

## CPRE SE eBulletin: 30 May 2008

*It is difficult to find a good word for the eco-towns outside central government. True, one Hampshire councillor has claimed that "Ford could become the new Crawley" (apparently intending this as a compliment) but elsewhere transport issues and the loss of greenfield are sparking concern, and the eco credentials of the sites are being called into question. More than twenty e-petitions have been posted on the No 10 website calling on Gordon Brown to ditch this eco-town or that. It is widespread protest but uncoordinated so its message is yet to strike home as hard as it might through the media.*

### 1. New CPRE South East Chairman

Christine Drury has stepped down as chairman of CPRE South East after leading the group through the challenging years of the draft South East Plan. Marie-Helene Baneth takes over this demanding role, bringing a strong background in agricultural policy to the post. Welcome Marie-Helene and thanks very much indeed Christine.

## Planning and Housing

### 2. Planning

**Planning Bill.** The controversial bill returns to Parliament on Monday amid signs of a growing revolt over plans to remove ministerial involvement in major infrastructure projects, which will be decided by the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC). Press reports today suggest that ministers will offer MPs the opportunity to vote down controversial schemes. Labour MPs had tabled an amendment to throw out the IPC but the government seems unwilling to back down on this point. MPs vote on the bill on 9 June (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/4xo4zz>; Times: <http://tinyurl.com/42v2p4>).

**Sub-national review.** There is confusion about the date of publication of the SNR but it may be published by the end of July (Planning: <http://tinyurl.com/3luzk8>).

**Regional plans.** Yorkshire and Humber's RSS (regional plan) has been approved by the government with an annual homebuilding target of 22,260 homes. This is 26% above the regional assembly recommendation of 17,620 and slightly more than the EiP proposal of 22,140 homes. Jenny Haynes, CPRE's Regional Policy Officer, said: "There is a huge contrast between what the Government says about devolving decision-making to local communities and the clunking fist of centralisation". There will be an immediate mini-review of the RSS to look at the implications of the higher housing numbers (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/6hz7hn>). The final East of England Plan was published by the government promising 508,000 additional houses compared to the 478,000 proposed by the regional assembly (6% increase). CPRE East of England Chairman Lawrence Wragg said: "This is a sad day for all who live and work in the Eastern Region. From the outset, the Government was warned of the impact that development on such a scale would have on our environment and quality of life, but has chosen to ignore it" (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/6f9eyb>).

**Infrastructure.** The £732 million Growth Fund for infrastructure in local areas "should be focused around a strategically significant town or city identified for growth within the regional spatial strategy" according to CLG (Regen: <http://tinyurl.com/46ckc2>). Extra homes must not be built in Hampshire before roads and other infrastructure have been improved, the County Council said (Portsmouth News: <http://tinyurl.com/6f5pmf>).

**Aggregates.** SEERA is consulting on aggregate extraction allocations. Deadline 8 August (<http://tinyurl.com/6xb4bo>).

### 3. Housing

**Family Housing – the Power of Concentration.** A report funded by CPRE Kent said that the exodus of young families from cities in search of housing they can afford is putting immense pressure on our countryside and polarising urban England. Steve Whitbread, Director of CPRE London said ‘They are forced to move out from town in search of housing they can afford, frequently splitting the city into neighbourhoods of the very rich and very poor. This puts even greater strain on the countryside for new housing, on transport infrastructure with so many having to commute into towns to work and on family life’. Case studies in the report demonstrate that high quality, reasonably priced housing can be provided in urban areas at more than 50 dwellings per hectare (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/4vqtak>).

**The Proximity Principle.** Well-designed high-density living, in rural as well as urban areas, can build sustainable communities and secure environmental objectives says CPRE in “*The Proximity Principle: why we are living too far apart*” (<http://tinyurl.com/6b546o>). Proximity should be favoured over dispersal to encourage community interaction; make public transport, local services and environmental initiatives more viable; and drive creativity and the economy. It is a principle that champions higher housing densities on urban, preferably brownfield sites over dispersed settlements such as suburbia and eco-towns. Author Becky Willis said: "Despite the advantages of proximity, Gordon Brown’s housing policy is causing greater dispersal, by promoting new eco-towns outside existing settlements and refusing to provide incentives for development within existing towns and villages." A CLG spokesman said the analysis was "fundamentally flawed" (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/6zy7yn>).

**Density and brownfield.** Provisional CLG data shows that proximity is increasing, though the South East builds to a lower density than the national average. Use of greenfield remains high at over 20% and 2% of new dwellings are in the green belt. 10% of dwellings are built within areas of high flood risk, up 1% on 2005. (CLG: <http://tinyurl.com/5uqjrp>; <http://tinyurl.com/6xrtoe>).

	England 2006	South East 2006	England 2007	South East 2007
Dwellings on brownfield	76%	78%	75%	78%
Dwellings per hectare	41	37	45	n/a
Greenfield dwellings per hectare	31	32	34	n/a
Brownfield dwellings per hectare	47	40	51	n/a
Dwellings built in green belt	2%	2%	n/a	n/a
Dwellings in high flood risk areas	10%	6%	n/a	n/a

**Affordable housing.** Government plans for huge increases in house building will not improve affordability. In 20 years home ownership will be even further out of reach for average earners, says new research for the South East England Regional Assembly. An analysis of government data used by Government advisors reveals that even if Ministers force building targets up by over 50% average house prices will rise to 9.6 times average income in the South East from 8.4 times now (SEERA: <http://tinyurl.com/5nlwsb>). A 30% targets for affordable housing in Blythe in Northumberland may have to be abandoned after a High Court judge ruled that property in the area is already “as cheap as chips” (Journal Live: <http://tinyurl.com/6pxbvf>).

**Zero carbon recedes.** English Partnerships says that the housing slump means that it will be hard to meet the government's target for 3 million new homes by 2020 and even harder to meet the 2016 zero-carbon target (Regen: <http://tinyurl.com/3pb3th>).

#### 4. Regional Monitoring Report

The "region appears to be doing well" according to the annual regional monitoring report from the regional assembly although the South East has made progress on only 11 of its 41 targets set out in RGP9 (SEERA: <http://tinyurl.com/68own7>). It is concerned that this success is coming at a price, particularly an adverse impact on infrastructure and the environment. A downturn in the economy could have a major impact on delivery of the region's priorities, particularly housing supply.

- ◆ The region has seen an average of 30,600 homes built each year over the past five years
- ◆ Completions of affordable homes are 30% below the target in the draft South East Plan
- ◆ 82% of houses were last year built on brownfield land (government target 60%)
- ◆ Each inhabitant contributes £21,500 to the economy (national average: £18,600); there is concern about economic disparities, particularly the poorer areas along the south coast.
- ◆ Distances travelled per person continue to increase.
- ◆ Water use is decreasing (152 litres per head per day, down from 161 lh/d last year)
- ◆ It is unlikely that the target for 95% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest to be favourable condition by 2010 will be met (currently 82% favourable).

The Assembly is concerned about the reducing availability of urban sites and the long-term impact of urban intensification on quality of life in towns and cities. On its policies to "secure a multi-purpose countryside and maintain the quality of environment" and "achieve locally based provision of services in rural areas", the report is positive despite saying that the data quality is inadequate, as is the data on ensuring vitality and viability of town and local centres.

### Eco-Towns

#### 5. Planning

**Planning process.** Government adviser David Lock claimed that ministers are plotting to "crash the planning process" for eco-towns and restrict the opportunity for residents to object. He claimed that housing minister Caroline Flint wants to "cut out a whole lot of processes" to ensure that five towns are completed by 2016 (Times: <http://tinyurl.com/3saqun>). Flint has insisted in response that eco-town proposals will go through the local planning process. Lawyers for the Long Marston eco-town protesters have sent a pre-action letter to the government as a first step towards judicial review proceedings (Birmingham Post: <http://tinyurl.com/5gwb9v>; Berwin: <http://tinyurl.com/3zfcz2>).

**SEERA.** At its May meeting, the Regional Planning Committee was advised that "contrary to the assurances given by Ministers, it is clear that the principle of eco-towns is being taken forward outside of the planning system... What is perhaps more telling is that while the eco-town consultation document talks in terms of free standing sustainable communities its focus is almost exclusively on the issue of housing" (<http://tinyurl.com/5dnof8>). The approach to Sustainability Appraisal is flawed and unlikely to provide a truly independent assessment of the merits of eco-towns, either as a policy or as a specific proposal. There is an urgent need for government to clarify whether the housing growth associated with eco-town proposals will be included in, or additional to, the overall housing provision figures in the South East Plan. The report comments on the South East shortlist:

- ◆ Bordon-Whitehill has the potential to offer a good fit with the South East Plan
- ◆ Ford and Weston Otmoor are unlikely to be consistent with the South East Plan and would probably undermine agreed spatial and economic priorities in their sub regional areas.

## 6. Reform eco-towns report

Think tank Reform says that there are serious issues to be addressed with plans for eco-towns (*Eco towns – the zero evidence footprint*: <http://tinyurl.com/6kbbcs>). It says the Government should provide full costings and examine alternatives to the eco towns initiative.

- ◆ The focus on 0.4% of the total housing stock, rather than the 99% of houses that are already built. It cites Kensington and Chelsea as a space-efficient attractive place to live.
- ◆ The true carbon neutrality of eco towns: many proposed locations are a considerable distance from work and amenities. Eco-development should take into account the overall lives of residents, including how they travel to work and use local amenities.
- ◆ The lack of evidence on the total cost of these settlements, including infrastructure, and the opportunity costs. The opportunity cost of these 112,000 units could be as much as 200,000 units in existing settings.
- ◆ The high opportunity cost in using up land outside cities which might be important wildlife habitats or farming areas.
- ◆ Many of the sites are former military installations, deliberately sited in remote and unsociable locations. The most eco friendly locations would be conurbations where there is little marginal cost in infrastructure and carbon terms for people to move around, and countryside land is preserved.

Reform says the government is not necessarily best placed to determine where future demand for housing is going to be. Wrong decisions can lead to unsustainable communities.

## 7. Car dependency

In a joint letter to Caroline Flint a group of environmental charities, including the Campaign for Better Transport, Friends of the Earth and CPRE, describe eco-towns guidance as "one of the best bits of guidance ever to emerge from a British government". However, it expressed concern that shortlisted eco-towns could promote car dependency because many are remote from large conurbations. Some of the shortlisted eco-towns, such as Marston Vale in Bedfordshire, are "fragmented sprawling developments of the worst kind" (Regen: <http://tinyurl.com/3vo8vn>). The Co-operative Group planning the Pennbury eco-town said that residents would get tax breaks to ditch their cars (<http://tinyurl.com/558b9z>). "Even with car clubs, cycle lanes and a bus service, these places are going to be packed out with new roads and new roads lead to more car use, and as a result, more carbon emissions". That is the view of the Federation of Master Builders which wants a patchwork of hundreds of smaller eco-projects (Home Move: <http://tinyurl.com/6zf7gq>). Lord Rogers also weighed into the debate: "I think eco-towns are one of the biggest mistakes government could make. Building in green areas for 5,000 to 10,000 people has to be car-based, it will not be a walking, living community. It goes against everything we know about sustainability" (Building Design: <http://tinyurl.com/6523kk>).

## 8. Ford, Hampshire

Arun District Council has commenced six days of hearings into the eco-town (Littlehampton Gazette: <http://tinyurl.com/532omx>; Arun DC: <http://tinyurl.com/6dsd3h>). The local protest group CAFE has launched its website (<http://tinyurl.com/6eauyr>; <http://tinyurl.com/4bfpzf>). "There's no way you can call Ford an eco-town if 87% of the land is arable and sited next to farms growing vegetables and salads for Waitrose... Building new towns is macho politics, and our track record in this area is lamentable." Janet Street-Porter rails against eco-towns (Independent: <http://tinyurl.com/53p2sp>; <http://tinyurl.com/5axt4o>). "All of the arable land at Ford is grade one. But at a time when food costs are soaring and agricultural land is at a premium, the Government thinks it prudent to slap 5,000 houses on it" says Ben Fogle (Telegraph: <http://tinyurl.com/55jcgb>). The No 10 e-petition has gained more than 700 signatures (<http://tinyurl.com/3uch4m>).

## 9. Weston Otmoor, Oxfordshire

“Weston is on a war footing and "Brigadier" Henman, tall, lean and imposing in his blue, open-necked shirt and immaculate cream chinos, stands in the map room of his elegant home.” The Telegraph interviews Tim Henman’s father who is leading the community protest (<http://tinyurl.com/4afv9j>). The proposed eco-town near Weston-on-the-Green has been welcomed as "a massive opportunity" for Oxford by the city council's new Labour administration. But it made clear that the Weston Otmoor eco-town must not be viewed as an alternative to moves to build 4,000 homes on land south of Grenoble Road (Oxford Mail: <http://tinyurl.com/5g9qfh>). The No 10 e-petition now exceeds 1,000 signatures (<http://tinyurl.com/3pesrn>).

## 10. Bordon-Whitehill, Hampshire

No significant opposition is emerging for this eco-town on former Ministry of Defence land. East Hampshire District Council broadly supports the proposal but says that the optimum level of house building was between 4,000 and 5,500 homes, and this should not rise to 8,000 (Petersfield Post: <http://tinyurl.com/3rjeyo>)

## Environment and Countryside

### 11. Environment

**South Downs.** West Sussex County Council granted permission for Northern Petroleum to drill an oil well in Markwells Wood despite it being in an outstanding natural beauty. The well will destroy 2.5 acres of ancient woodland in an area which is likely to become part of the South Downs National Park. Jacquetta Fewster of the South Downs Society said: "The damage to habitat, destruction of trees and hedgerows, the visual impact of the drilling tower and its lighting, construction of a new access through the wood, noise from vehicles: all of this is inappropriate in the Downs, where people go for peace and quiet" (Independent: <http://tinyurl.com/4mnwda>; Telegraph: <http://tinyurl.com/6co54l>).

**Town greens.** Campaigners in Oxfordshire are quietly optimistic that the town green application for Warneford Meadow will succeed (Oxford Times: <http://tinyurl.com/6d6aot>).

**Trees.** Restoring landfill sites by turning them into green space, such as woodland, parkland or farmland feasible, research published by CLG suggests (<http://tinyurl.com/4b6g4r>). Treetop protesters are optimistic they have saved Titnore Wood in West Sussex where they have been perched since May 2006 (BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/4henwu>).

**Litter.** CPRE and charity CleanupUK have launched a website to encourage volunteer groups to tackle the litter problem (<http://www.litteraction.org.uk/>). Mendip District Council is helping pilot the scheme (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/67nk9n>).

**Noise.** Defra has published noise maps for several towns and cities, including Bournemouth, Brighton, London, Portsmouth, Reading and Southampton. CPRE called them “a much needed step towards safeguarding a more tranquil environment” (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/4zzm5l>; Defra: <http://tinyurl.com/6jkvsx>).

**Eco-Island.** The University of Southampton is to help the Isle of Wight become an 'Eco Island' by 2020 (Edie: <http://tinyurl.com/44p3p7>).

**Romney Marsh saved?** Flood defences should protect homes and habitats in the future to relief of residents, who have been supported by CPRE Kent (<http://tinyurl.com/55ghfa>). Meanwhile, the first turbines are on their way to a 26 unit wind farm overlooking the Marsh (<http://tinyurl.com/63vj4p>).

**Campaign legal costs.** Only the 'very rich or very poor' could afford to fight schemes imposed by the government or local authorities, an independent investigation concluded. Anyone applying for an injunction is expected to give an undertaking agreeing to meet all parties' costs if they lose. The report calls for that to be scrapped in environmental cases as

ordinary citizens and non-governmental organisations were deterred from using the courts for fear of incurring huge legal bills. As a result, the location of landfill sites, recycling plants and housing developments often went unchallenged. Unless the government ensures legal action is more affordable, it will be guilty of breaching the Aarhus Convention, an international convention on citizens' environmental rights which is ratified by the European Community (Observer: <http://tinyurl.com/4dffub>; Report: <http://tinyurl.com/3h9jtb>).

**Countryside stewardship** is under threat from changes to the Common Agricultural Policy and the profitability of food and energy crops. A survey by the National Farmers' Union shows that two-thirds of farmers who signed up to Entry Level schemes failed to renew them when contracts expired. They cited high commodity prices as well as disenchantment with the way the schemes were now run (Observer: <http://tinyurl.com/5mc6qh>). Defra makes no mention of the “churn” rate in its earlier press release trumpeting that 5 million hectares are now under Environmental Stewardship (Defra: <http://tinyurl.com/4o8uy1>).

**Set-aside** is set to be abolished permanently (it is suspended for this year) after a health check of the CAP. CPRE welcomed the proposal to increase the funding that will be transferred from farm payments to rural development initiatives and green farming schemes, but expressed concern that not enough is being done to retain the environmental benefits of set-aside (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/52y3qj>). The RSPB said the proposals for “farm policy reform largely ignore the role agriculture must play in tackling climate change, reversing wildlife declines and preventing water shortages” (<http://tinyurl.com/3q2m8r>; <http://tinyurl.com/4dggpe>). Defra said “We are determined to find a way through to ensure that we have another 21 years and beyond of positive agri-environment schemes”.

## **12. Natural England: State of the Natural Environment Report & Manifesto**

**Summary.** Natural England launched its first overview of the country's environmental resources (<http://tinyurl.com/56jt58>) to a mixed reception. The main messages are that country's natural environment is much less rich than 50 years ago and is under ever-increasing pressure. Woodland birds, flora and butterflies are continuing to decline while wetland species also suffering and salt marshes are disappearing. There is concern whether the countryside was “sufficiently resilient and robust, diverse and interconnected” to survive future pressures. It warns that action is needed now to prevent species being lost and the environment suffering from an increasingly intense use of the land and sea, economic development and climate change. Chief executive Helen Phillips said: “We need to find ways to manage our landscape to create a mosaic of uses so that we can help wildlife survive—be it through a new 'national park' around the length of England's coastline, better use of the green belt or improved use of public funding for farmers.” CPRE criticised the call for flexible green belts and the lack of attention given to landscape character. It said that it is “disappointed that the quality of the human habitat, through the protection of landscape character and a tranquil experience in the countryside is given little prominence” (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/5yufen>).

**The South East.** The report is short on detail on the regions and has little to say on the South East beyond listing the vital statistics and championing the agency's controversial policies in the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (<http://tinyurl.com/5e2apx>).

**Green belts.** Helen Phillips said that green belts were neglected, inaccessible to the public and offered little benefit to wildlife. Rather than surrounding cities with no-go areas for new housing, it was time to find better uses for green belt land. Planners should find ways of creating green gaps, wedges and corridors that helped wildlife and made better use of green spaces next to cities. Tom Oliver of CPRE rejected her arguments: “It is critical that green belts remain permanent. If they are not, then landowners will no longer have an incentive to manage them because they are just waiting for the chance to sell them for housing”.

**Green Infrastructure.** Natural England says that each Growth Point and eco-town should be underpinned by a robust Green Infrastructure strategy, including green grids. It is also testing the Access to Natural Greenspace Standard which specifies that no person should live more than 300m from an area of natural green space of at least 2 ha and there should be provision of at least 1 ha of local nature reserve per 1,000 population.

**Manifesto.** Natural England also issued a manifesto which said it would prioritise storing carbon, absorbing excess water to prevent flooding, and linking up wildlife sites (<http://tinyurl.com/62vots>). It also promised to “help find the space for renewable energy by publishing a map of suitable locations for onshore wind energy developments”.

### 13. Energy

**Renewables.** RWE npower has revived its scheme for hydroelectric power on the Thames at Windsor (Maidenhead Advertiser: <http://tinyurl.com/5ga8hx>). The government has commissioned a consultancy report on the plans for a ten-mile barrage across the River Severn, which could generate 5% of the UK’s electricity needs. It will examine the scheme’s environmental impact and explore two main technologies: a conventional barrage, running between the English and Welsh coasts, and a tidal lagoon (Times: <http://tinyurl.com/6ldwa6>). The barrage could cost £23 billion (QS: <http://tinyurl.com/5q2ew9>) and Natural England chairman Sir Martin Doughty said it could not satisfy EU habitats regulations (Regen: <http://tinyurl.com/4n45tn>).

### 14. Transport

**Despot Depot.** People have already donated more than £10,000 towards fighting plans for a massive warehouse between Fleet and Farnborough. The fund has been set up by SPLAT (Stop Pyestock bLot Act Today), the campaign group opposing plans for a ‘mega-depot’ on the former Ministry of Defence site (Get Hampshire: <http://tinyurl.com/3eaora>).

**Operation Stack.** A CPRE Kent report shows how the Operation Stack congestion nightmare can be eased without recourse to a damaging greenfield lorry park using a Quick Moveable Barrier (QMB) (CPRE Kent: <http://tinyurl.com/6kgefz>; QMB: <http://tinyurl.com/69x4y4>).

**Thames Bridge.** An Alpine-style cable car to ferry people across the Thames in east London should replace plans for a £500m six-lane road bridge, say transport analysts commissioned by Transport for London. Boris Johnson has questioned the need for the bridge and agreed to consider the proposals in the report (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/5pdbyy>).

**Satellite Navigation.** The DfT has consulted local authorities and others on satellite navigation. No firm conclusions are drawn, but the dept will look at aiding industry to develop a code of practice on the design, routing and safe use of satnav systems; and to explore how to improve communications between local authorities, mapping companies, manufacturers and users (DfT: <http://tinyurl.com/55ju7m>).

**South East airports.** Decisions on expansion at Heathrow and Stansted should be postponed until the government's air transport white paper of 2003 is reviewed, a report by the Sustainable Development Commission and Institute for Public Policy Research said. They cite question marks over the environmental and economic arguments underpinning the proposals and warn that the government faced a wave of legal challenges if it did not hold an independent review of its 2003 aviation white paper which sanctioned new runways. They called for a commission to be tasked with compiling an updated evidence base. DfT said it “fundamentally disagrees” with the report's findings and that deferring a decision in favour of a further three-year debate is “not a serious option” (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/6km43y>; *Breaking the Holding Pattern*: <http://tinyurl.com/4kvptb>).

**88 tonners?** The UK's road hauliers say that if one super-lorry was substituted for two of the current maximum-weight 44-tonne vehicles, the CO2 saving would be about 30%. “Most people realise now that if you build or widen roads to reduce congestion, you end up

generating more motor traffic which leads to more congestion," responded CPRE. "The same goes for making lorries larger so as to reduce carbon emissions. You end up generating greater use of lorries" (BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/5rbmtq>). Lorries are paying for only between a third and two-thirds of the damage they inflict on society in terms of congestion, road damage, pollution and impact on other road users according to the Campaign for Better Transport (CBT: <http://tinyurl.com/6p45c4>). £5 billion is to be spent widening the M25 over 30 years. CBT says better options such as hard shoulder running are being ignored (CBT: <http://tinyurl.com/6j8s9z>).

## 15. Water Resources Management Plans

Water companies throughout England have published their draft Water Resources Management Plans (WRMP) for consultation until August (closing dates vary). As expected they address leakage, water efficiency and metering, and also champion new water supplies.

**South East Water** is putting forward options for two reservoirs: Broad Oak, near Canterbury, producing 27 million litres of water a day by 2024; Clay Hill in East Sussex 16.8 million litres a day by 2017 to supply West Kent. Other proposals include developing four new underground water sources and building two strategic pipelines across Sussex and Kent (<http://tinyurl.com/5mwusr>).

**Southern Water.** Compulsory meeting will help the company meet the restrictions on abstraction. In the longer term, desalination is an option (<http://tinyurl.com/4oxzph>).

**Thames Water** says while the company's much-criticised leakage rate can be cut and tariffs and metering can save further water, it will still need the 267 megalitres that the Upper Thames Reservoir could supply. "Our research shows that the pressures of population growth, climate change and increased consumption will put our supplies under severe stress. New resources such as the reservoir proposed near Abingdon will be essential." CPRE Oxfordshire said it would continue to oppose the scheme (<http://tinyurl.com/2eop9n>). Meanwhile, Boris Johnson has withdrawn a legal challenge to the decision to grant planning permission for a desalination plant at Beckton in return for the plant running on renewable energy (Maxim News: <http://tinyurl.com/5j4kw8>).

**Other South East WRMPs.** Folkestone & Dover; Tendring; Three Valleys: <http://tinyurl.com/6fx6ch>. Sutton and East Surrey: <http://tinyurl.com/62zst5>.

## 16. Rural Affairs

**Parish champion.** A new 'wellbeing' power for eligible local parish councils is promised by Hazel Blears, who foresees a new era of modern 'parish power'. "Parishes are about local democracy in action... their small size belies the big impact they can have" (CLG: <http://tinyurl.com/3pyo3w>; Times: <http://tinyurl.com/55srvo>).

**Heritage.** English Heritage is proposing that all 17 World Heritage Sites will be included in national planning protection rules, putting them on the same footing as conservation areas, national parks and areas of outstanding beauty (PublicNet: <http://tinyurl.com/5ea8fg>). English Heritage is also creating the first all-encompassing register of the country's neglected or decaying historic properties. The Heritage At Risk project will be launched on Tuesday 8 July 2008 (EH: <http://tinyurl.com/5wzvfv>).

## CPRE eBulletin

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