

CPRE SE eBulletin: 2 March 2009

1. Conservative Proposals for Planning

The Conservatives launched a policy green paper *Control Shift – Returning Power to Local Communities* ([is.gd/jNJP](#)). David Cameron said he is ready to scrap the Infrastructure Planning Commission as part of a radical shift of power from Whitehall to local authorities (Guardian: [is.gd/jNzn](#)). He also said that he will grant local authorities a "general power of competence", allowing them to take action on any issue to improve their communities.

- ◆ **National planning.** The Infrastructure Planning Commission will be abolished and replaced with public enquiries speeded up "by ensuring that they focus on material planning considerations instead of questioning the appropriateness of the project in principle". Private/hybrid legislation will be used for major projects of "real national significance". National Policy Statements for key infrastructure will be retained but will be approved by both houses of parliament.
- ◆ **Regional planning.** Regional Development Agencies will be stripped of their powers over housing, planning and regional spatial strategies. All regional spatial strategies will be revoked, though the London Plan will be retained. There is no mention of the Leaders' Boards currently due to replace the regional assemblies.
- ◆ **Local planning.** Planning inspectors examining LDFs will only be able to report to government direct breaches of national planning guidance. "All other issues will be left for local determination". Councils will be able to revise their existing LDFs to take account of the abolition of regional spatial strategies. This will allow councils to protect land, such as Green Belt, which the RSS have zoned for development.
- ◆ **Housing incentives.** The housing and planning delivery grant (HPDG) will be scrapped. Local councils will keep all new council tax for housing development for first six years and the government will match it, using money from the HPDG and the formula grant.
- ◆ **Economy.** Local enterprise partnerships, teams of local authorities, will be able to take over from the regional development agency. Local authorities will have a discretionary power to give business rate discounts to local shops and services, such as rural pubs or post offices, providing the authority can fund the cut. To encourage planning for business growth, a Business Increase Bonus will be paid when the business tax in a local authority area rises above the national average, the difference being paid to the council for six years. Local firms will be given the power block any local business rate increase.
- ◆ **Local powers.** Under the general power of competence, local authorities, including town and parish councils, will be given an explicit freedom to act in the best interests of their voters, unhindered by the absence of any specific legislation supporting their actions. They will be able to carry out any activity; undertake any works; operate any business; and enter into any transaction providing it is lawful. They will not be able to raise taxes. Rises in council case can be vetoed by a local referendum and a referendum will be triggered if an authority proposes a council tax increase above the national threshold. There will be a widespread stripping away of targets and the Comprehensive Area Settlement will be abolished. The Conservatives will end the "forced amalgamation" of authorities.
- ◆ **Cities.** The Government Office for London will close with its powers going to the mayor or local authorities. Mayors will be elected for the 12 biggest cities if people want them.

CPRE said that incentives for local authorities to build more homes must encourage good planning, not urban sprawl ([is.gd/lhY9](#)). The Town and Country Planning Association cautioned that national housing and regional planning must remain a priority (24dash: [is.gd/lfcS](#); Planning Portal: [is.gd/lfwU](#)).

2. Planning

South East eco-towns. The government has extended to the consultation deadline on the draft PPS and sustainability appraisal to 30 April (DCLG: [is.gd/lemt](#)). SEERA said that the proposals for three eco-towns in the South East risked thousands of extra homes being forced on the region through the backdoor. It is concerned that funding for infrastructure could be diverted to the new towns and called for decisions on the proposals to be made through the local and regional planning process (Planning: [is.gd/li3D](#); SEERA: [is.gd/lj0E](#)). Three reports have been completed on Weston Otmoor. None support the development. They predict transport chaos, an unacceptable impact on the landscape and difficulties in water supply and waste water management (Weston Front: <http://is.gd/log7>).

Other eco-towns. The firm behind the Marston Vale scheme in Bedfordshire has withdrawn from the eco-town programme in favour of pushing the site through the regional planning system (24dash: [is.gd/likD](#)). Middle Quinton in Warwickshire will generate a deficit of £373m and is not financially viable, according to a study funded by affected local authorities (24dash: [is.gd/lele](#)). CPRE said the report sounded the death knell for the entire eco-town programme (FT: [is.gd/leno](#)). Leicestershire County Council is to object to the proposed eco-town at Pennbury (Planning: [is.gd/liio](#)).

South East Plan. Nick Herbert MP warned that the government-imposed targets for 11,300 new homes around Arun threatened the character of the rural settlements and the surrounding countryside. "We will find that our villages lose their individual identities and developments will run into each other" (Shoreham Herald: tinyurl.com/cozsdd).

Thames Gateway. A 50 metre high sculpture of a white horse has been chosen to overlook the Ebbsfleet Valley regeneration area in Kent (Times: [is.gd/j8Xf](#)).

PPS6. Responses to the review of PPS6 showed strong support for the continuation of the town centre first policy, a stronger policy approach to small shops. The new impact test was also supported according to the government summary (DCLG: [is.gd/lidA](#)).

LDFs. Sound Core Strategies have now been approved for 11% of councils (Planning: [is.gd/lela](#)).

Flooding. 96% of local authority planning decisions followed the advice of the Environment Agency when it objected on grounds of flood risk in 2007-08, but 16 major and 100 smaller developments were approved in flood risk areas against Environment Agency advice (Edie: [is.gd/lhEe](#); EA: [is.gd/lhFz](#)). Developments in the Thames Gateway could be at risk from rising sea levels unless concerted action is taken now (Regen: [is.gd/leoS](#)).

Land banking. The Land Registry has published a guide warning investors and the public against land banking investment schemes ([is.gd/lih7](#)).

3. Housing

Housing targets. Housing starts were almost 60% lower in the final quarter of 2008 than in the corresponding period in the previous year (Regen: [is.gd/lfv1](#)). The government must build more affordable homes and stick to its long-term house building targets, the Communities and Local Government select committee said in its report *Housing and the Credit Crunch*. Kate Gordon for CPRE said "No-one in the industry seriously believes the national target of three million homes by 2020 can be met. Pursuing this target will lead to greenfield land being allocated needlessly for development" (Planning: [is.gd/lf35](#); Report: [is.gd/4xqd](#)).

Empty housing. The number of empty homes rose from 672,000 to 697,000 in 2007/08, the biggest increase for 17 years (Planning: [is.gd/lij6](#); Inside Housing: [is.gd/lij9](#)). Empty low cost affordable homes have risen by 10% (Inside Housing: [is.gd/lelr](#)). The Tories claim their Empty Property Rescue Scheme can ease the problem of 1.8 million families struggling to find accommodation while almost 1 million homes lie empty. The scheme would adopt lower living and environmental standards for the homes (Inside Housing: [is.gd/li92](#); [is.gd/lia4](#)).

Affordable housing. Kate Barker is leading the 2020 Group of housing associations, unions and local authorities. It is calling on the government to invest £6.3 billion on building more than 100,000 affordable homes over the next two years (24dash: [is.gd/le5B](#)).

Brownfield. During 2007 some 77% of dwellings (including conversions) were built on previously developed land, 1% up on 2006. The average density of new development in 2007 was 44 dwellings per hectare, compared to 41 in 2006 (Planning Portal: [is.gd/lign](#)).

Low Carbon. The Government is consulting on its *Heat and Energy Savings Strategy* and unveiled long-term plans for green makeovers to seven million homes by 2020. Householders will be rewarded for generating power and energy suppliers will be obliged to provide energy efficiency measures to domestic consumers. Homeowners will repay through their bills. The Sustainable Development Commission hailed the plans as "truly visionary and very positive" (24dash: [is.gd/le2d](#); [tinyurl.com/djbjrc](#); DECC consultation: [tinyurl.com/d7grq9](#); DCLG: [tinyurl.com/dc36o8](#)). Waterwise said that the government has ignored the energy costs of water in its proposals ([is.gd/leg2](#)). Housing associations are calling for tougher standards to be imposed on the private sector, which has been given a longer timetable to cut carbon emissions from new houses (24dash: [tinyurl.com/bglpl4](#)). The Liberals promised that every home will be energy-efficient within 10 years in a compulsory revamp of housing stock equivalent to the "digital switchover" (Guardian: [is.gd/liij](#)).

4. Green Space and Environment

Environment Agency to enable. Chairman Lord Chris Smith called for a "green deal" and said that the UK must not return to business as usual when the economy emerges from the recession but must make a "historic shift" towards sustainability. The Environment Agency's role will be to become "an enabler organisation" he said, and make it easier for others to make the right environmental choices. "Increasingly, we have to see ourselves as a facilitator as well as a regulator," he said (Edie: [is.gd/lhDk](#)).

The **Sustainable Development Commission** has been set up as a non-departmental public body, giving it more freedom from Whitehall (Inside Housing: [is.gd/ig0h](#)).

Green belt. There is growing pessimism about the future of Sevenoaks green belt under the South East Plan (This is Kent: [is.gd/lffR](#)). A proposed fish farm in Kent has been turned down because it is in the green belt (This is Kent: [tinyurl.com/czmzx6](#)). An equestrian facility in the green belt at Sears Green is meeting opposition (Bucks Advertiser: [tinyurl.com/dak3dh](#)). A farmer battling a proposed storage plot on his land in the Hertfordshire green belt has declared: "the British countryside is not for sale" (Watford Observer: [tinyurl.com/aphyda](#)).

Parks undervalued. Many local authorities value parks at just £1, but the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment claims the true value can exceed £100 million: "If you have a building on your stocks valued at £5 million and a park valued at £1, then maintaining the building will appear the better investment". It is proposing a new valuation framework that takes into account plants and trees (Regen: [is.gd/ligV](#); CABE: [is.gd/lih0](#)).

Garden grabbing. Ministers denied opposition claims that the planning system and government policy, which define back gardens as brownfield land, encourage the development of gardens for housing (Planning Portal: [is.gd/lisG](#)). Greater protection should be given to green spaces to halt the concreting over of the city's "lungs" and gardens, an Oxford MP said. Helena Whall for CPRE Oxfordshire welcomed the call: "We have for many years been urging the Government to address 'garden-grabbing'. Thousands of new homes each year that ministers claim are going up on brownfield sites are actually being built in back gardens" (Oxford Mail: [is.gd/iZEF](#)).

Allotments. The National Trust is creating up to 1,000 new allotments or community gardens (Times: [is.gd/lhCm](#)). George Monbiot took exception to the move: "allotments have been used as a sop to the dispossessed for at least four centuries" (Guardian: [is.gd/kDFI](#)). Fiona Reynolds responded that the National Trust is changing (Guardian: [is.gd/lhB5](#)).

Million ponds. Pond Conservation and 10 other organisations have launched a project aiming to reverse a century of pond loss, ensuring that once again the UK has over one million countryside ponds (Natural England: [is.gd/liZn](#); PC: [is.gd/liZ9](#)).

Set aside. Farmers are being asked by Defra to come up with innovative ways of preserving the environmental benefits of set aside (24dash: [is.gd/le6K](#)). Natural England and Defra however believe a compulsory scheme will be needed (Farmers Weekly: [is.gd/le6K](#)). The NFU said the priority must be to boost food production (Independent: [is.gd/jLnw](#)).

Trees. Saplings are trees and are therefore protected by TPOs according to a High Court ruling. "A TPO for woodland extends to all trees in the woodland, even if not in existence at the time the order is made" (Planning Portal: [is.gd/lfvK](#)).

Tories back ecological offsetting. Under Conservative proposals to stop biodiversity loss in the UK, all species will be given a cash value. The damage done by a project will also be given a cash value and developers asked to compensate for that damage by investing an equivalent amount to protect or improve biodiversity elsewhere (Guardian: [is.gd/iYgK](#)).

Waste. Cherwell District Council has pledged to fight plans to site an incinerator near Bicester, arguing that the county's waste policy is not yet in place (Planning: [is.gd/lidr](#)). A Surrey parish council is waiting to hear whether its High Court action to block an incinerator is successful (Planning: [is.gd/liIU](#)). Almost 40% of packaging found in a typical shopping basket at supermarket retailers cannot be easily recycled according to the LGA, which called on supermarkets to pay the cost of disposal. Waitrose and Lidl supermarkets are the worst offenders. (Guardian: [is.gd/jNTk](#); Independent: [is.gd/li8a](#)). Supermarkets issued 9.9 million plastic bags last year, a cut of 26% (Independent: [is.gd/l8ln](#)).

Planning for climate change. The UK should prepare for significant loss of landmass, and should prepare for a world potentially characterised by extreme heat and high sea levels, the Institution of Mechanical Engineers said. Effective master planning of urban areas is needed to increase natural and artificial ventilation corridors to help communities cope with climate change. New railways must be built because many of the existing routes use valleys that could be flooded. Reservoirs should be built underground to prevent evaporation and large scale funding is needed for researching for new forms of energy such as fusion (Planning: [is.gd/lfbB](#); Guardian: [is.gd/jqvP](#); Report: [is.gd/lfd3](#)).

5. Energy and Climate Change

Carbon and climate change. Carbon prices have collapsed in the recession, making it more economical to pollute (Guardian: [is.gd/lfsC](#)). MEPs backed new EU targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80% before 2050, and 25%-40% by 2020. 60% of energy will come from renewable sources, and the EU will have a 35% energy efficiency goal (New Energy Focus: [is.gd/lisi](#)). The UK's carbon dioxide emissions fell by 1.5 per cent in 2007, a figure disputed by environmentalists who accused the government of "creative accounting" (Independent: [is.gd/liv6](#); FoE: [is.gd/livb](#); Guardian: [is.gd/igwN](#)). Half of the recent rise in China's CO2 pollution is caused by the manufacture of goods for other countries, including the UK (Guardian: [is.gd/kx6x](#)).

Nuclear road to Damascus. Four prominent UK greens have backed nuclear power after decades of opposition because of the urgent need to curb emissions of carbon dioxide. They are: Stephen Tindale, former director of Greenpeace; Lord Chris Smith, chairman of the Environment Agency; Mark Lynas, Oxford environmentalist; and Chris Goodall, Green Party activist—the party may sack him over his conversion. Tindale said: "Being anti-nuclear was an essential part of being an environmentalist... but now... it's actually quite widespread this view that nuclear power is not ideal but it's better than climate change" (Independent: [is.gd/ku6B](#); [is.gd/lfaU](#)). The cost of meeting carbon reduction targets without nuclear power stations could be as much as £11 billion, the government claimed (Planning: [is.gd/liml](#)). Scottish First minister Alex Salmond rejected nuclear plants north of the border (Planning:

[is.gd/lf8A](#)). Greece announced a moratorium on new nuclear and coal power (Edie: [is.gd/lhE1](#)). The Swedish government announced a return to nuclear generation (Times: [is.gd/lhF2](#)) and its decision is influencing German opinion (Spiegel: [is.gd/lhEN](#)). Poland is also planning nuclear plants (Polskie Radio: [is.gd/lhGa](#)).

Wind. Planning is being sought for three 125m turbines at Cheverton Down on the Isle of Wight AONB. Developers are offering £1,000 a year to the community (Planning: [tinyurl.com/boj4xz](#)). Hazel Blears allowed an appeal against refusal of planning permission for wind turbines on moor land in Northumberland. Dominic Coupe for Northumberland CPRE said "The effect of this will be to create a vast industrial installation on the moors north of Alnwick, with structures taller than any buildings between London and Edinburgh" (Journal Live: [tinyurl.com/bzvyxf](#)). Britain has little capacity to build larger turbines but is leading the market in manufacture small wind turbines which generate up to 50kW of power. However, most are exported. The BWEA blames the government for failing to release guidance three on acceptable noise limits for small turbines (Edie: [is.gd/leSL](#)). Up to 100 300ft giant turbines are planned off the Dorset's Jurassic Coast, a World Heritage Site (Daily Mail: [is.gd/lf4T](#)). Planning permission has been secured for four turbines in North Herefordshire. Natural England objected to the "unmitigated and uncompensated significant impact on" the Shropshire Hills AONB. It called on the developer to pay financial compensation to the community for landscape loss. £120,000 for landscape projects secured, Natural England withdrew its objection.

Coal and gas. Climate secretary Ed Miliband has asked for a thorough review of plans for up to eight new coal plants and may force companies to fit carbon capture and storage (Guardian: [is.gd/kO63](#)). The chief executive of Centrica warned that coal plants fitted with CCS equipment are unlikely to be ready before 2030 (Guardian: [is.gd/l60q](#)). Campaigners from forty developing countries wrote to Miliband accusing the UK of being a climate criminal for its coal plans (Guardian: [is.gd/ku6m](#)). "Coal-fired power stations are death factories. Close them" was the blunt message from James Hansen, director of Nasa's Goddard Institute for Space Studies to Gordon Brown (Guardian: [is.gd/jCVZ](#)). Three gas powered stations have been approved (Planning Portal: [is.gd/ligr](#)).

6. Transport

Road. CPRE Oxfordshire campaigners said they were "disappointed but unsurprised" after Oxfordshire county councillors voted unanimously to approve the building of the controversial Cogges Link Road bypass at Witney. David Condon said "the vote was just a small preliminary skirmish compared with the onslaught that will be unleashed on the various authorities who wish to destroy the water meadows of Witney for the sake of their pet project the Cogges Link Road" (Oxford Mail: [is.gd/lhOy](#); [is.gd/lhOC](#)). A landowner has said he will apply for judicial review (CPRE Oxfordshire: <http://is.gd/log7>). George Monbiot recalled the unsuccessful 1994 battle to save Solsbury Hill near Bath from road construction (Guardian: [is.gd/lijn](#)). The Campaign for National Parks is calling on the government to provide sustainable travel in England's National parks (CNP: [is.gd/lepf](#)). Some biofuels cause more health problems than petrol and diesel, according to a new study (Guardian: [is.gd/ig0h](#)).

Aviation. Protestors against expansion of Lydd Airport in Kent have obtained legal opinion that the airport's Master Plan should be taken into account in the assessment of the adverse impact expansion will have on the European protected habitats that surround it (CPRE Kent: [tinyurl.com/bhdxut](#)). Changes to night flights at Manston airport were rushed through by Thanet council in the hope of securing a major freight operator. Kent CPRE director Hilary Newport said: "There is a real risk that this airport will have an effect on tourism because Ramsgate will become unattractive. We will take advice on if this is something that needs to be challenged" (This is Kent: [is.gd/lhQP](#); Planning: [is.gd/lick](#)). A Private Member's Bill to require Parliamentary approval for new major airports and additional runways is not being backed by the government (Planning Portal: [is.gd/lemk](#)). Stop Stansted Expansion is

challenging government's decision to approve an extra 10 million passengers a year in the High Court. It says that the government has ignored CO2 emissions, the negative impact on the economy and noise concerns (Planning: [is.gd/lf3W](#); Cambridge News: <http://is.gd/lo1K>). BAA said opening of a second runway at Stansted airport will be delayed by two years because there are not enough passengers (Planning: [is.gd/lfxt](#); Guardian: [is.gd/lfsc](#)).

Rail. The Tories have launched a plan to improve the railways, including a high-speed rail line linking London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, and a moratorium on building on disused rail lines (24dash: [is.gd/le68](#)).

Statistics. DfT has published its latest survey of public attitudes to climate change and transport. Around two-thirds of adults believed that "individuals should try to limit their car use for the sake of the environment" (DfT: [is.gd/leok](#)). The DfT has released the 2008 edition of transport trends. Car traffic in 2008 fell 1.7% on 2007 and HGV Traffic was down 2% ([is.gd/leiy](#); [is.gd/lef4](#)).

7. Rural Affairs and Food

Rural economy. The government published its response to last year's report on the rural economy from the Rural Advocate. It is critical of the Advocate's identification of a potential productivity gap of up to £347 billion between rural and urban areas, and says it is unhelpful to view rural economies in terms of 'unfulfilled potential'. It brushed off most of the recommendations (NDS: [is.gd/lees](#)). The Rural Advocate is currently conducting an inquiry into upland areas (Planning: [is.gd/liiU](#)). Defra has scaled back improvements to the Pirbright laboratory at the centre of the 2007 foot and mouth outbreak (Guardian: [is.gd/ku6m](#)).

Food. The Tories said that only meat "born and bred" in Britain should carry "British" labels (BBC: tinyurl.com/blta23). The culture of cheap food has damaged public health, farming and the environment, according to the head of Waitrose (Guardian: [is.gd/jOHf](#)). Nanotechnology could give packaged foods a dramatically longer shelf life and boost crop growth (Guardian: [is.gd/iZEF](#)). A report by Chatham House said the era of cheap food is over. The global food system will come under renewed pressure from the combined effects of population growth, the nutrition transition, energy, land, water, labour and climate change. Consumers will have to eat more genetically modified produce, while consumption of organic food may have to be reduced (Guardian: [is.gd/litl](#); Chatham House: [is.gd/liqo](#)). Organic farmers are pleading for rules to be relaxed so they can use non-organic feed (BBC: [is.gd/liTR](#)).

8. And finally...

CPRE groups are battling powerful government and energy interests to prevent the spread of wind farms. If we were the Campaign to Protect Rural Italy, it seems life would be more dangerous as we would also be battling the Mafia (AP: [is.gd/leVv](#)).

9. CPRE eBulletin

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