



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

Parliamentary News: October 2010

Planning Reform: Making Localism work for the Countryside

A key part of the Government's 'localism' agenda is to reform the planning system radically. The coalition has said that it aims to shift power away from central Government and put local communities in charge of planning.

Before Christmas we expect Ministers to bring forward a Decentralisation and Localism Bill to give a legislative underpinning to its reforms. The Government will also review planning policy statements and guidance and, in their place, develop a consolidated, simplified National Planning Framework.

In these reforms CPRE sees the potential to achieve a key part of our *2026 Vision for the Countryside*, in which we look forward to a reinvigorated, democratic planning system, based on identifiable communities to which residents feel a sense of loyalty.

Any radical overhaul of the planning system will pose both opportunities and threats for rural communities and the countryside. CPRE is publishing a *Charter for Planning Reform*, to help parliamentarians ensure that localism works for the countryside. Here are some of our key priorities:

Effective local plans

We understand the new planning system will make local plans, based on neighbourhood 'modules', a key tool for protecting and enhancing our countryside. CPRE believes:

- The process for developing these plans needs to be open and accessible;
- Robust assessments of local housing need and landscape character should be carried out so decisions are well-informed;
- Parish Plans and Village Design Statements should be the basis for neighbourhood modules in rural areas, and should be given far more weight in the planning system.

A fairer appeals system

The Liberal Democrats and Conservatives both made commitments before the election to allow appeals against planning decisions by the local community, as well as by developers. CPRE looks forward to the coalition delivering on this shared pledge, by introducing a new limited public right of appeal to make the planning system fairer, empower communities and improve the quality of planning decisions.

Caution over financial incentives

Offering financial incentives to councils to encourage them to grant planning permission for housing could result in poorly planned large-scale housebuilding, regardless of the consequences for the environment or social cohesion. We need more affordable homes, especially in the countryside, but incentives should only support the provision of new homes that are in line with the local plan and occupied within a fixed time period.

CPRE will also argue that there should be a sequential, 'brownfield first' approach for all kinds of development, recognising the value of land. We will be sending our *Charter for Planning Reform* to MPs and Peers shortly, and look forward to working with you over the coming months to ensure that we have a planning system that delivers for the countryside.

Time to be ambitious for the environment

The Government is consulting on a Natural Environment White Paper, the first for 20 years. CPRE welcomes the ambition of Defra's discussion document. Working with other environment and countryside groups, we are calling on Ministers to ensure that the White Paper itself, expected next spring, is equally ambitious.

Its aims and priorities will need support across government, not just from Defra. In particular, it must be closely integrated with the planning reforms being led by Communities and Local Government. Some form of strategic planning will be needed to help the Government deliver landscape-scale management and restoration of our natural environment.

We welcome the emphasis in the discussion document on restoring the natural environment. Sir John Lawton's recently published review of England's wildlife sites suggests that, while existing protected sites, including National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, have done a good job and must be maintained, we also need to prioritise landscape-scale action for the natural world. And the White Paper must be clear that its vision of protecting the natural environment covers all of its aspects – including beauty and tranquillity, as well as biodiversity.

While the discussion document rightly considers the services a healthy natural environment provides, including mitigating the impacts of flooding, carbon storage and defence against sea-level rise, we urge the Government not to lose sight of its intrinsic value. Millions of people visit, work in and value our countryside – we should be unashamed to say it is worth conserving for these reasons alone.

The consultation closes on 30 October, but we hope MPs and Peers will continue to press Ministers for an ambitious White Paper that fully recognises the value of the natural environment so that it can make an even more important contribution to our quality of life in the future.

We're here to help

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New Report: Have we got the bottle?

Our *Stop the Drop* anti-litter and fly-tipping campaign, fronted by CPRE's President Bill Bryson, has got off to a flying start in the new Parliament.

CPRE has published new research that details the economic, social and environmental benefits a UK-wide deposit refund scheme would provide. Under the scheme a small deposit would be placed on glass, aluminium and plastic drinks containers to encourage people to return them for recycling, rather than throwing them away as litter or in a bin. *Have we got the bottle? Implementing a deposit refund scheme in the UK* can be downloaded from our website, or a hard copy can be requested from us using the contact details below.

The research clearly demonstrates a drinks container deposit refund system would cost relatively little to set up, and would generate revenue to support most of its running costs. The research shows how the scheme would help the Government achieve a 'Zero Waste' economy by increasing recycling rates, and reducing litter as promised in the Coalition's 'Programme for Government'.

We are pleased by the way our new research has been received in Parliament. We were grateful to Martin Horwood MP for hosting the launch of *Have we got the bottle?* in the Jubilee Room, and for raising the issue at Prime Minister's Question Time. In response David Cameron said the Government will investigate if a scheme can be taken forward.

Please help support our campaign by writing to the Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman asking her to support a deposit refund scheme.

Hedgerows

CPRE has campaigned for many years for the protection and extension of our hedgerow network

New CPRE research, based on a survey of 133 local authorities, has found that whilst hedgerow protection has increased, there is a need to simplify the Hedgerows Regulations - without weakening them. We also want to see a landscape criterion so that locally distinctive hedgerows can be protected, and safeguarding of agri-environment funding for hedgerows.

Download *England's Hedgerows: Don't cut them out!* at www.cpre.org.uk, or ask us to send you a copy.