



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England

## Parliamentary News: December 2008

A shortened Queen's speech has given CPRE some cause for optimism, and the prospect of some interesting legislation for the New Year. At the same time, questions remain about the precise impact of some of the programme, particularly the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill.

### **Local Democracy**

This Bill will give us plenty of food for thought, and we will be eagerly awaiting the detail in order to determine its real colours.

Although local businesses need support, we are keen to ensure that environmental and democratic considerations carry equal weight alongside those of economic development and construction. We appreciate the steps the Government has taken to safeguard some democratic involvement in planning processes by proposing that the Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration will now be developed jointly by Regional Development Agencies and Local Authorities. We hope that a duty will be applied to ensure that local stakeholders are also given the opportunity to engage with the regional planning process.

### **Brighter news**

We warmly welcome the long-awaited Marine and Coastal Access Bill. The provision of an access corridor around the English coastline will be a positive measure, giving millions of people the opportunity to experience this country's magical coastal landscapes. CPRE is keen to see thorough local consultation as the Bill goes forward to ensure that landscape, wildlife, leisure and business interests are reconciled in the decisions made on access.

In common with other NGOs, we welcome the increased protection that this Bill will give to our under-pressure marine environment and its wildlife. We hope it can also be an opportunity to protect the unique seascapes which make the coast so attractive with visitors both from the UK and overseas.

We will be working on these Bills over the coming months, with both pieces of legislation having already begun their progress in the House of Lords.

### **Heritage gone, but is it forgotten?**

It was a disappointment not to see a Heritage Protection Bill in the Queen's Speech. Such legislation would have constituted the first reforms to heritage protection for more than 30 years, and introduced a more 'joined-up' approach to protecting our heritage. Sadly, despite having been more than seven years in preparation, the Bill did not make the final cut, and we are calling for Ministers to demonstrate now that heritage protection has not been forgotten.

### **Draft Bills**

The Government plans to introduce two pieces of draft legislation in this session which are likely to be of interest to us. These are the Draft Community Empowerment Bill which will aim to open up opportunities for public involvement in local government, and the Floods and Water Bill, which will, among other things, alter the regime for coastal erosion risk management.

If you would like further details on CPRE's work on legislation, please contact Adam Royle ([adamr@cpre.org.uk](mailto:adamr@cpre.org.uk)).

## **The Planning Act**

The Planning Act received Royal Assent on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> November, a year to the day after its introduction.

CPRE continued to work with Peers and MPs during the Bill's final stages. We opposed the creation of the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC), arguing that planning decisions on major infrastructure should continue to be made by Ministers, who are democratically accountable. We pressed for National Policy Statements (NPSs) to be created from scratch, and subject to environmental appraisal and full parliamentary and public scrutiny, and for members of the public to have the right to be heard at public inquiries into major infrastructure projects. We would like to thank parliamentarians from all parties who voiced these concerns.

Whilst we welcome the Government's decision to widen the ability of the Secretary of State to intervene on IPC decision-making, and the reassurances given on the NPS process, we remain concerned about the effect that the Act will have on democratic accountability in the planning process.

For more detailed briefings on the Planning Act please contact Adam Royle.

## **Mapping Local Food Networks**

As part of the £10 million Making Local Food Work programme, funded by the Big Lottery, CPRE, with Sustain, is running a five year project to map local food networks or 'webs' across England. These webs reveal strong interdependent relationship links from shoppers to land managers throughout the supply chain. They can support a host of benefits including maintaining viable farms and vital land management, and supporting jobs and new enterprise.

Wide-ranging groups from local communities are being drawn together across 30 locations in England, tasked to research and record their local food webs. The findings will be compiled in local case studies to increase our understanding of the links between producers and those who buy and eat their food, and the benefits these links can bring.

Parliamentarians can find out about local activity within their constituency by contacting Sam Redding. Further information about the Making Local Food Work programme is also available at [www.makinglocalfoodwork.com](http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.com).

## **Eco-towns: time to take stock**

The Government is now consulting on proposed locations and standards for eco-towns. CPRE believes this is a chance for Ministers to take stock, and focus on one or two exemplary schemes.

We welcome signs that the Government is becoming more aware of the need to test the environmental impact of eco-towns thoroughly through local and regional plans. But fundamental questions remain about the overall scale of the programme, given current economic conditions. The short-list still includes 12 schemes, and high environmental standards must not fall victim to a drive to deliver housing numbers.

CPRE will continue to engage with this process, questioning the need for a Planning Policy Statement on eco-towns and calling for safeguards to ensure this does not create a presumption in favour of new towns. In the market downturn a clear sequential approach in planning policy, favouring urban brownfield development and reuse of existing buildings, will be vital to avoid urban decline and greenfield sprawl.

## **And Finally...**

CPRE wishes you all a very peaceful Christmas and a happy New Year!

## **We're here to help**

Contact our National Office policy and campaigns team for information on our work:

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You can also find out more about our work by visiting [www.cpre.org.uk](http://www.cpre.org.uk)