

Campaign to Protect Rural England

South East Region eBulletin: News for July 2010

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1. Planning and Economy

The Right to Build scheme. The government plans to enable villages in England to build homes, shops and businesses without seeking council planning permission, "as long as there is overwhelming community backing in a local referendum" (CLG: <http://is.gd/dOJPQ>; <http://is.gd/dOJZv>). Fiona Howie for CPRE criticised the scheme saying that development should be controlled through local plans not a simple public ballot (BBC: <http://is.gd/dD08W>; 24dash: <http://is.gd/dJaX5>; CPRE: <http://is.gd/dD0GF>). The Telegraph and Mirror claimed it will allow building in the green belt (<http://is.gd/dD1Oa>; <http://is.gd/dJ0wR>). The RTPI said: "we believe that local plans, developed by elected members in partnership with local people and businesses are the most democratic way to deliver the aspirations of local communities for housing provision" (Planning: <http://is.gd/dKbFF>).

Schools. Communities minister Eric Pickles has issued new planning guidance directing planning authorities to "only refuse planning permission for a new school if the adverse planning impacts on the local area outweigh the desirability of establishing a school in that area". Where a refusal is challenged, the appeal will be fast tracked (Planning: <http://is.gd/dOxFK>; Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/dSF3i>).

South East Plan. Decentralisation Minister Greg Clark dumped 3,000 pages of South East Regional Plan documents on the dispatch box. "It weighs two stone" he told the House, "the document we've replaced it with is six pages and weighs an ounce" (<http://is.gd/dus06>). Examination of the Oxford Core Strategy is set to continue, taking into account the deletion of the South East Plan (CPRE Oxon: <http://is.gd/dOyGO>) and South Oxfordshire District Council is to start work on a new Core Strategy (Thame: <http://is.gd/dOIwU>).

Post-RDA world. The new Local Enterprise Partnerships that will replace regional development agencies are to be handed a "lead role" in coordinating funding from coalition's planned £1 billion Regional Growth Fund the government said (Planning: <http://is.gd/dOIec>). Lord Heseltine will chair a panel that will recommend to ministers which projects should receive grants from the same fund (Planning: <http://is.gd/dOJHw>).

Landmark polytunnel ruling. Wye Valley Action Association has won a High Court ruling that polytunnels near sensitive sites must be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment. The ruling recognised the impact of the development on the surrounding countryside, not just on the farmland where the polytunnels were erected. Paul Stookes for the WVAA said "There are real tensions in food production. We should be producing food locally, but you have to question whether we should be producing summer fruits in February." The NFU is to support an appeal by Herefordshire Council against ruling in the Appeal Court in November (Guardian: <http://is.gd/deVJb>; Planning: <http://is.gd/dlzav>).

Wales rural planning policy. The WAG has issued new planning guidance for sustainable rural communities. It promotes affordable rural housing and "rural enterprise dwellings" where there is an identified need. Farmers will be able to build a new home on their land to pass their business on to a younger person and guidance is provided for low impact "One Planet Developments" in open countryside (<http://is.gd/dzrQ5>).

Deregulation. The Planning Officers Society identified 15 areas of current planning practice it wants to be slimmed or abolished under the government's deregulation scheme, including advertising in newspapers, sustainability assessments and the need to demonstrate a five year supply of housing land. They also want a review of current four-year and ten-year immunity rules for unlawful development (<http://is.gd/dD2wD>).

2. Housing

South East Plan. Eastleigh Borough Council has abandoned plans for 6,000 houses at Hedge End, a Strategic Development Area in the South East Plan. CPRE South Hampshire applauded the decision (Daily Echo: <http://is.gd/dJuNO>; The News: <http://is.gd/dLxcz>). Henley MP John Howell talked to the Oxford Times about new planning rules and development at Grenoble Road, targeted for a 4,000 home urban extension under the SEP until halted by a legal challenge from CPRE Oxon (<http://is.gd/dJt6u>).

Affordable rural housing. Many villages and rural areas will become enclaves of the wealthy with local shops and services a distant memory unless affordable housing is built, the National Housing Federation, CPRE and others said. Kate Houghton for CPRE said: "The people who are being priced out of the countryside are the people who make up the lifeblood of rural communities. If the people who maintain our rural areas and their services cannot find housing locally, the heart of many communities will be lost" (Report: <http://is.gd/dP2iz>). The National Housing Federation, the NFU and the National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs said that farmers fear being priced out of the countryside by shortage of affordable homes (<http://is.gd/dsDks>).

Numbers. The NHF said that up to 85,000 houses could be dropped from plans after the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies (PP: <http://is.gd/dD286>). The Communities and Local Government Committee is to conduct an inquiry into localism and the impact of scrapping regional spatial strategies will have on house building (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/dSFFO>). Around one in ten social homes, 436,000, are under occupied across the country (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/dztfj>; <http://is.gd/dBIck>).

Eco-towns and houses. The government has halved the budget for eco-towns and asked the Office of Government Commerce to conduct a review of finance (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/dP2oa>; PP: <http://is.gd/dOXCX>; Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/dOXgO>). Bicester's eco-town looks set to go ahead despite the funding cut (Oxford Times: <http://is.gd/dOO9M0>; OJ: <http://is.gd/dOOgF>). Adur District Council is concerned about funds for the Shoreham Harbour eco-town: "At this stage we're not even guaranteed 50%... Without the funding to finish off the studies we need, the eco-town won't happen" (Argus: <http://is.gd/dP2KI>). The government is to launch a community energy fund to allow housing developers to meet renewable energy obligations through financial support to local energy schemes (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/dOiub>; Building: <http://is.gd/dOuzA>; CLG: <http://is.gd/dOTzG>). Under the Green Deal, households will be able to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and pay back the costs through fuel bill savings (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/dOiSX>).

3. Coalition Government: scrapped, mergers and uncertainties

Regional. The government announced its intention to abolish the eight regional government offices "subject to the satisfactory resolution of consequential issues through the Spending Review" (RSN: <http://is.gd/dOFyS>). The Regional Development Agencies will go by March 2012 but there are confused messages about which powers and funds will go to the new Local Enterprise Partnerships and which will be drawn back to central government (CLG Structural Reform Plan: <http://is.gd/dP4iD>).

Environment and landscape. Caroline Spelman withdrew Defra funding from the Sustainable Development Commission. Jonathan Porritt accused Spelman of "utterly brazen cynicism" (FFF: <http://is.gd/dOvds0>). Spelman abolished outright the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, the Inland Waterways Advisory Council and the Commons Commissioners (<http://is.gd/dOacO>; RSN: <http://is.gd/dD12M>). The members of Wildlife Link, including CPRE, told the government it could advise on which budgets and quangos could be cut (<http://is.gd/dOebH>), a move that has led to an accusation they are undermining the green movement (Guardian: <http://is.gd/dOens>). Wildlife link issued an warning against reductions in spending that would hit public recreation, conservation and wildlife-friendly farming (RSN: <http://is.gd/dOCfY>).

Farming. Caroline Spelman scythed away the Agricultural Wages Board, fifteen Agricultural Wages Committees, sixteen Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committees and the Committee on Agricultural Valuation (<http://is.gd/dOacO>). Rumours Spelman is the Grim Reaper have been denied by Defra. The Food Standards Agency has been stripped of its responsibility for nutrition policy, food labelling and food composition policies (<http://is.gd/dO9YM>).

Heritage. Architecture and heritage watchdogs, CABE & English Heritage, may be merged. The Heritage Lottery Fund and National Heritage Memorial Fund could meet the same fate (Building Design: <http://is.gd/dDlii>; DCMS: <http://is.gd/dO9IM>).

4. Landscapes, Tranquillity and Environment

Nature of England. Defra has issued an "an invitation to shape the nature of England". The consultation is designed to shape a white paper on the natural environment due later in the year (Closing date: 30 October; <http://is.gd/dLCFx>). Caroline Spelman told the Guardian "our approach to our natural environment is often bafflingly equivocal" (<http://is.gd/dLD3s>). Oliver Hilliam for CPRE said "At last, we are finally hearing noises from the government which suggest an understanding that the natural environment should be valued for its intrinsic – and irreplaceable – benefits" (Guardian: <http://is.gd/dOq54>). Wildlife and countryside groups, including CPRE, said the countryside has been 'overlooked' amid the climate change battle. Helen Meech, assistant director of external affairs at the National Trust said: "The environment agenda has been very dominated by climate change and this discussion is an opportunity to bring the natural environment back up the agenda" (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/dLy1W>).

Green belts. Elmbridge Council is set to ban a long standing car boot sale in the green belt (Surrey Herald: <http://is.gd/dJtHX>), and also rejected a sunken hotel (Surrey Herald: <http://is.gd/dP484>). Plans for a boat house and lodges in the Kent green belt was rejected (Kent News: <http://is.gd/dJua4>).

Town greens. Kate Ashbrook of the Open Spaces Society said there no evidence whatever that people are using village green status to thwart development and no case for a review of the law (News Start: <http://is.gd/dBHtA>). Natural England and other government agencies are looking for the UK best landscape projects. Only local authorities, housing associations and registered charities need apply (<http://is.gd/dJzpI>).

Biodiversity. Farmland bird numbers in England have fallen to a 44-year low after dramatic habitat loss and a harsh winter. The British Trust for Ornithology said "there is certainly no evidence yet that farming initiatives such as environmental stewardship have succeeded in reversing national population declines." The RSPB claimed that intensive farming practices have caused a sharp decline in kestrel numbers in recent years but the BTO rejected the claim (Guardian: <http://is.gd/dSC4s>; FWI: <http://is.gd/dB2U7>; Telegraph: <http://is.gd/dOvVM>). A study by Price Waterhouse Coopers warned that the UK economy at risk from unchecked biodiversity loss (<http://is.gd/dqzFY>).

Heritage. Chatham Dockyard and the former RAF Upper Heyford are on the government's long list for World Heritage Status nomination (Planning: <http://is.gd/dP6ht>).

Light pollution. The Highways Agency is turning off lights on quiet motorways (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/dOATO>). The North Norfolk Astronomy Society is conducting a Dark Skies Survey (EDP24: <http://is.gd/dOMUV>). Wiltshire Council is rolling out a scheme to reduce light pollution (Salisbury Journal: <http://is.gd/dP6st>).

Litter. Keep Britain Tidy said the cost of employing litter pickers and buying equipment to clear chewing gum rose by £100 million to £858 million. Samantha Harding for CPRE, called for some innovative measures like paying people to bring back empty bottles and cans and providing more bins (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/dONbX>). Clive Aslet treated us to a historical perspective on litter (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/dOMtk>).

5. Transport

High Speed 2. Lord Mawhinney said a direct link to Heathrow airport should only be considered once the high speed network has been extended at least to Manchester and Leeds (Report: <http://is.gd/dOz7g>). The newly-formed Conserve the Chilterns and Countryside campaign group, said: "Lord Mawhinney is making recommendations based on rushing ahead with the misguided route recommended under the previous administration" (BFP: <http://is.gd/dOL12>). Aylesbury MP David Lidington, Minister for Europe, said he would vote against the high speed rail proposals even if it meant losing his ministerial job (Bucks Herald: <http://is.gd/dOLsw>). CPRE had raised concerns about the impact on London's green belt of a Heathrow parkway station on the floodplain at Iver, Bucks (<http://is.gd/dOM7l>).

Rural bus routes are among those likely to be worst hit by a review of public transport funding, CPRE and the Campaign for Better Transport said. Shaun Spiers said "Cutting the bus grant may look like a quick way to slash spending, but the social, environmental and economic costs to the countryside would be huge. Those unable to drive could be forced to move out of rural areas or face isolation, while those living car-free in towns may be cut off from the countryside. Closed pubs and post offices would be joined by derelict bus shelters, the final straw for the vibrancy of many villages" (RSN: <http://is.gd/dOCyx>; Guardian: <http://is.gd/dODcS0>).

Roads. Charging motorists for each mile they travel is inevitable if future traffic gridlock is to be avoided, the RAC Foundation said (BBC: <http://is.gd/dfMjh>).

Aviation. The Institution of Civil Engineers said the government must overturn its ban on new runways at the country's busiest airports or risk undermining the UK's global connectivity and competitiveness (Planning: <http://is.gd/dP1jy0>).

6. Energy, Waste and Water

Climate Change and the Carbon Economy. Simple measures such as turning electrical appliances off at the mains and installing energy-efficient light bulbs could slash the UK's carbon dioxide emissions said the Grantham Institute for Climate Change (Independent: <http://is.gd/dOBlj>). Global temperatures in the first half of the year were the hottest yet (Guardian: <http://is.gd/dSE72>). A report cleared Climategate scientists of fudging data but said they should have been more open about their work (Guardian: <http://is.gd/dOE6C>; Independent: <http://is.gd/dOEN9>). Greenpeace said "To peak and decline our emissions was always going to need us to push a large rock up a steep hill, but the rock got heavier and the hill got steeper because of the reporting of the [Climategate] emails" (Guardian: <http://is.gd/dOEy2>).

Energy policy. The government presented its first annual energy statement to parliament. Energy and Climate Change Secretary, Chris Huhne promised to provide incentives to generate heat from renewable sources, speed up the connection of offshore windfarms to the national grid, bring in emissions performance standards for power plants and introduce smart meters more quickly (Independent: <http://is.gd/dOsGP>). In an interview with the Sunday Telegraph, Huhne said that more wind turbines would be built (<http://is.gd/dOtd8>). A government review of the energy planning National Policy Statements was welcomed by CPRE (NEF: <http://is.gd/dOWL0>; DECC: <http://ow.ly/2cep1>; CPRE: <http://ow.ly/2cepX>). Friends of the Earth published a report calling for stronger government policies on renewables and more community schemes (<http://is.gd/dOy5B>). The Committee on Climate Change said low-carbon technologies must continue to get government support, or risk never reaching market (Guardian: <http://is.gd/dOypd>). The government has launched a consultation on its microgeneration policies (NEF: <http://is.gd/dOXrK>).

Wind. CPRE Northamptonshire is calling on CPRE nationally to withdraw its qualified support for onshore wind power generation. It says wind power failing to live up to its promise, any environmental good from carbon savings is a fraction of that suggested by the wind industry, and the very modest quantities of electricity produced are of limited use (Executive

Summary: <http://is.gd/dsKbH>; Report: <http://is.gd/dsKex>). Britain's offshore wind ambitions will face a £10bn funding gap within five years, energy experts said (Independent: <http://is.gd/dJqSq>). Fishing groups are calling for a suspension of offshore energy development pending an investigation into the effect of cable technology on salmon stock (Planning: <http://is.gd/dJqab>).

Wind appeals. CPRE Oxfordshire said it was disappointed that four 125-metre-tall (400ft) turbines at Fewcott Wind Farm near the M40 were given the go-ahead on appeal. Mike Tyce for CPRE Oxfordshire said: "It is certainly disappointing news, to say the least, for CPRE and all the others who have worked so hard at the Inquiry. It is really disappointing for the residents of Fritwell and Fewcott who will have to live under their overpowering presence for at least the twenty-five years for which the turbines are permitted" (<http://is.gd/dOtW9>). In Leicestershire plans for eight turbines were rejected at appeal due to their local impact (Planning: <http://is.gd/dP1A3>). A decision on a wind farm in Cambridgeshire is on hold due to the abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategy (Cambridge News: <http://is.gd/dOdXs>). A farming couple in Cumbria lost their High Court challenge to plans for a wind farm near their land (Planning: <http://is.gd/dP3hL>).

Fossil fuels. European coal fired power stations will now have to 2023 to clean up their emissions or close down (Independent: <http://is.gd/dOGd5>).

Waste. If all planned incinerators are built, UK will have more capacity than waste (Tolvik: <http://is.gd/dD3ct>). Defra is reviewing waste policy and delivery in England (Deadline 9 September: <http://is.gd/dSGMd>; <http://is.gd/dSErr>). Defra is recommending community ownership of 'energy from waste plants' and that those communities get a discount in their fuel bills. Friends of the Earth said: "Suggesting people will accept incinerators if they come in pretty buildings with a cash reward belittles the valid arguments that communities have against them" (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/dSEVm>).

Water. The inquiry into the proposed Upper Thames Reservoir has finished hearing evidence. A combined team from CPRE Oxfordshire and Kent presented evidence against the plan (CPRE Oxon: <http://is.gd/dP3FC>). Natural England and the Environment Agency opposed a huge reservoir in Broad Oak, Kent at the inquiry into South East Water's management plan (Your Canterbury: <http://is.gd/dP3zM>). Protect Kent warned of increasing damage to environmental resources in the SE from water abstraction (<http://is.gd/dSHTx>).

7. Rural Affairs, Farming and Food

Rural economy. The Rural Cultural Forum said harnessing the untapped creative potential of the countryside could generate more than £1bn a year (RSN: <http://is.gd/dOFg5>). Ministers have commissioned the Plunkett Foundation to conduct a review of the economic, social and environmental impacts of rural social enterprise in England (RSN: <http://is.gd/dOEoq>). A report from the Commission for Rural Communities said economic recovery is underway in most rural areas. It is concerned that local authorities are neglecting high levels of self employment; the importance of Home Based Businesses; the importance of large firms in rural areas; and the large proportions of 'economically inactive residents' in rural areas (<http://is.gd/dlEgL>; <http://is.gd/dlEj7>; RSN: <http://is.gd/dOD1t>). Village halls can make an important contribution to the rural economy, says a report from ACRE (RSN: <http://is.gd/dOAEM>). Tourism's contribution to the UK economy could grow by more than 60% to £188bn by 2020, Visit Britain said (BBC: <http://is.gd/dD1st>). Prince Charles has launched the Prince's Countryside Fund. As well as funding rural training schemes, the charity will hold a reserve fund to be used in emergencies such as flooding and foot and mouth (RSN: <http://is.gd/dOHum>).

Rural life. The 2010 State of the Countryside report said rural people are well-placed to overcome challenges such as the lack of adequate broadband connections in the countryside (RSN: <http://is.gd/dOGAg>). "My town, Chipping Norton, is a place conflicted between the wealth of some of its residents and its ordinary workers struggling to find decent jobs", said one contributor to the Guardian's Peoples Panel on rural life (<http://is.gd/dJvsC>).

Big Society. The Prime Minister announced the Big Society initiative which will allow communities to run their own services and take over facilities such as pubs (Planning: <http://is.gd/dOODZ>; Morning Advertiser: <http://is.gd/dOOuv>). Four communities are to pilot 'open source planning' including Windsor and Maidenhead (RSN: <http://is.gd/dxIT9>). Eric Pickles is now joint chair of the Big Society ministerial group, the remit of which has been expanded to cover localism as well as big society.

Broadband. The Country Land and Business Association expressed anger at delays to the roll-out of faster broadband connections as the government delayed the universal 2Mbps access commitment by 3 years (RSN: <http://is.gd/dODB5>). Communities in part of the rural West Midlands now have universal wireless broadband access (RSN: <http://is.gd/dODUX>).

Food. Prince Charles made impassioned plea for urban people to "reconnect with the land and source of their food" (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/dD2E9>). The pioneering Lewes Road Community Garden in Brighton is now in exile after being evicted (<http://is.gd/dOqXo>; Guardian: <http://is.gd/dOqZ7>).

Retail. Councillors in Shropshire threw out a plan for a town centre superstore in Oswestry against planners advice after a long campaign by CPRE. Proposals for three out-of-town stores remain to be decided in the autumn (BBC: <http://is.gd/dSCBh>; CPRE Shropshire: <http://is.gd/dSBEY>). The celebrated decision to refuse a Tesco supermarket in Sheringham is mired in legal and standards board complaints, and alleged dirty tricks. The application may have to be reheard (Planning: <http://is.gd/dOGZb>; Independent: <http://is.gd/dOGWD>). A plan for a Sainsbury's superstore in Bristol, opposed by CPRE, was rejected against planning officer's advice. The rejection threatens a new football stadium in the green belt (<http://is.gd/dD21c>; BBC: <http://is.gd/dSH4B>). A London Assembly report has called for changes to local, regional and national planning policies, including the Use Classes Order, to offer protection for small shops (Planning: <http://is.gd/dOxba>). The UK's first Local Development Order (LDO) has been issued to help regenerate High Wycombe's historic quarter. It allows limited change of use without planning permission (Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/dSFhx>).

8. Campaigning

CPRE Network South East. CPRE is hosting a regional seminar in London on 25 September (open to branches outside the South East). The agenda includes workshops on Working with Community Groups and Working with Farmers. Further details from www.cpre.org.uk/members/events or vickis@cpre.org.uk.

CPRE. CPRE Oxfordshire says it is fighting the biggest campaign in its history to protect the Oxfordshire countryside. It is creating a Google map of threats to the county's green belt, and another map of large development threats (Whitney Gazette: <http://is.gd/dOVwS>). In a letter to the Telegraph. CPRE's Shaun Spiers promised that CPRE will work hard to help fill the gap left by the abolition of the Commission for Rural Communities (<http://ow.ly/2aIDs>). Sir John Baham former head of the Confederation of British Industry and a vocal opponent of wind farms is the new patron of CPRE Cornwall (TI Cornwall: <http://is.gd/dwv5m>).

Piece by Piece. The Guardian has launched the Piece by Piece project to bring together groups working to save biodiversity from ill-conceived development. It is promised to be a forum for local campaigners to swap tips and tactics (<http://ow.ly/2he24>). The Transport Research Laboratory site in Berkshire, and the Ashford Link Road and Lydd Airport in Kent are among the first threatened areas listed.

CPRE South East eBulletin

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