



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
Standing up for your countryside

Parliamentary News: July 2011

Countryside under threat: Major concerns for the future of planning

CPRE started the year feeling optimistic about reforms to planning. The Government's Localism Bill promised to rebalance the system in favour of local communities and Ministers seemed genuinely committed to the role of planning in protecting the environment. Unfortunately, as we have seen more details of the Government's proposals, our mood has changed.

A recently leaked version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) demonstrates that, under the reforms, some crucial planning policies will be watered down so that the default answer to development is 'yes'. This follows amendments to the Localism Bill which mean planning decisions could be influenced by financial considerations, rather than long term environmental objectives. Taken together these proposals will weaken the ability of local communities and planning authorities to prevent inappropriate development. We fear that this could put huge swathes of our countryside up for grabs as the economy recovers.

Our concerns began with the Chancellor's Budget Statement in March where planning was described as an 'obstacle to economic growth'. Of course we all want to see economic recovery but this need not be at the expense of the countryside - or sensible planning. We can have the development we need and protect the countryside for future generations but we must have a robust and effective planning system to achieve that.

All of us who care about the countryside - as well as the vitality of our towns and cities - need to stand up for what we value. With the economy still faltering, the threat may not seem particularly urgent. But, unless we act now, when we emerge from the recession there will be great concern across the country as local communities discover that the planning system and its ability to shape development, protect the countryside and promote urban regeneration have been seriously undermined by the reforms currently being pushed through.

We now await the draft NPPF which is due to be issued for further consultation before the summer recess but CPRE is already gearing up for a major campaign to press the Government to think again. We have been working hard to shape the Localism Bill and NPPF. We are grateful for the support that MPs and Peers have already given us, but progress is slow. We need your help now to persuade the Government of the value of good planning as a critical tool to protect and restore our countryside.

How you can help us

Please lobby the Minister, Greg Clark, and urge him to:

- stand up for the countryside and the integrity of the planning system;
- ensure the countryside as a whole, not just our best landscapes, is protected by the NPPF from damaging development;
- give local planning authorities, through the NPPF, the ability to require new development to re-use previously developed land before building on greenfield sites.

Politicians must make natural choice

The Natural Choice, published in June, is the first Government White Paper on the natural environment for over 20 years. Happily, there is much in there to inspire anyone who loves the countryside, wildlife and the precious green spaces in our towns and cities.

The week before *The Natural Choice*, the National Ecosystem Assessment was published. The NEA has done something ground-breaking - it has measured the economic value of the services nature provides us. It suggests that our ecosystems, properly looked after, could be worth many billions a year. In measuring and valuing things that have often not been valued at all in the past, the NEA will be an important tool for decision-makers.

But when we think of the joy we get from the natural world we don't calculate it in pounds and pence. Some things are wonderful and worth protecting just because they are. So we are pleased that, as well as valuing ecosystem services, the White Paper also recognises the intrinsic value of the natural environment and the countryside.

Stop the Drop: Update

CPRE was very disappointed that Defra's review of waste policy, published on 14 June, missed a golden opportunity to introduce a UK-wide drinks container deposit refund system (DRS). Despite overwhelming public support and strong evidence that such a system, already in place in many other countries, could greatly increase UK recycling rates and reduce litter, Ministers have decided not to act now. Instead, the review recommends looking at different approaches but, as with other government statements on litter, does not lay out precisely what these might be.

The Government has not closed the door on a deposit scheme, so our campaign continues. New CPRE research published last week demonstrated that well over 4,000 full time equivalent green jobs could be created by a DRS. You can find the detailed research report through our website.

Also, thank you to all MPs and Peers who have supported our campaign on roadside litter by writing to the Minister, Lord Henley. CPRE has joined forces with over 100 local councils and Keep Britain Tidy to ask the Government to correct a legal anomaly that allows people who throw litter from cars to escape fines. We are seeking an amendment through the Localism Bill in the House of Lords.

Getting High Speed 2 on the right lines

Developed by CPRE the Right Lines Charter was launched in April 2011 and is now supported by over a dozen national organisations. It sets out four core principles 'for doing High Speed Rail well' to achieve the best long-term outcomes for the country, the climate, communities and the countryside. We believe that the current proposals for High Speed 2 fall well short of the Charter principles and, with our campaign partners, have been challenging the Government to do better.

We urge MPs and Peers to read the Charter, available at www.rightlines.org.uk, and to come to the Right Lines Charter Parliamentary Reception, on 18 October, 6-8pm, in the Jubilee Room.

The Natural Choice says other good things too - there will be new Nature Improvement Areas to protect and improve nature across more of our countryside. Some will be led by government, and others by partnerships of local communities, charities, landowners and others. We are promised more action on the light pollution that draws an insidious veil across starry skies. Communities will be able to work to improve their local landscapes, and there is recognition of the efforts of voluntary groups - and these include many CPRE members - to clear our towns and countryside of unsightly litter.

The Government now faces the challenge of turning rhetoric into reality. This is a task for all of Government, not just Defra. In particular, DCLG must do its bit. The planning system has helped protect much of the natural richness we still have in our towns and countryside. The White Paper contains some reassurances on the environmental role of planning, but, as we say in our main article, Ministers are making major changes to it now which, if they get them wrong, could make this vision very difficult to deliver.

We're here to help

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