



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

Parliamentary News: June 2009

Time for a new vision?

Understandably, much recent political debate has been about the state of the economy: how deep will the recession be, what will be its impacts, and how best can we recover from it? The environment, after its brief spell in the sun as a mainstream political issue, risks slipping down the agenda again.

But this should not be so. Much has been said about the potential of a 'green recovery'; investment in technologies and industries that will provide jobs, boost the economy and aid the battle against climate change. It is also increasingly clear in these difficult times that people value the natural environment as an important aspect of their quality of life. CPRE supports the need for action, and looks to government to transform green rhetoric into real schemes, real jobs and real progress on environmental protection.

The Budget in April was a small step in the right direction. The announcement of the UK's first carbon budget was exciting and ground-breaking, although the funding to support its ambitions is pretty sparse. We welcomed new money to support energy-efficiency, additional backing for offshore wind and the funding for carbon capture and storage pilot schemes, although questions about the long-term viability of this technology remain unanswered.

2026: A Vision for the Countryside

But if we want real change in how we live our lives, long-term sustainability and a new focus on quality of life, we must lift our eyes beyond the difficult present, and consider where we want to be in twenty years' time.

CPRE is doing this, through the publication of *2026: A Vision for the Countryside*. Our vision, launched last month in Parliament, sets out how we would like the countryside to look in 2026, our centenary year. It recognises that the countryside has faced, and continues to face, many threats, from inappropriate development, through climate change to ignorance of its value for the whole nation.

But our vision is also inspiring and optimistic. We need not be unrelentingly pessimistic about the prospects for our countryside; we believe it can be improved for the benefit of everyone, whether they live in town or country. Throughout our history, CPRE has battled to protect and enhance the English countryside, at the forefront of campaigns for National Parks, Green Belts and a strong, participatory town and country planning system. So, building on this history, our vision describes a countryside that is more beautiful and richer in wildlife, with well-designed and well-planned developments and strong communities, and that makes a full contribution to tackling climate change.

To get there, we will need support from all parties, and we will set out later this year our priorities for manifestos for the coming General Election.

In the meantime, please read our vision at [www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns/environment/2026-a-vision-for-the-countryside] and let us know what you think.

Light Pollution

Many of you will be aware of CPRE's Night Blight campaign which was launched in 2003. The campaign illustrated how light pollution had increased by 26% in England between 1993 and 2000, and that the spread of inefficient outdoor lighting was denying thousands of people the experience of a starry night sky.

Also in 2003, the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology made some welcome recommendations to tackle light pollution, including making it a Statutory Nuisance and introducing planning guidance to control lighting on new developments. Subsequently, CPRE welcomed the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (2005) which made many forms of light pollution a Statutory Nuisance. However, we are still awaiting planning guidance, despite Government commitments to provide this, most likely taking the form of an annex to Planning Policy Statement 23: Planning and Pollution Control.

CPRE will continue our campaign for better control of light pollution and we urge parliamentarians to contact the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to press for assurances about when the long awaited draft planning annex will be published for consultation.

Victory in the South Downs!

CPRE heralded a momentous triumph with the announcement in March that the South Downs would become England's 10th National Park. We congratulated the Government for doing the right thing.

CPRE was instrumental in the campaign for the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. We are celebrating the 60th anniversary of this ground-breaking legislation throughout the year.

We are keen to see that designated areas continue to be protected in the future, and would ask parliamentarians to press the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government to ensure that the purposes of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are fully taken into account in the forthcoming National Policy Statements expected before the summer recess.

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Bill Progresses, But English Countryside Remains Under Threat

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill will have its Commons Report Stage in the near future, and proposes some key changes to the regional planning system.

The Bill creates a new single Regional Strategy, bringing Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies together, and entrusts Regional Development Agencies and newly-created Local Authority Leaders' Boards with implementing the strategy. Economic Prosperity Boards, a new means of sub-regional collaboration for Local Authorities, could be given planning powers under the Bill.

CPRE remains concerned that regional strategies will be narrowly focused on delivering economic growth and housing development, that communities and stakeholders will not get the opportunities to input into the process, and that the reforms could cause confusion in the planning system and hamper, not improve, local democracy.

During the Second Reading debate we were delighted to see MPs from all sides of the House raising these concerns. Some of these were pursued at Committee Stage, but we remain anxious that the Bill has an overriding economic focus, and could lead to communities becoming even more disengaged from the planning system.

We urge MPs who share our concerns to contact Adam Royle to ensure they receive a detailed briefing on the amendments we are supporting at Commons Report Stage.

Have you considered?

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We're here to help

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Find out more about our work by visiting www.cpre.org.uk