kay, for the owners of Tuesley Farm, said: "I thank the planning officers and councillors for being brave in the face of the vitriolic onslaught from certain quarters and taking the right decision for the future of the farm. We must now all continue to work with each other and continue developing a farm that is socially, environmentally and economically sustainable" (Freshinfo: <http://tinyurl.com/yvdxmz>).

8. Energy & Waste

Wind power. Industry secretary John Hutton announced in Berlin that Britain wanted to expand offshore wind power to provide about a fifth of the country's electricity by 2020. The government's forthcoming energy white paper will increase the subsidies to offshore wind, which struggles to compete with much cheaper onshore production, by 50% from 2009, with the aim of giving Britain 33GW of offshore wind power by 2020 (Times: <http://tinyurl.com/yqfe8d>; Guardian <http://tinyurl.com/2t2vjq>). But there are concerns about the visual impact from the coastline and on wildlife (This is Dorset: <http://tinyurl.com/2y4a2q>; <http://tinyurl.com/2za79v>). SEEDA has commissioned a £10,000 survey to pinpoint locations for wind turbines across Sussex. The Argus said the County Council has pledged to erect almost 750 turbines by 2016, including 22 at 70 metres high, 20 at 30 metres and 300 at 20 metres, together with 400 small turbines on homes. It is estimated that this will generate 32 megawatts of electricity each year—enough to power 15,500 homes (Argus: <http://tinyurl.com/2f3esf>). The study, which is being led by Brighton and Hove City Council with the Sussex Sustainable Energy partnership, has already identified the number of wind farms needed for the next 10 years. CPRE Sussex will defend individual sites as planning applications are made (from CPRE Sussex).

Biofuels. Environment secretary Hilary Benn outlined his vision for the future of biofuels. "Our policy is to proceed with caution," he said as he stressed that policy will be based on real evidence of the social, environmental and economic impacts of biofuel (Farmers Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/2gl8y9>).

Coal. Medway Council deferred a decision on E.on's proposal to build a new coal-fired power station on the Kingsnorth site (Greenpeace: <http://tinyurl.com/yt9v4b>).

Nuclear. Sizewell in Suffolk, Dungeness in Kent, Hinkley in Somerset and Bradwell in Essex have been identified as the most likely sites for new nuclear construction (FT: <http://tinyurl.com/2bxyx7>).

Incinerator. A public inquiry into a proposed incinerator at Newhaven in Sussex has heard evidence of the financial case for the plant. Green MEP Caroline Lucas argued that the government should block the burner as it would increase pollution, traffic and greenhouse gas emissions, have an adverse impact on the adjacent South Downs Area of Natural Beauty and breach planning guidance (Eastbourne Today: <http://tinyurl.com/24b2h9>).

9. Environment and Ecology

Thames Basin Heaths. The South East England Regional Assembly, local authorities and others are seeking views on proposals for a long-term strategy for the heaths. Deadline 15 February (SEERA: <http://tinyurl.com/yo6os2>)

Lymington. Support is mounting for the campaign to install breakwaters to save Lymington Harbour and protect a 12-acre salt marsh which is rapidly eroding. MP Desmond Swayne says the plans risked being blocked by Natural England (This is Hampshire: <http://tinyurl.com/yt97nk>; <http://tinyurl.com/2fwk88>).

Action Plan. Defra has published its action plan setting out a new direction for Government policy on the natural environment. The Ecosystems Approach Action Plan signals a move away from separate natural

environment policies on wildlife, water, soil, air quality towards a more joined-up approach, taking account of the natural environment as a whole (Defra: <http://tinyurl.com/ywrmcf>).

Climate change. CPRE Kent said that climate change over the next century is set to transform the Garden of England into the new Côte d'Azur of the northern hemisphere—with an even smaller coastline. It is hosting a conference on 1 February to debate the choices that will need to be made (CPRE Kent: <http://tinyurl.com/2e3lev>). Environment secretary Hilary Benn confirmed that the UK will fall well short of its target of cutting carbon emissions by 20% on 1990 levels by 2010 (Business Green: <http://tinyurl.com/2gyhkt>). Amid tears, booing, hissing and applause, 189 of the world's 190 nations agreed in Bali to take action on climate change. Only Burma dissented after the US gave ground and agreed to a two year road map to replace the Kyoto agreement. The aim will be cut greenhouse emissions by 50% by 2050 and an agreement is expected to be signed in Copenhagen in December 2009. Shipping and aviation may still be omitted from the agreement. In a side deal, Britain and all other developed countries other than the United States have signed up to 25–40% by 2020 (Independent: <http://tinyurl.com/ys5pwz>; Reuters: <http://tinyurl.com/yqoca4>).

Stone curlews. The ending of set aside is threatening populations of stone curlews (Telegraph: <http://tinyurl.com/2caryp>). Protection for the bird has been extended at Porton Down on the Wiltshire/Hampshire border—one of the few areas it is found (GNN: <http://tinyurl.com/2gx5ge>).

10. Infrastructure and Transport

Public transport. The South East is set to receive £649 million investment in local transport over the next three years from the £4 billion Local Transport Capital Settlement (GOSE: <http://tinyurl.com/2bc7f6>; DfT: <http://tinyurl.com/ystdw6>). A series of enhancement projects to improve the capacity and reliability of railways in the South East were announced in Network Rail's new strategic business plan (Oxford Times, <http://tinyurl.com/yqt9ny>; Network Rail: <http://tinyurl.com/2xskwr>).

Weymouth bypass. The public inquiry into compulsory purchase for the £84 million Weymouth Bypass sat during November. CPRE Dorset, the Campaign for Better Transport, Natural England, the Woodland Trust and many others gave evidence that woodland and meadows will suffer "very substantial damage" if the road is built (Bypass the Bypass: <http://tinyurl.com/3a5omm>; Dorset Echo: <http://tinyurl.com/yr9g3y>). Natural England told the inquiry there are no 'exceptional circumstances' which justify the road being built in a key natural area (Dorset Echo: <http://tinyurl.com/2xue65>).

Park & Ride. A Winchester park and ride site has received an award for landscape design (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/ypufyh>).

Air corridor. A decision on proposals for a new flight path affecting parts of North Hampshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire has been delayed until January, after local MPs slammed a lack of consultation over the issue in a House of Commons debate (Newbury Today: <http://tinyurl.com/23unhq>). Hampshire MP Sir George Young demanded a fresh inquiry into the proposals saying that the case for a new night-time flightpath into Southampton and Bournemouth Airports, which would see dozens more planes flying over the New Forest, had "not been made". The plan will lead to more noise and visual intrusion over "very environmentally sensitive areas", including the Test Valley and the New Forest National Park (This is Hampshire: <http://tinyurl.com/2c92nl>; <http://tinyurl.com/yuxxfn>).

Heathrow. The government has launched a fourteen-week consultation (the minimum period required under EU law) on options for Heathrow. A third runway, 2,200m long, could be built while meeting noise and air quality targets, the government claimed. The number of take-offs and landings a year would rise from 480,000 now to 702,000 by 2030; flights will increase from 480,000 a year to 700,000. Deadline: February 27 2008 (DfT: <http://tinyurl.com/38y4jz>; Times: <http://tinyurl.com/28wywe>). Greenpeace accused the airport operator BAA and the Government of "extraordinary collusion" over the consultation exercise (Independent: <http://tinyurl.com/29c545>; <http://stopheathrow.org/>). John McDonnell MP, whose Hayes and Harlington constituency includes the airport, called the plans an "absolute betrayal" that will provoke "the biggest environmental backlash in not just this country but the whole of Western Europe" (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/2cycaw>). The Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise to challenge the business argument for more runways (Times: <http://tinyurl.com/2zbajp>).

Stansted. Doubts have been cast on whether Stansted Airport will get a second runway after the proposals for Heathrow were announced. The decision to prioritise expansion at Heathrow over Stansted goes against the Government policy laid out in the Air Transport White Paper (ATWP) of 2003, which called for a new runway at Stansted by 2011/12, followed by a third runway at Heathrow after 2015 (Harlow Herald: <http://tinyurl.com/yo6np6>).

11. Rural Affairs

Budget cuts. Rural campaigners have expressed alarm at the prospect of up to £270 million of cuts at Defra. Tom Oliver for CPRE expressed concern that cuts were even being considered. "Even if this is only an idea circulating around Whitehall, it shows how very desperate the position of the environment is within the Government's priorities," he told the BBC Radio 4 Today programme (icWales: <http://tinyurl.com/23fpow>). Defra is proposing to slash the budget of Natural England by 15% this year with deeper cuts expected later. The organisation is also being forced by the Treasury to repay the £16m spent setting it up and to meet 2% across the board efficiency cuts. Its budget is to be reduced in all areas, including recycling, nature protection, energy saving and cutting carbon emissions (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/23j2gf>; <http://tinyurl.com/2bab4j>).

Natural England. One year into its life, Natural England is facing huge levels of discontentment among staff, who want the management to go (Farmers Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/ysfer4>).

Agri-environment. Natural England has launched a campaign to increase public awareness of agri-environment schemes with an online map showing all of the five million hectares of land in the schemes, which cover more than half of all farmland in England (<http://www.natureonthemap.org.uk/>). Proposed reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy have come under attack from CPRE and the RSPB, who say the proposals—published in the form of a 'Health Check' for European farming—will not help farming communities or wildlife (Daelnet: <http://tinyurl.com/yvoolw>).

Food. CPRE has joined with the NFU, Townswomen's Guild and other groups to launch a 'Why beef and sheep farming matters' campaign aimed at raising awareness of the crisis facing the sector and encouraging people to buy British. The campaign is calling for a fair price for beef and sheep farmers (Meat: <http://tinyurl.com/yuk7zd>; CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/2jstka>; NFU video: <http://tinyurl.com/2zyto3>). However, most of the food used by the government is imported (Times: <http://tinyurl.com/2dx3mh>). The "era of cheap food" is over according to the NFU, but farmers are still leaving the industry due to low farm gate prices (Publican: <http://tinyurl.com/2x93pe>). The South East Food Group Partnership (SEFGP) has launched a new website to make finding local food easier (SEFGP: <http://tinyurl.com/29ypwg>). "By 2026 we will see a revival in locally produced food. Farmers will be valued for the work they do in maintaining the countryside, woods, meadows and habitats for wildlife. Climate change, population growth and environmental taxes will be key drivers in making this happen. By 2026, consumers will choose and prefer locally grown food." Join the CPRE debate on the future of farming (<http://tinyurl.com/2cqdyv>).

Rural proofing. A Commission for Rural Communities study alleged that the government is "still not adequately considering" rural needs. Defra hit back, insisting the government is "committed to rural proofing" and that its "policies are serving rural communities well" (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/2zxj5p>).

Abbreviations, Links and Definitions

CLG: [Communities and Local Government](#). EiP: [Examination in Public](#). GOSE: [Government Office of the South East](#). SEEDA: [South East England Development Agency](#). SEERA: [South East England Regional Assembly](#). SPA: [Special Protection Area](#). TBHSPA: [Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area](#).

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