

# Campaign to Protect Rural England

## South East Region eBulletin: News for April 2010

*A shorter eBulletin than usual due to the lack of major policy announcements during purdah.*

### Planning & Environment News

#### 1. Housing the South East Report

The House of Commons South East Regional Committee hurried out a report on housing as the election was called (<http://is.gd/bRRpG>; Telegraph: <http://is.gd/bRRs7>).

**Housing.** The committee warned that current projections of population and household growth suggest the existing south east plan target to build 32,700 additional dwellings per year between 2006 and 2026 will be insufficient to meet need. It recommended the South East England Partnership Board takes account of the higher National Housing and Planning Advice Unit projections "as a matter of urgency and be prepared to revise their target upwards". CPRE told the committee that "housing demand in the South East is almost limitless and any attempt to satisfy demand could mean unacceptable damage to the environment and countryside". The committee responded: "Whilst campaign groups go to great lengths to explain to the public the negative impact of home building, too little is done to explain the negative impact of failing to meet targets." Committee chairman Dr Stephen Ladyman told the Telegraph: "Housing numbers are incredibly controversial and people get terribly upset about it, but the evidence we collected was absolutely clear; we are falling short of the current (new homes) target, and the current target itself is significantly short of what it should be. If we don't make changes then the whole country will suffer."

**Affordable housing.** "We are concerned that the region is currently not achieving the 35% target for affordable housing set out in the South East Plan... We urge the Government to consider alternative ways of delivering affordable housing... We also recommend that greater attention be paid to alternative models for providing housing land in rural areas, including community land trusts and nomination rights."

**Green belt.** CPRE South East Director Edward Dawson told the committee that "In many ways green belt has been the saviour of the region, because it has prevented the outward spread of the capital. It is integral to the future of the region." However, the Committee concluded that green belt policy "was designed for a different time, and it is now working against the ideal of sustainable communities which hope to encourage people to work, rest and play in the same local area... We recommend continuing support for [the] policy of selective review of green belt in the South East Plan."

**Environment.** The Committee said "We are aware that the landscape and environmental assets are part of what makes the South East such an attractive place to live and work" but it noted it had not received any convincing evidence as to what the region's environmental limits to development are. "We recommend that as part of their preparation of the Single Regional Strategy, the SEEPB fully engage at an early stage with regional agencies involved in environmental protection, such as the Environment Agency and Natural England, and the third sector".

**Reaction.** CPRE South East Director Edward Dawson said: "It's encouraging the MPs on the committee appear to be singing from the same hymn sheet as us... Its clear MPs agreed with us that the London and Oxford Green Belts have been the saviour of the region in terms of preventing ugly and damaging run-away development" (CPRE SE: <http://is.gd/bRSQE>; The News: <http://is.gd/bQNqq>).

**Election.** In Guilford, the Tories said the report showed that Labour planned "deletions" from the green belt (BBC: <http://is.gd/bRU7f>). Both Liberals and Labour are calling for a review of Oxford's green belt (BBC: <http://is.gd/bRWJQ>).

## 2. Housing

**Affordable housing.** Housing and planning minister John Healey wants to extend permitted development rights so that a maximum of 10-15 new affordable homes could be built when parish councils have set out "clear evidence and design expectations". The rights will apply to parish and town councils in settlements of less than 3,000 people where the council identifies a registered social landlord as their development partner. Green belt, habitat sites and other designated protections will be retained (Planning: <http://is.gd/bi3ai>). The government's affordable homes target could be missed by twenty years unless the three major parties promise to protect the housing budget, the National Housing Federation and the Home Builders Federation warned (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/bHwdQ>). The National Housing Federation also warned three million people will be living in overcrowded homes within three years (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/bQ5Sq>) and that poor housing costs the NHS £2.5bn a year in treating people (<http://is.gd/bQ3LN>).

**Around the South East.** Oxford City Council has been forced to trim the size of its planned Northern Gateway development after having to accept that the proposal to build 4,000 homes in the Green Belt south of Grenoble Road is being deleted from the South East Plan. Now there are thousands fewer homes in the pipeline, the council has had to scale down the proposed northern development in order to maintain the jobs-to-homes balance in the city (CPRE Oxon: <http://is.gd/bPsXH>). Developers have lost a High Court bid to build 210 homes outside Wallingford in Oxfordshire (Planning: <http://is.gd/bQ5aU>). A new settlement would be the best option to provide the bulk of the 5,000 new homes needed in Waverley, councillors suggested (Get Surrey: <http://is.gd/bi2X8>).

## 3. Planning

**Legal costs.** The European Commission has issued a final warning to the UK over the prohibitive costs of launching legal challenges to planning decisions. Failure to comply with the warning could result in a summons to the European Court of Justice (Planning: <http://is.gd/bQ7if>).

**Election.** The proposed eco-town in Fareham is being backed by Labour, opposed by the Liberals and broadly supported by the Conservatives (BBC: <http://is.gd/bTacD>).

## 4. Landscapes, Tranquillity and Environment

**Dibden Bay.** In a letter to Hampshire County Council, Natural England refused to back calls for Dibden Bay, a large area of reclaimed coastline near Hythe, to be made part of the New Forest National Park. It says the site, threatened by a container port, is not attractive enough to merit inclusion and it merely says port development must "take full account" of the environment (Andover Advertiser: <http://is.gd/bi1cL>).

**Green spaces.** Just five minutes of exercise in a "green space" such as a park can boost mental health, researchers claim (BBC: <http://is.gd/bRVs6>). A £4.5m government drive to boost the number of class outings to galleries, museums and the countryside has failed, a report by the Commons select committee said (Guardian: <http://is.gd/bRXa9>). The majority of quarries in England could be turned into wild areas, creating thousands of acres of space for threatened species. The RSPB said "Quarries can have a major impact on the landscape - but once they have reached the end of their life they have a fantastic potential to deliver habitats for threatened wildlife" (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/bQbbp>). Residents have succeeded in the High Court in overturning an inspector's decision to allow cabins in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Planning: <http://is.gd/bPADB>).

**Green belt.** Improved measurement techniques have found an extra 810 hectares of green belt land in England (Planning: <http://is.gd/bFMUA>). Pinewood Studios launched an appeal after its application for its controversial Project Pinewood scheme on green belt land was refused by South Bucks District Council (Bucks Advertiser: <http://is.gd/bQOuk>).

**Ecology.** British farmland birds populations have plummeted by 11% since the 1990s (Daily Mail: <http://is.gd/bQNu6>). Bee colonies are continuing to collapse in the United States and

UK (Guardian: <http://is.gd/bQOpC>). The threat to English oak from acute oak decline may prove worse than Dutch Elm disease (Independent: <http://is.gd/bRZK5>). There is hope that bleeding canker disease which is devastating horse chestnuts could be cured (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/bS0Kv>). The Woodland Trust is mapping the wild cherry in a bid to prevent its extinction (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/bS1in>).

**Light pollution.** A survey carried out by the CPRE and the British Astronomical Association found 83% of people have their view of the night sky affected by light pollution. Half of the 1,000 people polled said their sleep was affected, while most were unable to study stars (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/buXyE>). Andy Boddington explained CPRE Shropshire's dark skies Twitter project to the Birmingham Post (<http://is.gd/bQCw2>). Sark is in the process of applying to become the first Dark Skies Island in the world (CTV: <http://is.gd/bQ2AV>).

**Litter.** TV nature expert and vice-president of CPRE Leicestershire, Colin Green, said he was disgusted by the filth that had accumulated in rural areas (This is Leics: <http://is.gd/bQ8kl>).

**Tranquillity.** In the wake of the aviation shutdown following the volcanic eruption, Ralph Smyth of CPRE called for a National Quiet Day "to remind us all for one day at least of what we are all losing in our rush to be somewhere else" (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/bHtuH>). The Open Spaces Society is objecting to retrospective planning permission for microlights to be flown in Buckinghamshire next to the Bernwood Jubilee Way (Grough: <http://is.gd/bQ5oW>).

**Art.** Plans for the construction of a 50 metre-tall white horse sculpture in Kent have been given the go-ahead (Regen: <http://is.gd/bQEdl>).

## 5. Transport

**High Speed Two.** Celebrities and aristocrats are joining the campaign against the rail line, including Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne, Sophie Dahl, and Lord Rothschild (Times: <http://is.gd/bEuCi>). The small village of Chetwode in rural Bucks fears it could be completely decimated by the route (Advertiser: <http://is.gd/bQ8BB>). On a visit to Oxford Lord Adonis said High Speed 2 would free up capacity on the Chiltern Line and could alleviate traffic congestion on roads like the A34 (Oxford Mail: <http://is.gd/bQM08>). Buckinghamshire County Council said the case for the scheme was unproven and the route through the Chilterns unacceptable (eGov: <http://is.gd/bQMuc>). Protestors in London claim the compensation scheme is unfair and are proposing a more substantial scheme (Local London: <http://is.gd/bQ3Cb>; CNJ: <http://is.gd/bQ44L>). South Northamptonshire Action Group has been formed by business people, farmers and landowners opposed to the line (Chronicle: <http://is.gd/bQ8s9>). More than 9,000 people have signed up to a Facebook protest page against the link (<http://is.gd/bEuOo>).

**Aviation.** The High Court ordered the Government to pay 60% of the legal costs incurred by Heathrow campaigners in their battle against the third runway (Uxbridge Gazette: <http://is.gd/bQLOH>). Green party leader Caroline Lucas called on the European Commission to launch an investigation into Shepway District Council's resolution to approve an extension at Lydd Airport (Planning: <http://is.gd/bPAKK>). A decision on the extension should be called in the government has been delayed until after the election (BBC: <http://is.gd/bQbZY>; Guardian: <http://is.gd/bQBZp>).

**Clutter.** The Plain English Campaign complained that too many pointless signs are springing up next to Britain's roads (Independent: <http://is.gd/bi0LI>).

## 6. Energy, Waste and Water

**Climate Change & the Carbon Economy.** Researchers at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research said that the 76 countries that had made pledges under the Copenhagen accord had put off making difficult decisions and were "betting on extreme reduction rates" in emissions after 2020, leaving the world "in dire peril" from rising temperatures (Times: <http://is.gd/bEwc4>). Almost 40% of UK farm businesses are being affected by climate change. While farmers think climate change will bring some threats such as floods and droughts, most think it will bring opportunities, such as prospects for growing

alternative crops in a warmer climate (FWI: <http://is.gd/bF6Ld>). The Energy Bill, which provides financial support for Carbon Capture and Storage and revises the role of Ofgem received Royal Assent (NEF: <http://is.gd/bQQZs>).

**Wind Energy.** It takes an average of 26 months to win permission for a wind farm in Britain, compared with an average of 42 months across the EU. Britain also has one of the least bureaucratic planning systems, with developers needing to contact an average of 15 authorities and organisations to obtain permission. The EU average is 18 (Times: <http://is.gd/bEuks>). Renewable UK retorted "These sort of statistics don't show us the refusal ratio which is 75% in the UK" (Ecologist: <http://is.gd/bQDWb>). The Wall Street Journal reviewed the UK's growing offshore wind industry (<http://is.gd/bFMqT>) and Bloomberg said offshore wind is set to boom (<http://is.gd/bQ4fG>). A couple are suing for £380k after being driven out of home by 66db noise from wind turbines (Daily Mail: <http://is.gd/bFMEK>). A new study has developed a scoring system that could help assess proposals for onshore wind plants. It considered four aspects: the technical properties, the social impact, the environmental impact and the share of earnings offered as compensation for any negative effects (Click Green: <http://is.gd/bHviM>). The Ministry of Defence has dropped its objections to five offshore wind farms for the Greater Wash after commissioning a new radar system (NNN: <http://is.gd/bHvqN>; NEF: <http://is.gd/bQR4g>; BBC: <http://is.gd/bQbV5>). Natural England is objecting to a windfarm that will impact on the Lake District & National Park and the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Times & Star: <http://is.gd/bQaX1>). A wind farm proposal near Morpeth has been rejected for being in the green belt (Morpeth Herald: <http://is.gd/bQbHh>). Five turbines are proposed on the Isle of Wight (BBC: <http://is.gd/bQbRz>). Green campaigner Jonathon Porritt has slammed the "elitist" mentality of middle-class people protesting against wind turbines (Birmingham Post: <http://is.gd/bQCqc>).

**Other renewables.** Reading West Labour MP Martin Salter and Conservative MP for Broxbourne Charles Walker have joined forces to call on the government to drop plans for the Severn Barrage on environmental grounds (Planning: <http://is.gd/bRWkg>).

**Nuclear.** German energy giants E.ON and RWE confirmed plans to bid to build a new nuclear reactor at Wylfa on Anglesey (EEN: <http://is.gd/bQLDw>).

**Coal.** Protesters continue to occupy the future site of an open cast mine in the shadow on the Wrekin, Telford and Wrekin (<http://is.gd/bEFcW>; <http://is.gd/bQ5Wz>).

**Water.** The Group Against Reservoir Development has uncovered an environmental report, commissioned by Thames Water, which shows that the proposed Abingdon reservoir would create massive upheaval and environmental damage over nine years (Oxford Mail: <http://is.gd/bQNg1>; GARD: <http://is.gd/bPtEp>). Water companies, not farmers, are to blame for river pollution and household sewage waste rather than farm slurry should be the target of tough pollution measures to reduce phosphorus levels in English rivers, says a study by the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (Ecologist: <http://is.gd/bQFQq>). The Worldwide Fund for Nature fears that the growing population will lead to Britain's rivers drying up, including the Itchen in Hampshire (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/bS1se>; WWF: <http://is.gd/bS1uR>).

## 7. Rural Affairs, Farming and Food

**Rural Prospects** is the title of a research report on the Future of Rural Development in the UK from Newcastle University. It covers topics such as ageing, broadband housing and economics (<http://is.gd/bQQP0>).

**Farming.** The National Audit Office said the £200m Organic Entry Level Scheme, set up to reward organic farmers for protecting the environment and the landscape, had not given the environmental benefits Defra had claimed it would give or offered value for money (FWI: <http://is.gd/bi2qV>). Britain needs one million farmers, say campaigners, and city workers and allotment farmers are needed to reverse dwindling farm workforce (Ecologist: <http://is.gd/bQFWD>).

**Food.** Claims that world food production will have to double by 2050 have been challenged by the Soil Association which says that the increase of around 70% rather than 100% is needed, a difference equivalent to the entire food production of the continent of America (Ecologist: <http://is.gd/bJnw9>). Consumers turned their back on organic food but continued to buy fairtrade in 2009 (Ecologist: <http://is.gd/bQFKC>).

**Retail.** Vacancy rates in UK shopping centres stood at 8.5% at the end of 2009. This compared to a national high street average of more than 12% (Regen: <http://is.gd/bQD5d>).

## 8. Campaigning

**CPRE.** "Why doesn't the Campaign to Protect Rural England want to protect rural England?" James Delingpole challenges CPRE in the Telegraph (<http://is.gd/bQCjQ>). CPRE Wiltshire has adopted a new working name, Protect Wiltshire, designed to be more user friendly and attract new, younger members (Gazette: <http://is.gd/brTWf>). CPRE Dorset organised a seminar on renewable energy (<http://is.gd/bQ3cs>).

**Civic Voice.** Tony Burton, who heads up the new Civic Voice initiative is profiled in Planning (<http://is.gd/bFKjX>). The Civic Voice brand was created by Dragon Rouge (<http://is.gd/bFOBP>). Griff Rhys Jones: "Conservation and the preservation of rural England, it's all divided into lots of groups, some of which are at war with each other" (Guardian: <http://is.gd/bJIFh>).

**Lily Kember** of Plane Stupid has been given the Independent's Green Award for Best Campaigner (Independent: <http://is.gd/bRZV3>).

## CPRE South East eBulletin

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