

Planning - Time To Stand Up And Be Counted

The Town and Country Planning System – one of CPRE's major achievements – is under grave, possibly terminal, threat from the Coalition Government. The Blair and Brown Governments were not kind to it – abolishing Structure Plans and otherwise weakening the system to kow-tow to the City and business interests but their activities pale into insignificance against George Osborne's recent Budget statement.

He declared bluntly that planning is “a chronic obstacle to economic growth in Britain” and that “cumbersome planning rules and bad regulation stand in the way of new jobs”. He proposes to introduce “a new presumption in favour of sustainable development” to withdraw the preference for development on previously developed land and in other ways simplify the planning system. The default answer to a developer will thus be “yes”.

Already the Government has declared its determination to abolish the Regional Spatial Strategies in its Localism Bill, which will destroy virtually all the sub-national strategic planning capacity that was needed to deal with problems like pollution, global warming, integrated transport, mineral quarrying and waste disposal. These issues cannot be dealt with by local councils acting on their own, but now there will be little way to co-ordinate action on them – all because Eric Pickles hates regions and all their works!

The impact of all this is that developers will be much freer to override local communities' wishes to conserve their environments and influence its change and growth – so much for localising power! Unless their members are very alert to spot threats, developments will be carried out regardless of their wishes, so who knows what will suddenly appear in their midst? The planning system has its detractors but at least it is ultimately the responsibility of councillors democratically elected by all of us.

It is time to protest! I have already alerted my MP, Chii Onwurah, to this

threat and she fully shares my concern. Please write to your MPs to object in the strongest terms you can muster! Especially those who live in the four constituencies in our Region that elected Government supporting MPs at the last election. Please also join in the campaign National Office will soon launch. Osborne must be stopped!

*Howard Elcock
Regional Chairman*

CPRE North East Region AGM

This year the AGM will be held on Tuesday 12 July 2011 in the new Newcastle City Library. We will meet on the ground floor (Level 1) at 12 noon inside the library by the main entrance which is on the corner of John Dobson Street and New Bridge Street.

The City Library is a six storey building in the city centre. Outstanding in all aspects, this fabulous building is an ideal venue for exhibitions, music and drama performances, meetings, training sessions, exams and all businesses or local organisations. The 24 hour library means that even if your local library is not open, you can still access a range of useful services. These include reserving items online, renewing items online, downloading e-books, using reference websites and online chat with a librarian 24/7.

We will be given a guided tour of the library which will begin at 12 noon, those interested please gather five minutes beforehand in the general information area. Once the tour has finished we will be having lunch at around 1pm, followed by the AGM beginning at 1.30pm.

The address of the City Library is Charles Avison Building, 33 New Bridge Street West, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8AX. Tel: 0191 2774100

All members are welcome to attend but you are requested to let Rosie Whiteley know by 5 July in order that the catering and room layout can be confirmed. We look forward to seeing you then.

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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

Jun 14	CPRE Stockton
Jun 21	CPRE Darlington
Jun 25	CPRE NW Network
Jul 12	RG AGM Newcastle
Jul 12	CPRE Stockton
Jul 19	CPRE Northumberland AGM
Jul 19	CPRE Darlington
Aug 1	CPRE Durham
Aug 9	CPRE Stockton
Aug 9	CPRE Darlington
Sept 6	CPRE Northumberland
Sept 13	CPRE Stockton

Northumberland Branch

Northumberland Branch AGM



Each year we try and hold our AGM together with an interesting tour and the opportunity to get together for a social gathering and meal afterwards. This year is no exception as we are holding our meeting on Tuesday 19 July at the Battlesteads Hotel, Wark, with a guided tour around their amazing carbon-neutral heating system and organic garden.

The Battlesteads is proud to be the greenest hotel in Northumberland. Of the 173 hotels across the county, it is the only one with a carbon-neutral heating system and one of only two to hold a Gold Award from the Green Tourism Business Scheme.

Being at the Battlesteads provides a glimpse into the future of sustainable living, where sustainability is intrinsically woven into every aspect of the business. From the big stuff – like the carbon-neutral heating and hot water system which serves the entire hotel, and the extensive gardens with two polytunnels which provide fresh fruit and veg for the kitchen throughout the year – to the small stuff, like the locally sourced, natural and organic toiletries in each of the rooms and the use of empty toilet roll cardboard inners for potting seedlings.



Battlesteads Garden

The tour will begin at 6.30pm and will be followed by the AGM at 7.30pm, after which there will be the opportunity to enjoy a bar meal and sample some local ales. Accommodation is also available for those who wish to make a night of it or have a break away. There is no charge for the tour but members will be required to meet the costs of their own bar meal.

Wark is situated on the B6320 Bellingham road, 12 miles north of Hexham on the River North Tyne. The bus service 880 (to Bellingham via Wark) runs from Hexham bus station and outside of the railway station.

Please let Rosie Whiteley know if you will be attending. We look forward to seeing you there



One of the two polytunnels at the hotel

Opencast In Northumberland Refused

It was good news for CPRE and residents in the Northumberland village of Halton Lea Gate when a second application to carry out opencast mining close to the village was refused by the County Council in May.

Good news for residents as this application, if granted, would have ruined the beauty and tranquillity of life in this quiet village.

Good news for CPRE because we worked hard for two years to support residents and this was a welcome result at a time when opencast mining has developed into a serious and recurring threat to the Northumberland countryside.

The reasons for refusal were the detrimental impact of the proposed scheme on sensitive landscape and the almost cheek by jowl closeness of the site to the village itself. Did someone once mention a 500 metre buffer zone?

So, a welcome victory, but the battle continues. We are currently faced with an opencast proposal on Green Belt land which has been cultivated for over 100 years and straddles the old Roman Road of Dere Street – a pristine piece of English countryside at its best. I really hope we can stop this one.

Les Ashworth - Northumberland CPRE

Durham Branch

Cumulative Effect Of Wind Farms

Wind farms can now be found in many places in County Durham and the surrounding area. Further ones have planning permission but construction has not yet started. Many others are still in the planning system.

This is now having a significant effect on Durham's landscape in many areas. There is a cluster in NE Durham and also around Tow Law. When Red Gap is constructed, there will be quite a cluster along the A689.

But perhaps the area with the greatest issue for the cumulative effect is to the north of Darlington. There are currently five applications in a short distance from Lamb's Hill by Stillington to Moorhouse by Sadberge. One, the A1 site, is dormant but only because the developers are considering a much larger site that will straddle the A1(M).

Whatever may be the merits of wind power, this situation must cause concern. The current LPA approach is to deal with each application on a "first come first served" basis. If this is the correct approach, surely it is abysmal planning, especially when one of the sites is potentially so large it will need to be considered by the Infrastructure Planning Commission.

Stockton has approved Lamb's Hill. At present a Direction has been given to prevent them from issuing the permission - one reason argued is the cumulative effect. Time alone will tell how this progresses.

Housing On Commercial Land

Should commercial land ever be released for housing? In Durham this is starting to be a real question.

In Bowburn, one site was allocated for commercial use but developers argued it must have a housing use. The site was contaminated. Housing would attract grants to clean it, commerce would not. After a number of failed attempts, planning permission for a mixed residential and commercial use was granted on appeal. The housing development is now well under way.

At the other end of Bowburn is Durham Green, an important site next to Junction 61 on the A1(M). Now the developers are interested in housing on part of this site. At present however there is no firm plan to this effect.

Land at Wynyard in Hartlepool is also allocated for commercial purposes. Now there is a planning application for housing on part of this land, divorced from other housing development. It is on the other side of the A689 from the village of Wynyard.

There are three issues that arise from this:

1. If we release too much commercial land for housing, where will people work?

2. Will this lead to more greenfield land having to be released for commercial purposes in the future?
3. Once the housing part of any development is completed, is there a risk that developers will not progress the commercial part? Could the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy remedy this?

Richard Cowen - Vice Chair

Another Type Of Wind Farm?

Could we see fields full of small turbines?

A recent application for a 100 foot turbine has signalled a possible new type of wind farm. Usually these small turbines are owned and generate power for the adjacent property, whether farm, factory or school. They tend to be singletons, or perhaps 2 very small ones. However, with this latest application the applicant lives in an adjacent village, a divorcing of user from owner. His desire to offset his carbon usage is laudable, but others may see a different role. A farmer may be content to have a number of different small turbine owners using his field, a power company could see it as an alternative to the large turbines which are proving difficult to gain approval for. It may never happen, but it would be useful to monitor your area and to consider how you would respond if such a development came forward.

As a further consideration we have been advised that the south west of England is finding it is being inundated with applications for the Endurance E-3120 turbine, a so-called small turbine. However, as the photo from a Hayes McKenzie document shows it is actually a fair size. The agent for most of these applications is CMS UK and local people have been working to convince planners the applications should be refused. Refusals have occurred and CMS is now withdrawing applications in considerable numbers. It is considered the FIT system is encouraging such applications and we need to be aware of them.

Gillan Gibson - Co Durham Branch Secretary



CPRE North East Region 'BIG' Meetings

As you may be aware, the North East Region holds meetings twice a year which are specifically for all levels of the Organisation to get together on one level to discuss anything topical that may be going on at the time.

These meetings have always been known as 'BIG' meetings because they cover a large geographical area and involve CPRE from grass-roots level to the top, giving everyone an equal chance to have their say. The meetings were intended to improve the communication and relations between these 4 levels and have always been attended by representatives from Districts, the two Branches, the North East Regional Group and the National Office. Often we have a guest speaker from another organisation who may update us on their work or give a presentation. Always these meetings are interesting and informative and provoke good discussion.

However we are contemplating stopping these meetings as we seem to have succeeded in our achievements. Communication levels are greatly improved and as a result it would appear that the meetings are not as necessary as they are now not as well supported by the membership and are quite costly to run. All members are welcome to attend regular Region and Branch meetings where they can be actively involved in topical issues and any opinions can be voiced, so the question remains: do we need to continue to run the BIG meetings in addition to Branch and Regional meetings?

We always like to consult members and gauge opinions before making any changes, as this is your CPRE. I would be interested to hear of member's views regarding this, as it is always good to get feedback and report it to Regional meetings.

Please have your say and let me know at admin@sourcedofficesupport.co.uk if you have any comments to make. Many thanks.

Rosie Whiteley

Natural Environment White Paper

As we go to print, the Government is publishing its Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP), the first such comprehensive statement of environmental policy for 20 years.

CPRE believes the White Paper could help honour David Cameron's commitment to lead the 'greenest government ever', but to do so it will need to meet a number of tough challenges. Perhaps the greatest is to translate good rhetoric into action across Government, including by departments that have not always been very serious about environmental protection, like the Treasury and the Department for Business.

It is vital that the White Paper helps 'green' the Government's planning reform agenda. George Osborne's Budget in March suggested that planning should be about prioritising economic growth, seemingly with little regard for impact. The NEWP must redress the balance and ensure that protection and restoration of our countryside and best landscapes stays at the heart of good planning.

We also need a White Paper for the whole natural environment. Government Ministers are concerned about ongoing declines in wildlife. Quite right too, and they need to do more about them. But at CPRE we know the natural environment is about more than biodiversity, and this White Paper must take forward action to protect our landscapes and the 'ordinary countryside', safeguard tranquillity and tackle light pollution.

And the Government should champion the intrinsic value of the environment. A recent weighty report, the National Ecosystem Assessment, does ground-breaking work to begin valuing many of the 'services' nature provides, and this will hopefully help politicians make better decisions. But it's only part of the picture – a beautiful, wildlife-rich countryside is valuable in itself; we can't, and shouldn't, measure everything in pounds and pence. What price a beautiful view, a stunning sunset or an imposing moorland landscape? In difficult economic times, the countryside lifts and inspires us – the Government must act to ensure it can do the same for generations to come.



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