

CPRE South East eBulletin for October 2010

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In Brief

Spending, or rather the lack of it, dominates this edition.

The **Comprehensive Spending Review** was published to fanfares and groans. The expenditure reductions are less draconian than many had suggested in the days before the CSR, but nevertheless are the most swingeing cuts our lifetimes. While climate change is given a relatively easy ride in the cuts, planning, housing and the natural environment are badly hit. Public assets including many forests are to be sold. Many details remain to be clarified.

The **Bonfire of the Quangos** has seen a lot of unknown bodies abolished and some important organisations lost or floated away from government.

The **National Infrastructure Statement** was launched by David Cameron but it is largely a rehash of the CSR and previous announcements.

In the **Rest of the News**:

- ◆ The end of coal power draws closer as EON withdraws **Kingsnorth** from the carbon capture and storage competition (page #).
- ◆ The government reissued its suite of **Energy National Policy Statements** for consultation, with nuclear and wind power on the ascendency.
- ◆ **Housing** completions have fallen to a long term low.

Budgets, Abolitions and Survivals

1. The Trio of Announcements

The Comprehensive Spending Review. Chancellor George Osborne announced £81 billion spending cuts, with government departments being cut by an average of 19% (http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spend_index.htm).¹ Much of the detail behind the cuts is only just emerging.

Bonfire of the Quangos. 192 quangos large and small, important and obscure have been abolished, 118 will be merged (<http://is.gd/gkvwS>). 380 quangos survive. Many of the losses were already known, including the abolition of the Commission for Rural Communities. British Waterways will become a charity, and a host of Defra bodies are demoted to advisory committees.

National Infrastructure Statement. David Cameron announced the NIS which repeated CSR pledges on a low carbon economy, transport and science. Its biggest boast is to “providing the best superfast broadband in Europe by 2015” involving £530 million of investment in four years “including in some of the most remote areas of the UK”. This means the already announced four pilot areas within North Yorkshire, Cumbria, Herefordshire and the Highlands and Islands. The specific locations will be decided over the winter and the government will publish a National Broadband Strategy in December 2010. (NDS: <http://is.gd/gjjo0>; NIS: <http://is.gd/gilqo>).

Much more has been set out, explained or sometimes obscured by press statements and ministerial comment during the last ten days.

¹ The budget data quoted here is Total Managed Expenditure (TME), which is the sum of Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) and Annually Managed Expenditure (AME). AME comprises items such as EU income, CAP, social security and debt interest which cannot be forecast over the expenditure cycle. Cuts to administrative budgets include cuts within arms length agencies.

2. Communities and Local Government

The budget dives from £9.6 billion this year to £3.9 billion by 2014-15 (51%). CLG will devolve £1.6 billion of this cut to local government (reducing the cut to 33%) and £809 million to the Regional Growth Fund. It promises a 42% saving on administration costs.

Planning. Reform of the planning system is confirmed:

- ◆ **Open Source Planning.** “The coalition government is committed to a radical reform of the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which people live, based on the principles set out in the Conservative Party publication Open Source Planning.” Local authorities will receive £5 million for Open Source Planning in 2011-12 and rising to £20 million in 2014-15 (£5m in 2011/12, £10m in 2012/11, £15m in 2013/14 and £20m in 2014/15). From 2012-13 this grant will not be ring fenced.
- ◆ **Abolitions.** The Advisory Panel on Standards for the Planning Inspectorate is to be abolished and replaced by the “Inspectorate’s internal challenge process”. The replacement of the Infrastructure Planning Commission with a Major Infrastructure Planning Unit within the Planning Inspectorate is confirmed.

Housing. Funding for social housing will be cut from £8.4 billion over the past three years to £4.4 billion over the next four years. More than half of the new budget is already committed (Regen: <http://is.gd/gkBSQ>).

- ◆ **New Homes Bonus.** The £950 million fund will “support economic growth and increase housing supply” (£196m in 2011/12 and £250m per year until 2014/15). This will match fund the Council Tax on every new home for each of the following six years. A consultation on the New Homes Bonus will be launched next month.
- ◆ **Affordable housing.** 150,000 new affordable homes are promised by 2014-15. Most the money will come from social housing “reform”, largely higher rents, with “more modest, capital investment in social housing”. The Local Authority Social Housing Grant is reduced from £212 million this year to nothing in 2012-13 but councils will keep their rental income.
- ◆ **Decent & empty homes.** £2 billion of capital funding is promised to help towards completing the Decent Homes programme, enough to more than halve the backlog. £100 million will be granted for local authorities to bring empty homes back into use.
- ◆ **Red tape.** The government also promises “reduction of the total regulatory burden on the house building industry.”
- ◆ **Abolitions.** The National Housing and Planning Advice Unit has been abolished. Local area agreements and the associated funding have been abolished (Planning: <http://is.gd/gjNMS>). Three other casualties are the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, Growth Area funding and the Thames Gateway programme.
- ◆ **Reaction.** Shelter’s Chief executive Campbell Robb said: “The proposed figure of up to 150,000 affordable homes over four years represent less than a third of what this country urgently requires to bring the housing system from its knees.” Grant Shapps said the department would have needed an unrealistically huge budget if it had set out to build enough homes to halve the housing waiting list. “You would need £50 billion quid to do this,” he said (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/gfzNp>).

The **Regional Growth Fund** will be worth £1.4 billion over three years in the English Regions. (The Regional Development Agencies received £1.5 billion a year.) The RGF will support projects with significant potential for private sector economic growth and employment, supporting in particular areas that are currently too dependent on the public sector. It will also housing growth and market renewal schemes”.

- ◆ **Budget.** 2011-12: £495; 2012-13: £505; 2013-14: £420, but no money promised for the last year of the review period. £600 million will be capital funding; £800 million will be revenue funding. DfT is contributing around a third of the funding; CLG £809 million.

- ◆ **Michael Heseltine** will chair a panel to assess funding bids made by the private sector, public-private partnerships and the local enterprise partnerships. The first round of bids will be announced before the end of 2010-11.
- ◆ **Beneficiaries.** A provisional analysis by Regeneris Consulting suggests that many South East and rural authorities are not well placed to benefit from the fund (<http://is.gd/gfuyX>).

Local Government. Local authorities were told they faced cuts of 7.1% each year over four years, reducing their budget from £29 to £23.4 billion by 2014-15. This is a 26% cut, “reduced to 14% when projections from extra Council Tax is taken into account”.

- ◆ **Ring fencing.** The grant structure will be simplified and most ring fencing removed.
- ◆ **Capital funding** from central government to local authorities will fall by 45% and total capital expenditure by local authorities will fall by 30% by 2014-15. (Letter from Eric Pickles to local authorities: <http://is.gd/gaIw2>. Letter from Grant Shapps: <http://is.gd/gaJ3w>.)
- ◆ **Reaction.** There is concern among developers that cuts to libraries, parks and leisure centres may lead to greater pressure to provide these through S106 agreements.
- ◆ **Abolitions.** The Audit Commission and the Standards Board for England are to be abolished.

Communities. Around £470 million will be available over four years to build voluntary and community sector capacity.

- ◆ **Funding.** This will include funding for the Government’s promised Communities First fund, which is intended to support new and existing community organisations based in deprived neighbourhoods, endowment funds for local community foundations and the National Citizen Service (NCS) volunteering initiative for 16-19-year-olds. The funding package will include a short-term, £100 million “transition” fund. The Working Neighbourhoods Fund will end.
- ◆ **Right to buy.** A community right-to-buy scheme will give communities due notice and the right to buy or manage public buildings and services threatened with closure.
- ◆ **Big Society.** A Big Society Bank, will be funded from dormant bank accounts and aim to bring in private sector funding for voluntary organisations and social enterprises.

3. Business, Innovation and Skills

The BIS budget is reduced from £21 to £16 billion by 2014-15.

- ◆ **Regional Development Agencies.** The abolition of the RDAs is confirmed “saving £1.5 billion a year by 2014-15, some of which will be reinvested elsewhere.” They will cost £1.4 billion to wind down (FT: <http://is.gd/gkCgr>).
- ◆ **Post Offices.** The government promises a “continued commitment to maintain and modernise the Post Office Network. This will transform the network and protect community post offices, building a sustainable future Post Office Ltd.” Plans to turn the Post Office into a mutual could benefit rural communities, the Plunkett Foundation said (RSN: <http://is.gd/gjVxF>).
- ◆ **Consumer Focus** which investigates consumer issues and champions consumer causes will be transferred to Citizens Advice.

4. Energy and Climate Change

DECC receives an overall increase in budget from £2.9 to £3.7 billion by 2014-15 but faces savings within its core resource budget of 30% in real terms by 2014-15, including through cutting lower value projects and focusing on key priorities (<http://is.gd/gjG2M>). The government claims it will achieve “a 34% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 compared to 1990 levels, while cutting the costs of doing so. It moves away from a top down approach, instead freeing individuals, communities and businesses to make choices which protect the environment.” DECC supremo Chris Huhne said: “We remain on course to deliver on our promise to be the greenest government ever”. The government will set out in full how each department’s policies will contribute to meeting emission reduction targets in a government-wide carbon plan in 2011.

Carbon capture and storage. Up to £1 billion of investment will create one of the world’s first commercial scale carbon capture and storage (CCS) demonstration plants. The government has given no information on how the other three planned pilots will be funded. However, following the

withdrawal by EON's Kingsnorth (below), only Scottish Power's existing Longannet plant remains in the competition.

Carbon Floor Price. The government plans to publish a consultation in November on the reform of the climate change levy to provide support to the carbon price.

Climate Reduction Commitment. £1 billion a year from sales of allowances under Climate Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency scheme, now delayed to 2012, will be diverted to general public finances and the CRC becomes a levy on medium and large businesses.

Feed in tariffs will be refocused on the most cost-effective technologies in order to save £40 million by 2014-15. "The efficiency of Feed-In Tariffs will be improved at the next formal review [2013], rebalancing them in favour of more cost effective carbon abatement technologies." However, the review may be brought forward if the uptake exceeds forecasts. Farmer's Guardian suggested that on-farm anaerobic digestion could suffer (<http://is.gd/gaZ74>).

Green Bank. The government promises £1 billion of funding in 2013-14 and "additional significant proceeds" from asset sales to capitalise a UK wide Green Investment Bank. Labour had promised £2 billion. "This will aim to provide financial interventions to unlock significant new private investment in green infrastructure projects, such as offshore wind farms." Many details of the GIB remain uncertain and without further capitalisation it may operate as a "guarantee department" rather than a significant lender. Greenpeace expressed disappointment at the low level of commitment (<http://is.gd/gaMto>). The asset sales will include the government's stake in a company that makes enriched uranium for nuclear power (Guardian: <http://is.gd/gjRaC>).

Green Deal. This will enable households to improve the energy efficiency of their homes at no upfront cost. It will be funded by energy companies and repaid by householders. Housing Associations will also be able to take part in the scheme (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/gfxft>). The Warm Front which improves energy efficiency for the poorest households in the UK is abolished.

Nuclear. Commitment to cap (i.e. subsidise) nuclear waste and clean up liabilities, on top of recent carbon floor price commitment paves the way for new nuclear build. An electricity white paper will give further details in November.

Renewable energy. Over £200 million for the development of low carbon technologies including offshore wind technology. The NIS confirmed it includes £60 million for manufacturing at port sites and that the government will invest in offshore wind but onshore turbines will be built by "private sector investment" (NDS: <http://is.gd/gij2g>). The NIS promises smart grid and smart meter technology, to make every home and every business an intelligent part of an electricity network, to help moderate demand at peak times and to preserve supply and demand balance despite increased amounts of intermittent, renewable electricity generation.

Renewable heat. Increased incentives for low carbon energy generation through the Renewable Heat Incentive will be introduced in 2011 (£860 million).

5. Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The budget is cut by £3.0 to £2.3 billion by 2014-15. The decision to abolish the Commission for Rural Communities is expected to save £18 million over the Spending Review period. Overall the Department will reduce its running costs by £174 million. There will be continued investment in flood and coastal erosion risk management, with £2 billion being spent in total over the Spending Review period.

Rural Development Programme for England. Environmental stewardship schemes will deliver savings of £66 million a year by 2014-15, "but will remain open to all farmers in England" through "making better use of available European Union funding". DEFRA will increase the High Level Scheme by 83%. CPRE welcomed the increase to the Higher Level Stewardship scheme saying "This will help many farmers to continue to maintain valuable countryside" (<http://is.gd/gfynt>). Natural England has temporarily closed the HLS scheme for new entrants, which has a reduced budget this year, while it examines the future budget consequences. It says

Entry Level Stewardship, Uplands ELS, Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Areas are unaffected (<http://is.gd/gilZ4>).

Waste. DEFRA will cease funding for seven waste PFI projects which it says are no longer needed to meet EU landfill targets. This includes the South London Waste Partnership incinerator, and the Milton Keynes and Northants *Project Reduce* which is trying to eliminate any need for incineration (full list: <http://is.gd/g9Lhw>). Other PFI projects are for the chop later. The NIS says that “solid recovered fuels” will become more important. These are typically mechanically recovered waste fed to coal plants or incineration for energy production. The NIS recognises for “waste which cannot be prevented or recycled, the valuable role of energy recovery from waste (where possible with combined heat and power), including the expansion of anaerobic digestion, as part of renewable energy supply.”

Forests. The Forestry Commission survives but Caroline Spelman is expected to announce plans within days to dispose of about half of its 748,000 hectares of woodland by 2020 amid fears about conservation and access. The National Trust expressed interest in the sell off. The RSPB said it was relaxed about the idea of some sales, but would be unrelaxed if the wrong bits were up for sale like the New Forest, Forest of Dean or Sherwood Forest (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/gfmcf>; Guardian: <http://is.gd/gjRfg>). Vince Cable has called for the New Forest to be protected (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/gjTMp>).

National Nature Reserves. The Independent reported that the privatisation of England’s 224 national reserves is a likely outcome of the CSR and that Defra has already held discussions with the National Trust, Wildlife Trusts and RSPB (<http://is.gd/gfDq5>).

British Waterways becomes a charity. It will be funded through a guaranteed, long-term contract with Government, a ‘charity lock’ on British Waterways’ property endowment and growing income from tax relief and charitable sources (<http://is.gd/ga62v>).

Abolitions. A whole host of Defra advisory bodies and quangos are to be abolished including the Agricultural Wages Committees, British Waterways (below), the Commission for Rural Communities, the Commons Commissioners, Food from Britain and the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. A number of advisory bodies are to be reconstituted as a committee of experts, including Farm Animal Welfare Council, pesticide and air quality bodies (<http://is.gd/gjNwi>).

6. Transport

The budget falls from £13.1 to £12.3 billion by 2014-15 and administrative costs are to be cut my third (DfT press release: <http://is.gd/gb0my>).

Rail. Many of the announcements are existing schemes. Fares are set to rise steeply.

- ◆ **Network.** £14 billion of funding to Network Rail to support maintenance and improvements to the East Coast Mainline; Birmingham New Street station upgrade; and network improvements in Yorkshire, around Manchester and south Wales. Improvement projects at Reading and Gatwick Airport stations are to go ahead, as are projects to improve rail freight links between Southampton and the West coast.
- ◆ **Fares.** Rail fares to increase 3% above RPI (currently 4.6%) for three years from 2012.
- ◆ **London.** Crossrail, estimated cost now £14.5 billion, will save £1.4bn through value engineering by rephrasing the tunnelling programme and pushing back the opening by a year. The London Underground network upgrade will continue. Phase 3 of Thameslink at London Bridge looks set to be abandoned.
- ◆ **HS2.** The government’s intention to build the controversial HS2 line is confirmed and £750 million is allocated over five years.
- ◆ **Heritage.** The Railway Heritage Committee is to be abolished.

Local Transport. £10 billion for maintenance and investment in road and local transport, including work on the A11, M4/M5, M1, Midland Metro, Tyne and Wear Metro and construction of the Mersey Gateway suspension bridge. The **Local Sustainable Transport Fund** will provide

£560 million to challenge local authorities outside London to “bid for funding to support packages of transport interventions that support economic growth and reduce carbon emissions in their communities as well as delivering cleaner environments and improved air quality, enhanced safety and reduced congestion.”

Regional Funding Allocations have been abolished. The DfT said: “We will also be looking to develop less bureaucratic successor arrangements to the previous Government’s Regional Funding Allocations for transport that, over time, give a proper voice in scheme prioritisation to elected local authorities and business interests. We hope that Local Enterprise Partnerships will have an important role in this.”

Roads. The Highways Agency will save over £240 million by 2014-15. In the South East, improvements on the A21 have been cancelled for at least a decade (Kippings Cross to Lamberhurst; Flimwell to Robertsbridge; A21 Baldslow Interchange). A23 improvements in Sussex, widening of parts of the M25 and a PFI scheme for highway maintenance on the Isle of Wight will go ahead. Increases are planned to the charges on Dartford Crossing alongside accelerating plans to improve traffic flow by suspending charges at peak times & introducing new technology. Six previously approved street lighting PFI schemes around the country are cancelled.

Buses. Concessionary bus travel retained but bus subsidy to be cut by 20% by 2014-15 and local government resource grants by 28%.

Abolitions. The Commission for Integrated Transport and Cycling England are to be abolished. The latter’s website has already gone.

7. Culture, Media and Sport

The budget (non-Olympics) is fairly unscathed reducing from £5.6 to £5.5 billion by 2014-15. £300 million is to be taken from the TV licence fee, to improve the UK’s broadband network. The government will pilot superfast broadband projects in rural areas in North Yorkshire, Cumbria, Herefordshire, and the Highlands and Islands.

CABE. DCMS pulled its £5 million funding for design watchdog CABE and CLG is equivocal on the future of its £7 million funding for the body (Planning: <http://is.gd/gaKMx>).

The Rest of the News

8. Planning

Abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies. Cala Homes is challenging the decision by Eric Pickles saying the decision was “antithetical to the policies and objectives” of the 2009 Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act and in breach of planning regulations and EU law. The developer wants to build 2,000 homes at Barton Farm, Winchester (24dash: <http://is.gd/gfjDZ>). CPRE and CPRE SE have submitted evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee examination of the abolition of regional spatial strategies (<http://is.gd/gjILY>; <http://is.gd/gjIE6>).

Schools. The government is consulting on changes in permitted development rights to support the development of free schools. “Where a schools development requires any additional work to change the exterior of an existing building or is a new build development, planning permission will be required in the normal way” (DCLG: <http://is.gd/gfwWv>).

LDFs. The Core Strategy for the New Forest has been found sound. It seeks 11 homes a year, sustainable transport and small renewable energy schemes where they do not affect the “special qualities” of the National Park. It is expected to be adopted on 9 December 2010 (Salisbury Journal: <http://is.gd/gfz4G>; EiP: <http://is.gd/gfz7z>).

LEPs. An announcement on the first wave of Local Enterprise Partnerships is expected shortly. It is already clear that the government will not pay their running costs and they will not directly manage EU funding.

Making localism work for the countryside. CPRE has published a charter highlighting key areas it wants ministers to address in any legislative changes brought about by the localism agenda. CPRE is calling for a limited community right of appeal to “re-balance the planning system, empower local people as part of the Big Society and improve the quality of planning decisions.” It also wants to limit financial incentives to local authorities to build new housing and Community Right to Build referendums only to be permitted when they are in line with local plans (<http://is.gd/gjxOO>). It is clear that the government has already dropped its commitment to the third party right of appeal (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/gjxUp>; Planning: <http://is.gd/gjHjJ>).

The LGA is calling for an end to placing planning application advertisements in local newspapers (Planning: <http://is.gd/gjyFF>).

9. Housing

Completions fall. The number of homes added to England’s housing stock fell to a record low in 2009-10, down 23 per cent on 2008/9. Just 128,680 additional homes were provided last year compared with around 167,000 in 2008-09. Homes in the South East were down 32% (DCLG: <http://is.gd/gfwlT>). Local authorities have ditched plans for 160,000 homes since the coalition government came to power (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/gjPG6>).

Affordable housing. CPRE SE Director Edward Dawson reviews the growing problem of building affordable housing in the South East (<http://is.gd/gjId5>). Simon Leadbeater says the choice between gardens and affordable homes is a false dichotomy and garden developments have not added appreciably to the number of affordable homes (Ecologist: <http://is.gd/gjumz>).

Home on the Farm. Communities minister Andrew Stunell has called on councils to consider amending planning policies to make it easier for disused farm buildings to be converted into affordable homes (Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/gfww4>).

Travellers. Communities minister Andrew Stunell outlined a new “fair deal” for travellers and gypsies, saying those travellers that “play by the rules” will get more protection against eviction, putting them on an equal footing to those living on residential caravan sites or in council houses. Councils will be able to take quick action against those that breach tenancy agreements and they will be able to obtain possession orders with less risk of legal challenge (Planning: <http://is.gd/gjOfx>).

10. Rural Affairs and Economy

Big Society. The Commission for Rural Communities said the principles of the Big Society approach were already well embedded in much of rural England but many organisations had real fears that a lack of funding would significantly damage progress (RSN: <http://is.gd/gjVAX>). *Big Society: What does it mean for environmental action?* is the theme of the latest edition of Inside Track from the Green Alliance (<http://is.gd/gaHxQ>).

Rural poverty. One in four rural children live in poverty the Commission for Rural Communities said (RSN: <http://is.gd/gjVrb>).

11. Landscapes and Biodiversity

Financing nature. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has published a report arguing for innovative ways of funding nature conservation including a levy on new homes, conservation credits and green taxes (<http://is.gd/gjNm9>). A United Nations report says natural goods and services, such as the pollination provided by bees or filtration of water by wetlands, should be included in a nation’s economic value in the same way as GDP (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/gjTGx>).

Heritage. English Heritage has published South East Heritage Counts 2010, which looks at the economic contribution of heritage assets (<http://is.gd/gjJGG>). HELM has issued guidance on transferring heritage assets to the community sector under the government’s Big Society proposals (<http://is.gd/gfwgn>). English Heritage has claimed copyright over use of images of Stonehenge taken by third parties (Thinq: <http://is.gd/gjtRC>).

The **River Thames** has won the International Theiss River Prize for outstanding achievements in river management and restoration (Edie: <http://is.gd/gfB8a>; Independent: <http://is.gd/gjSuA>).

Light pollution. The Blackdown Hills AONB has produced excellent guidance on reducing light pollution, including actions for householders and businesses (<http://is.gd/fZWM4>).

Walking. Consultation has begun on the first stage of the coastal path in Dorset (Planning: <http://is.gd/gjy3P>).

12. Food, Farming and Retail

Industrial farming. Nocton Dairies say plans to build a dairy farm for 8,100 cows in Lincolnshire are continuing despite one of its partners pulling out after the public outcry (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/gjTt1>). Herefordshire County Council has given approval for crops to be grown in polytunnels within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NFU: <http://is.gd/gfnIn>). In Kent plans to construct 200m long polytunnels on 165 hectares of farmland is dividing opinion in Hadlow (This is Kent: <http://is.gd/gfob4>).

Orchards. Common Ground said Kent is in danger of losing its Garden of England reputation as orchard land continues to disappear (Kent News: <http://is.gd/gfj2v>). Half of Britain's apple orchards have disappeared in 10 years (Daily Mail: <http://is.gd/gjJUh>).

Planning battles. CPRE Shropshire and partners lost battle to prevent a Tesco in Shrewsbury getting retrospective permission for being built too large and stocking too many convenience goods (Shropshire Star: <http://is.gd/gfDMW>). Eric Pickles rejected plans by Tesco to demolish an edge-of-town existing store in Staffordshire and replace it with a larger retail development (Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/g3wZE>).

13. Transport

HS2. Protesters want a judicial review on the grounds the government has failed to properly assess the impact of the high speed line on places such as the Chilterns AONB. Analysis suggests the new link would use twice the amount of energy of the West Coast main line and as much as three times the amount if the trains were to run at their maximum projected speed of 250mph. The project's green credentials have been largely abandoned by coalition ministers amid concerns they can no longer be corroborated (Guardian: <http://is.gd/gfxyn>). HS2 Ltd chairman Sir Brian Briscoe and DfT deputy director Philip Graham faced a barrage of questions at a four-hour session of Aylesbury Vale District Council. House of Commons Speaker John Bercow, received huge cheers when he said: "This national interest argument is the sound of goal posts being moved. It's difficult to identify a benefit for the people of Bucks is a massive understatement – there ain't one!" (Bucks Advertiser: <http://is.gd/gfAbH>). Newly elected councillors to Chiltern District Council have pledged to fight the proposal (Bucks Advertiser: <http://is.gd/gfjnK>; BFP: <http://is.gd/gfjqG>).

Buses. A report by the Citizens Advice and the Campaign for Better Transport said cuts to local buses risk driving people out of work and locking others into welfare dependency (CBT: <http://is.gd/gjyv4>). The DfT announced £15 million for green buses including for the Oxford Bus Company (<http://is.gd/gjJmR>).

Clutter. Leicestershire County Council is to remove advertising signs on roundabouts after complaints from residents and CPRE Charnwood (This is Leics: <http://is.gd/gjKCf>).

Roads. Prime Minister David Cameron has backed plans to build the controversial Cogges Link road in Witney (Oxford Times: <http://is.gd/fZLXm>). The backers of Kent International Gateway (KIG) have decided to drop the scheme after it was refused by the Secretary of State. Now the rival KRAFT scheme is gearing up to take its bid forward (Kent News: <http://is.gd/gjRzf>).

14. Climate Change and Energy

Emissions. Britons are less environmentally conscious than they were five years ago, with twice as many people now "bored" by talk of climate change as in 2005. Four in 10 take no action at all to reduce their household carbon dioxide emissions (Independent: <http://is.gd/gjSeX>).

Coal. EON has withdrawn Kingsnorth from the government's carbon capture and storage competition (EE: <http://is.gd/gaHMJ>). The Energy PPS (below) insists that new coal plants must have "commercial-scale demonstration of CCS" so Kingsnorth looks out of the action for a long

time to come. A DECC spokesman said: “EON’s decision was disappointing. We are confident that there is interest out there in CCS but you can’t ignore the fact there is a recession” (Guardian: <http://is.gd/gaL8f>). Work has begun on an open cast coal site partly in the Shropshire Hills AONB, despite protestors still being dug in (BBC: <http://is.gd/gjxF6>).

Severn Barrage abolished. Chris Huhne confirmed there would be no state funding for the Severn tidal power project, saying the government did not see “a strategic case at this time for public funding” (Wales Online: <http://is.gd/g7LSp>).

Wind. Chris Huhne told parliament that half of the new energy generating capacity built in the UK by 2025 to come from renewable sources, the majority of which is likely to be wind. He said: “I’m fed up with the standoff between advocates of renewables and of nuclear which means we have neither. We urgently need to invest in new and diverse energy sources to power the UK” (FT: <http://is.gd/g7LwM>). “The British wind experience... far from saving the earth, turns out in practice to be costing the earth” (Troy: <http://is.gd/gfveB>). Painting wind turbines purple could help to cut the number of birds and bats killed by flying into them (Edie: <http://is.gd/gfBms>). Vattenfall has decided not to extend the Thanet Offshore Wind Farm (This is Kent: <http://is.gd/gjyfU>). Floating turbines could allow more rapid extension of offshore wind (Guardian: <http://is.gd/gjyjk>).

Nuclear. Chris Huhne reiterated the government would not provide any subsidies for new nuclear plants but said the government would not rule out assuming responsibility for accidents and radioactive waste, including spent fuel “at a fixed price” (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/g7Lnp>). The Government has announced that the nuclear power reactor designs from US company Westinghouse and France’s EDF and Areva are “justified” for deployment in the UK (Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/gfx78>).

Waste. The CBI said that energy from waste generation should quadruple (NEF: <http://is.gd/gjRXv>). Didcot sewage works in Oxfordshire is producing gas for 200 local homes from sewerage (Independent: <http://is.gd/gjSNQ>).

15. Energy National Policy Statement Consultation

DECC has issued a revised suite of energy National Policy Statements. The consultation closes on 24 January 2011 (<http://is.gd/g7HJJ>). The main changes are:

Overarching (EN-1). There is stronger reference to heritage protection, including PPS5.

Fossil Fuels (EN-2). No consent will be given to proposals to build coal-fired power stations which do not include commercial-scale demonstration of CCS. Plants should be located near existing infrastructure and take advantage of water transport where possible.

Renewable Energy (EN-3). The NPS is clearer that offshore as well as onshore wind projects might impact on green belts.

Electricity Networks (EN-5). The new text provides clarification on bird strikes and undergrounding. On the latter it says “the IPC should only refuse consent for overhead line proposals on the basis that undergrounding is preferable if it is satisfied that the benefits from undergrounding outweigh any extra economic, social and environmental impacts and the technical difficulties are surmountable.”

Nuclear (EN-6). Kirksanton and Braystones in Cumbria have been dropped and Dungeness in Kent remains off the list. The remaining potential sites are Bradwell, Hartlepool, Heysham, Hinkley Point, Oldbury, Sellafield, Sizewell and Wylfa. The government says it is confident that geological disposal of waste will be implemented.

Reaction. The RPTI said its “initial assessment suggests that the NPSs still lack the strategic element required to properly assess alternatives. They have not followed the format of recent planning policy statements in presenting policy distinctly from background and guidance.” The Planning Officers Society said key points had not been tackled. These include the lack of funding for authorities to engage with applications, a location strategy for generating infrastructure, the separate consideration of overhead lines and the role of local authorities (Planning:

<http://is.gd/gfsUy>). Paul Miner for CPRE said: “The responses to the Government consultation showed overwhelming public support for removing pylons from our most valued landscapes. But the statement released by DECC doesn’t give a clear commitment to undergrounding energy lines or stopping future pylons being put up” (<http://is.gd/gmrWl>).

16. Water, Minerals, Recycling and Waste

Deposit scheme. CPRE’s Shaun Spiers criticised the packaging industry’s hostile reaction to CPRE’s call for a return to deposits: “it is very disappointing that industry bodies are trying to rubbish our research (rather than working with us to consider how such a scheme could work without burdening retailers and producers with excessive costs” (Guardian: <http://is.gd/gjQcv>).

17. Campaigning

CPRE South East. In his quarterly report, CPRE SE Director Edward Dawson looks at the emerging policy for LEPs, the growing problem of building affordable housing in the South East, the futures of SEFs, and more (<http://is.gd/gjId5>).

Protect Kent is putting together its case for the Lydd Airport public inquiry. It says any help or expertise from other branches who have fought aviation proposals recently would be very welcome. Contact: Sean.Furey@protectkent.org.uk.

Common Cause. In a joint report CPRE, Oxfam, WWF, FoE and the Climate Outreach and Information Network say: “Debates on the consequences of cultural values and the mechanisms by which they evolve must become as vigorous as public debate about the evidence base for government policy, business practice or civil society campaigns. There is a crucial and exciting role for civil society organisations in ensuring that this becomes the case.” The report tackles the organisation of life-goals and values; values and bigger-than-self problems; and tools for analysing ‘elite governance’ and ‘participative democracy’ frames (Common Ground: <http://is.gd/g6lpi>). George Monbiot explains the thinking behind the report (<http://is.gd/g8fC0>).

18. And finally...

Those of you who have visited our embassies overseas will no doubt have appreciated the excellent choices made by the Government Hospitality Advisory Committee on the Purchase of Wines. Sadly it has been abolished in the Bonfire of the Quangos, as in a time of hardship every little helps. I guess Our Excellencies worldwide will now have to shop at Tesco like everyone else.