

## The Future of Overview

As I am sure readers will now be aware, Howard Elcock has retired as Chairman of our Region and I have taken over. I hope I can be as successful as Howard has been and I think we all owe him our thanks for his leadership for the past 5 years. I am pleased to say Howard has agreed to act as one of the vice chairs and I am sure I shall welcome his assistance.

At the AGM we briefly discussed the future of this publication, particularly whether we should reduce from 4 to 3 publications per year. Perhaps as I have now become chairman it is an appropriate time to consider Overview more generally and we have met to discuss this. While I believe Overview has well served its purpose and is a useful tool for conveying information about our organisation, some issues have arisen.

The primary purpose of Overview is, I believe, to give information to our members. But we also distribute it to other organisations. We are well respected in the Planning system and we have considered it important to let relevant persons know what we are doing. These have ranged from the small parish council to larger regional organisations.

But there is a potential problem here. What may be of interest to a parish may be of no interest to regional organisations and vice versa. So do we need to target our audience better, or should we accept that one publication may be of no interest to one organisation but the next one may be? Or is it appropriate to have more than one type of publication for different organisations?

We also know there is a problem with duplication of effort. We are checking our lists to try to reduce this so far as possible but unfortunately the nature of the beast is that some duplication is almost inevitable.

The name has also been questioned. Should we continue with “Overview” or

is something saying it is a Newsletter or Bulletin more appropriate? Does this depend on our audience?

Of course finance is a crucial factor here. We have to accept we are a small organisation meaning it is difficult to get a wide range of contributors. But I think these are important questions which do need to be considered.

So we would like to seek your views on how we should proceed. Perhaps you could consider the following questions

- Do you think we have it about right at the present time in terms of content, quality and number of editions per year?
- Assuming finances are adequate, should we continue with quarterly editions or would 3 per year be better? Fewer editions would of course allow more time between editions and I know there is some stress in producing the current quarterly ones. This may also make it easier to get contributions.
- Apart from members of CPRE in the Region, should it be distributed to other organisations and if so to whom? Is it appropriate to continue with a “one size fits all” approach or, assuming time and finance were available, should we consider different editions for different purposes, perhaps based on those interested in the very “local” picture and those more interested in a regional perspective?
- Is “Overview” the right title for this publication? Indeed, is it a Newsletter, a Bulletin or almost a Magazine?

Any comments would of course be treated in strict confidence. But if you do have any comment on these points or any other you consider relevant, it would be very helpful if you could let Rosie know.

*Richard Cowen - Regional Chair*

“If you do not know where you are going, any road will take you there” *Lewis Carroll.*

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**CPRE, the Campaign to Protect Rural England**, is a charity which exists to promote the beauty, tranquility and diversity of rural England. We advocate positive solutions for the long-term future of the countryside. Founded in 1926, we have 60,000 supporters and a branch in every county. Patron: Her Majesty The Queen. President: Bill Bryson.  
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### Diary Dates

Sep 20	CPRE Darlington
Oct 3	CPRE Durham
Oct 11	RG QM in Durham
Oct 11	CPRE Stockton
Oct 18	CPRE Northumberland
Oct 18	CPRE Darlington
Oct 24	BIG meeting CANX
Nov 8	CPRE Stockton
Nov 15	CPRE Darlington
Dec 5	CPRE Durham
Dec 6	CPRE Northumberland
Dec 13	CPRE Stockton
Dec 20	CPRE Darlington

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## Forests, LNPS, Green Belt, The AONB And Digesters

All these issues are very much in the news at the present time. I believe we have had significant developments involving all of them here in the North East.

The Forestry Panel came to our Region at Hexham on 25 July. I attended this session which was divided into a number of workshop discussions. The Panel then visited a number of locations (including Kielder Forest) on 26<sup>th</sup>. Details of this event can be found at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel/2011/visit2-northumberland/>

Local Nature Panels are also a new and important feature in the Government's plans. While these are probably of greater interest to wildlife organisations, the sort of areas where they are likely to be created are usually areas of high landscape value that CPRE will be interested in. In our Region, one LNP is being considered for the Uplands from the Borders to the Yorkshire Dales. When the Tyne Gap is included, this will provide a continuous area of great interest to CPRE. There are also plans for LNPs to cover the lowlands north of the Tyne, similarly the Durham lowlands between the Tyne and the Tees and a separate one for Teesside (including Darlington). If all are approved, this will cover the whole of our Region, which has a number of important sites some of international importance.

So far as the Green Belt is concerned, I believe there is widespread concern about its integrity. Both Durham and Northumberland County Councils have plans for housing that will intrude into the green belt. Local groups are being formed to challenge these proposals and I believe CPRE should support these so far as possible. It may well be that the National Planning Policy Framework will also assist here – whatever its faults it does provide protection for the principle and permanence of the green belt and I question whether our Councils will be able to overcome these provisions.

The AONB held its annual forum on 18 July. Much of their work is of interest to CPRE and it has recently published excellent plans for the AONB and building design within it, as well as promoting the Uplands LNP. A "Friends of the AONB" has now been launched and no doubt we will wish to support this Group so far as proposed activities in the AONB are concerned. There may be occasions where we differ from the Friends but it is difficult to foresee any.

And anaerobic digestion? I have been involved here on a personal basis, but one that may have significant implications.

I opposed the original application, which was for a farm scale unit, principally as being a right development but in the wrong place. However, nearly three years ago it received planning permission.

Worryingly, the conditions imposed suggested it could be small to medium scale industrial unit.

Meetings with County officers pretty well confirmed this.

Since then things have progressed. Instead of electricity generation, it is now proposed to inject gas into the grid. A further planning application is now proposed not for this change but to accommodate the necessary plant for cleaning the gas and creating the right pressure. It is now intended to lay the gas pipe down my road, enabling me to connect.

Obviously this is a significant benefit. I still believe this process is in the wrong place, but have lost that argument. So the question now is, do I (and other residents) continue to oppose this proposal, or now accept it is going ahead and try to get as much benefit as possible from it. The latter course I am sure will accord with government policy regarding incentives and renewable energy, including of course proposals within the draft NPPF.

*Richard Cowen - Regional Chair*

## NPPF - Is The DCLG Fit-For-Purpose? The Debate Hots Up!

In a recent interview in the Financial Times, Greg Clark, the Communities Minister, accused the National Trust of making "risible" claims regarding the proposed changes to the planning system. The accusations did not stop there. Mr Clark went on to say that those who opposed housing development were guilty of "nihilistic selfishness".

The Trust hit back: "Greg Clark and his colleagues at the DCLG"..... appear to think that "greenbelts and other designated areas of countryside are all that anyone cares about". The Trust added: "They are not, as the Government should have realised from the forestry debacle earlier this year." Items also under discussion were HM Government making "warm noises about local communities", but heavily loading the dice to favour development.

I'm flabbergasted. I can't recall insults, as bad as these, ever being brought into the public arena by either of the protagonists mentioned. The fact that negotiations between the premier conservation organisation in the U.K., founded in 1895 at the height of Victorian philanthropy and supported by 3.6 million members - not to mention 55,000 volunteers, tells us everything we need to know about the planned changes in policy.

The fact that the insults appear to have emanated from a body, elected to legislate in the national interests and to the benefit of future generations, is puzzling. Especially, when it could be argued that many of those involved are on temporary contracts, and will not be there to see the results of any mistake or folly.

That said, the real debate taking place here is about the economy. Low growth, or no growth, is going to prove to be a disaster for many people, and will lock us into the same wasted decades that Japan has endured from the 1990's onward. The "pro-growth at any cost" brigade, are trying to win the day at the expense in my opinion, of the circumspection of the Department

in question.

There is something odd about the DCLG, that it does not stand up for the interests of settled communities in this debate. The need for affordable housing is “the” national disgrace. However, successive government administrations, going back to the late 1950’s, have failed to produce what is needed. The present “dash for cash”, or “cash for sprawl” proposals, will also fail. For two reasons. Firstly, there is no great public enthusiasm for urbanisation at any cost, even less for bulldozing the countryside. Secondly, and more worryingly, the banks and financial institutions do not currently have the resources to finance another housing boom. I say worryingly, because the taxpayer might just end up paying dearly, both financially and aesthetically, for proposals that are disagreeable to the vast majority.

*Phil Bell - Chair CPRE Northumberland*

## The Isles Proposed Wind Farm

Readers will no doubt have heard of this proposal bearing in mind the coverage it has had in the news. Very briefly, E.ON have stated they are proposing to make an application to the Infrastructure Planning Commission or its successor for a wind farm at Newton Aycliffe that will contain anything from 25 to 45 wind turbines. If approved, this could be the largest wind farm in England.

This is in addition to wind farm proposals at Lamb’s Hill Stockton (which now has planning permission), Foxton near Sedgfield and Newbiggin and Moorhouse near Darlington. In fact all of these proposals are within about a 4 km radius of each other. The existing developments of Walkway and Butterwick and the approved site at Red Gap are also not far away.

I believe as CPRE we must be most concerned about this proposal. If approved, it would change the whole landscape in this part of greater Durham. It will also straddle the A1(M) at the gateway into Durham from the south. The impression it gives may well of course vary according to your opinion of wind farms, but my opinion is that this will be a significant industrialisation of the gateway.

The local MP Phil Wilson is so concerned he has arranged a Parliamentary petition.

Details of the proposal can be found on E.ON’s web site at:

<http://www.eon-uk.com/generation/2950.aspx> or,

from the residents’ point of view;

<http://www.theislescommunities.com/>

*Richard Cowen - Regional Chair*



## Localism & Neighbourhood Planning

The Localism Bill, which is central to the Government’s planning reforms, is due to complete its passage through the House of Lords this autumn. The national planning policy framework (NPPF), which will replace all existing planning policy statements and guidance, will also be a vital part of the reform. The new system is due to ‘go live’ on 1 April 2012.

CPRE is concerned that as it stands the Localism Bill will not ensure power is really returned to local people. We are therefore campaigning for improvements to the legislation including:

- giving communities the right to challenge decisions that go against locally agreed plans;
- restricting the grounds on which local decisions can be overturned on appeal;
- including a robust environmentally sound definition of sustainable development;
- ensuring that planning permission should not be influenced by financial considerations;
- ensuring that neighbourhood planning is open and accessible; and
- ensuring that the local authorities’ “duty to cooperate” promotes collaboration in both the plan-making stage and plan implementation.

However, the Bill *will* introduce new neighbourhood planning powers that *could* give communities real influence on the future of the areas in which they live and work. Essentially, the Bill offers parish councils or other community forums the right to develop:

- a ‘neighbourhood development plan’ which should include evidence (eg community profile), a vision, and policies to deliver it. The plan needs to ‘conform’ to the strategic policies within the Local Plan and national policy, and to be accepted by a referendum of local residents. If it is supported by a simple majority it will be adopted as part of the Local Development Plan; or
- a ‘neighbourhood development order’ – which would effectively grant outline or full planning permission for specific developments.

The two pilot neighbourhood planning schemes in Allendale and North Shields are already throwing up practical issues to do with engagement with the local community, involvement of the parish council and co-operation with the council planners which are providing learning opportunities.

To help promote further engagement in the planning system the Department for Communities and Local Government have provided funding to a number of organisations to help provide advice and support. CPRE in partnership with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC – the umbrella body for parish councils) has been awarded one of the four contracts. The other contracts are held by RTP1, Locality (the umbrella body for development trusts) and the Prince’s Foundation for the Built Environment (see below for details). CPRE is offering a planning advice ‘hotline’ (Continued on Page 4)

and will be organising a number of local training events. In the North East, we may also be working with the rural community councils and other partners who are interested in promoting the wider concept of community planning, covering devolved rural service delivery and community projects as well as neighbourhood plans. So – watch out for more information into the autumn and winter.

*Nic Best, Senior Campaigns & Policy Officer*

Contact information:

CPRE & NALC: [www.planninghelp.org.uk](http://www.planninghelp.org.uk); 020 7981 2832

RTPI: [www.rtpi.org.uk/planningaid](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/planningaid) 0330 123 9244

Locality: [www.locality.org.uk](http://www.locality.org.uk) 0845 458 8336

Prince's Foundation: [www.princes-foundation.org/our-work/supporting-communities-and-neighbourhoods-planning](http://www.princes-foundation.org/our-work/supporting-communities-and-neighbourhoods-planning) 020 7613 8500

## A Default 'Yes' To Building In The Countryside?

CPRE is currently asking members across England to respond to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation.

The NPPF is possibly the most significant change to planning policy in the last 20 years. There are a number of elements that are particularly worrying for CPRE:

- The presumption in favour of sustainable development. Chancellor George Osborne has described this as 'a default yes to new development'. The presumption would require local authorities to approve proposals without delay and particularly when there is no local plan in place. CPRE is calling for substantial alteration of this policy.
- There is no mention of using brownfield (previously developed) land before greenfield for new development. CPRE believes that local authorities should be supported who wish to prioritise building new housing on brownfield land rather than greenfield.
- Existing planning policy (in PPS4) which protects the countryside for its own sake should be retained. This policy is crucial to protecting those large areas of the North East's countryside that are not covered by Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or National Park protection.

- Loopholes in the draft policy on Green Belts, which have checked the sprawl of Tyne and Wear and protected the landscape setting of Durham, need to be closed. In particular, the proposal to allow more transport-related development could make it much easier for a new road to be driven through Durham's Green Belt.

So far, over 2,000 people have written to their local MP as part of the CPRE campaign. We would be very grateful if CPRE members could also do so if they haven't already. You can also encourage your local councillors, if they are sympathetic to our concerns, to write to the Minister. For more details go to [www.cpre.org.uk](http://www.cpre.org.uk).

## Local Development Frameworks

The last quarter in Durham was dominated by the Local Development Framework documents issued for consultation by Durham County Council. They are a Council who consider issuing both the main documents and the supporting documents for consultation a way of ensuring a robust final LDF, something which could be particularly important if some of the proposals coming out of the NPPF consultation become final.

Local Development Frameworks are the suite of documents each Council has to develop to outline the planning policies which will cover their area. The central document is the *Core Strategy* and Durham Council issued the *Policy directions* stage which particularly looks at spatial strategy, employment land and housing. CPRE Co Durham has queried the amount of housing allocated which seems rather large in our opinion. The *Interim sustainability report*, which accompanies the *Core strategy: Policy directions* goes through each policy in detail and measures it against a set of criteria to produce an assessment of effect on future sustainability. In a similar theme the *Interim Habitats Regulations appraisal*, primarily deals with possible effects on sites of international nature conservation importance known as Natural 2000 sites. It is a detailed analysis and it is hoped the Council will follow through with similar care on other sites in the County.

With *Towards a waste delivery strategy. for low carbon energy* all types of energy generation are considered. However there is a particular a concentration on consideration of wind energy where it is considered the County has its share of capacity and it is suggesting it aim for 26% low carbon energy generation, rather than the 30% which is usual.

Other aspects which are still to be consulted upon are Green Belts, Green Infrastructure and the final version of the *Core strategy*

*Gillan Gibson - Durham Branch*

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