

Campaigns

Countryside concerns and CPRE action



APPRAISING ECO-TOWNS

Despite welcome signs that Ministers are starting to listen to CPRE's views, there is still room for improvement in the Government's draft eco-towns policy

Location remains the key to successful new development,' says CPRE's Senior Planner, Kate Gordon. 'But many of the current eco-town proposals would entail building on greenfield sites or prime agricultural land. Others are in flood-risk areas, or without decent public transport.'

These are precisely the factors that the planning system should address. So it's good news that the draft eco-towns Planning Policy Statement recognises the need to test proposals against local and regional plans, but vital that it does not pre-judge those plans by naming locations.

CPRE's response to the Government's consultation argues that insisting on large, free-standing settlements is unhelpful. The response advocates more challenging targets for public transport, and a sequential approach that favours urban brownfield development before building on greenfields.

'We support the Government's aspirations for more affordable and environmentally sustainable homes,' says Kate Gordon. 'But in the new economic climate the eco-towns programme should be scaled back to one or two truly exemplary schemes, supported by smaller urban extensions where necessary or "eco-quarters" in existing towns.'

ACTION

Use the ten tests on CPRE's website (and in *Countryside Voice*, summer 2008) to assess eco-town proposals in your area. Write to your MP to highlight your concerns.

DOWN YOUR WAY

The Government has also published sustainability appraisals for shortlisted eco-towns proposals. CPRE branches around the country are flagging up the key issues in their areas.

- The sustainability appraisal for Marston Vale eco-town contains misrepresentations, says **CPRE Bedfordshire**, in particular by wrongly stating that the whole site is in a designated growth area.
- Rackheath, on the outskirts of Norwich, depends on the construction of a new distributor road, making it incompatible with the requirement for 'excellent public transport' says **CPRE Norfolk**.
- **CPRE Sussex** has objected to 'serious and material errors' in the sustainability appraisal for Ford eco-town, which denies the existence of a locally designated protected green space.
- Proposed eco-towns at Pennbury and Newton both have serious transport constraints, says **CPRE East Midlands**, which has branded the sustainability appraisal 'highly misleading'.

HOUSING IN HARD TIMES

Housebuilding targets must put quality before quantity to reflect the realities of the economic recession, says an influential new report

Many of the points made in CPRE's evidence to the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee are included in a new analysis of the Government's housebuilding plans. In particular, the Committee advocates an urgent review of housebuilding targets, and returning to releasing previously developed land before greenfield sites.

'When economic times are hard, developers inevitably "cherry pick" greenfields over less profitable brownfield locations,' says CPRE's Senior Planner, Kate Gordon. 'This Government has a good record of building on brownfield sites – but

currently, their inflexible approach is jeopardising past achievements.'

The report also recommends building more energy-efficient homes, and calls on the Government to complete an environmental appraisal of housebuilding targets before implementing regional plans. Crucially, the Committee urges the Government to consult the Sustainable Development Commission on the environmental limits of annual housebuilding targets.

'This is one of the best Select Committee reports I've seen,' continues Kate Gordon. 'We are pressing the Government to act on its recommendations.'

In a parallel development, CPRE has welcomed the launch of the new Homes and Communities Agency. With its wide-ranging planning and land acquisition powers, the organisation will become the largest regeneration agency in Europe.

'The early signs are encouraging,' says Kate Gordon. 'The Agency has already been busy talking to a wide range of stakeholders and seems keen to work with local communities to address environmental issues. We still have some residual concerns about the disposal of public land – but, with its experienced leadership and a transparent approach, the Agency has made a good start.'

Rural Housing Trust development in Beer, East Devon, which provides four homes for shared ownership and six for rent

SUSTAINABLE HOMES AND COMMUNITIES

CPRE is calling on the Homes and Communities Agency to:

- set clear priorities for urban regeneration before greenfield development;
- test and agree housing supply through local and regional plans;
- identify ways to meet local housing needs through local consultation;
- develop existing resources for making better use of brownfield land;
- make use of existing properties, including empty homes;
- prioritise affordable housing in small rural settlements;
- ensure that high-quality homebuilding is not sacrificed in pursuit of targets; and
- use its own planning powers only in exceptional circumstances.



MIKE GREEN FOR RURAL HOUSING TRUST

'The anticipated falls in housebuilding mean the timescale for achieving the 2016 and 2020 targets will have to be extended, and the target numbers adjusted accordingly.'

Home Builders Federation submission to the Select Committee inquiry on housing and the credit crunch

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THE POLITICS OF PLANNING

The new *Planning Act*, which passed into law last November, introduces a system for determining major planning applications. CPRE has strong reservations about how it will work

The *Planning Act 2008* aims to speed up decisions on major infrastructure projects, such as power stations and roads, following delays with the delivery of projects like Heathrow's Terminal Five. Decisions will be taken by the controversial new Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC), guided by the principles set out in a range of new National Policy Statements (NPS).

'We monitored the Bill closely throughout its passage through Parliament,' says Paul Miner, CPRE's Senior Planning Campaigner. 'Some of it is sensible, but we're not alone in our doubts about how the new IPC will work in practice. Unelected commissioners will pronounce judgement on the largest developments – yet these are matters of huge public concern.'

As a member of the campaigning Better Planning coalition, CPRE raised many concerns about the new measures. MPs and peers on all sides supported amendments to leave final decisions with the Secretary of State, but were ultimately defeated in both Houses of Parliament.

Nevertheless, says Paul Miner, 'we did win some concessions. Ministers have promised to review the future of the IPC after two years – so, in practice, it may not actually take any decisions.' CPRE's lobbying also won better public

consultation arrangements: the Government undertook to submit existing policies, including on aviation, to fresh public scrutiny before adopting them as NPSs. But the Government's recent decision to support a third runway at Heathrow arguably renders this commitment redundant.

CPRE will continue to seek to influence the detailed arrangements of the new planning process, and will urge the new IPC to assert its independence from political and commercial pressures.

Protests against the new runway at Heathrow have fallen on deaf ears, despite the Government's intentions to consult the public

SITUATION VACANT

Ministers are recruiting for the Chair of the new Infrastructure Planning Commission as we go to press. The post has unclear long-term prospects – particularly given a Conservative commitment to abolish it should they form the next Government – but may appeal to someone with practical experience of planning law. Much will depend on their experience and personality.



'I want to put it on record again that, should the IPC be set up, we would look to end its existence as fast as possible because we believe that the British people expect democratically accountable Ministers, who are elected by them, not an unaccountable quango, to be responsible for such decisions.'

The Shadow Planning Minister, Jacqui Lait MP, House of Commons, 24 November 2008

APPA/PHOTOS



STOP THE DROP CAPTURES THE PUBLIC MOOD

As CPRE's flagship anti-litter campaign gathers pace, a new poll shows overwhelming public support for the return of bottle deposit systems

More than four out of five people support the reintroduction of a refundable deposit on drinks containers – and nine out of ten of them think the scheme would reduce littering,' says Sam Harding, CPRE's *Stop the Drop* Campaign Manager. The figures were revealed in an Ipsos MORI poll carried out for CPRE at the end of last year, to coincide with the Government's own research into drinks container deposit schemes.

'This shows that such a scheme would have huge support,' says Sam Harding, 'so now it's time that the Government introduced a scheme that would be both right and popular!' The popularity of such a bottle deposit scheme and our wider campaign was also reflected in the number of people who took the time to write to their MP asking them to support our Early Day Motion. Those letters prompted

significant Parliamentary support for CPRE's campaign.

Government action is also called for in new research published by the Policy Exchange. Together with CPRE, the independent think tank has been studying ways of 'designing out' litter hotspots. The joint report also looks at anti-litter legislation and enforcement further afield, including New York, South Australia and Singapore.

More locally, CPRE has worked with the Keep Britain Tidy group ENCAMS to develop a toolkit for parish councils. 'The kit explains how parish councils can use their existing powers to tackle litter and fly-tipping,' explains Sam Harding. 'It covers practical things like providing bins and signs, banishing plastic bags and organising local litter-picks. There are also tips on writing newsletters, and some encouraging case studies from successful parish councils.'

Children from Derry Hill Primary School in Calne perform at the launch of a new schools education pack, which includes activities to encourage children to understand the harmful consequences of dropping litter. For a complete, downloadable copy of the pack, visit www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns and follow the links to *Stop the Drop*

EDUCATING ABOUT LITTER

CPRE has teamed up with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to produce a new schools education pack. Launched with a performance of the play *King Wastealot's Picnic* at Derry Hill Primary School in Calne, the pack features practical activities and materials to help children understand more about litter and the environment.

Powerful photographs, statistics and posters help the children to understand how carelessly dropped rubbish harms wildlife and the environment. 'This is a fantastic way for young children to learn about the issue of litter,' says Sam Harding. 'It helps demonstrate that they can all do something to help.'

ACTION

Report litter and fly-tipping problems to your local council. Visit www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns and follow the links to *Stop the Drop*, or ring National Office for more detailed advice.