



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

Parliamentary News: September 2009

A Manifesto for the Countryside

In our last newsletter, we described CPRE's optimistic vision for 2026, launched in Parliament in May. Now, with the General Election at most just nine months away, we are developing a 'Countryside Manifesto', based on the vision and setting out our key 'asks' of the next Government – of whatever party – to protect and enhance our countryside for the benefit of everyone.

Recent months have seen a slew of consultation papers and policy proposals from all the parties that begin to give an idea of the alternative political visions being offered for the environment and the countryside. CPRE has contributed to many of these processes, and we look forward to seeing the detailed manifestos that will emerge before the election. Our key priorities for those manifestos fall into three broad areas.

Twenty-first century planning

Good town and country planning has been critical in protecting the English countryside from inappropriate development, and driving the regeneration of our towns and cities. But recently, it has often seemed that many in positions of power regard planning as an obstacle, rather than a vital tool for ensuring that different interests are reconciled, and that the right development happens in the right places.

We are calling on all the parties to re-state a commitment to an objectives-led and democratic planning system that delivers truly sustainable development, involves stakeholders, and effectively promotes the public interest in the use of land. We want to see better protection for the countryside, stretching targets for brownfield development, extensive retro-fitting of housing to make it more energy-efficient, land use that recognises the value of well-designed, high density development, and a major shift in transport policy towards low carbon modes such as bus, rail, walking and cycling.

Protecting the human habitat

A more beautiful, varied and tranquil countryside is core to CPRE's mission and, we believe, to everyone's quality of life. The next Government should recognise the ongoing value and importance of our National Parks and other designated landscapes, and of the Green Belts – the 'countryside next door' that is often people's first experience of the natural environment, and whets their appetite for more.

We are calling on politicians in all parties to defend our finest landscapes robustly, to consider extending protection to key landscapes that do not fall within the National Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty network, to work with local authorities to safeguard tranquillity, and to support and extend England's Green Belts.

Action on litter and fly-tipping

Litter remains all too prevalent in much of our countryside and towns. We are calling on the next Government to put its weight behind a new education campaign on litter, to support local authorities better in taking action to clean up their areas, and to introduce a national deposit scheme for drinks containers, which would cut litter and boost recycling.

Please get in touch if you would like to know more about our manifesto priorities – and please support them by pressing for them within your own party.

Back key amendments and protect the countryside as Bill enters final stages

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill will have its Commons Report Stage on 13 October. Following the Bill's Committee Stage, CPRE remains concerned that the new regional strategies, as set out in part 5 of the Bill, will be too focused on delivering economic growth and housing numbers.

In light of these concerns, we are urging MPs to support amendments 12, 13 and 14, and vote for them on 13 October. These will add the Government's definition of sustainable growth to the Bill. Including this definition will ensure that equal consideration is given to environmental, social and economic issues in the future. The amendments, tabled by Joan Walley MP, benefit from the cross-party support of Tim Yeo MP and Martin Horwood MP.

These minor amendments to the Bill will still mean that regional strategies deliver new homes, especially in rural areas where affordability is a key concern, but in a way that protects the countryside, reduces carbon emissions from transport, and boosts the regeneration of urban areas.

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.

Save Our Green Spaces

CPRE is a supporter of the Save Our Green Spaces campaign which has come together to highlight the need for protection of South West England's countryside. The coalition is opposing the South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and has called on the Government to ensure the overall number of new houses allocated for the region is reduced and priority is given to delivering affordable homes. Ministers should also commit to proposals for sequential, brownfield first development across the countryside.

EDM 1853 Planning and development in the South West region supports the campaign. We are asking MPs from all parties to sign this motion. Further information is available at www.saveourgreenspaces.org

CPRE welcomes eco-town announcement

CPRE welcomed the Government's decision to scale back the eco-town proposals, announced before the summer recess. We believe that the locations approved were the least damaging in the shortlist, although we are keen to see better engagement with local communities as the proposals are developed.

A few of our initial concerns remain. We have always emphasised our support for the principle of ecologically sensitive development, but the detailed proposals for eco-towns have often fallen far short of our aspirations. The locations still appear to promote car-dependency and there is a lack of plans to secure sustainable transport alternatives. We continue to press the Government to address these concerns, and to make better use of empty homes and regeneration of urban areas in future proposals for eco-developments.

We ask parliamentarians to contact John Healey MP, Housing Minister, and urge him to reject proposals from the shortlist which were not selected, and to pursue alternative options on sites already identified as suitable for development. We need schemes that respect environmental limits, are developed with the full involvement of local communities and create conditions for sustainable living and working. The real challenge remains to raise environmental standards in all new development and existing buildings.

CPRE at the Party Conferences

CPRE will be at the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative conferences this year. If you would like to meet us to discuss any of our campaigns, particularly our Countryside Manifesto, please contact Adam Royle.

We're here to help

Adam Royle – Parliamentary Officer
020 7981 2837 (adamr@cpre.org.uk)
Sam Redding – Campaigns Support Officer
020 7981 2823 (samr@cpre.org.uk)
Ben Stafford – Head of Campaigns
020 7981 2818 (bens@cpre.org.uk)

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