

CPRE *SOUTH EAST*

Sustainable Spatial Planning

ANNUAL REVIEW 2009



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
SOUTH EAST



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Officers and Representatives for 2009

Chairman:	Marie-Hélène Baneth (to Sept 2009)
Vice Chairman:	Rodney Chambers
Vice Chairman:	Christine Drury (Acting Chairman from Sept 2009)
Treasurer:	Brian Wood
Regional Director:	Edward Dawson
Group Secretary:	Gloria Keene

Branch Representatives:

Berkshire Branch:	Richard Eassie
Buckinghamshire Branch:	John Wood
Hampshire Branch:	Christopher Napier
Isle of Wight Branch:	John Langley
Kent Branch:	Richard Knox-Johnson
Oxfordshire Branch:	Brian Wood
Surrey Branch:	Tim Murphy
Sussex Branch:	Rodney Chambers

Other Representatives

SEFS Policy & Executive:	Edward Dawson
Historic Environment Forum:	Edward Dawson
South East Rural Forum:	Edward Dawson
Regional Water Group;	Christine Drury
Regional Transport Group:	Alan Drinkwater
Regional Waste Group:	John Beech

Introduction

This report covers the period January–December 2009, and is presented at the CPRE South East annual meeting on 19 May 2010. The accompanying Accounts and Treasurer’s Report cover the same period. 2009 was a year of the economic recession. The housing market continued to be in slump. The effects in the South East region were strongly felt, as the regional economy was overheated and there was a long-standing mismatch between housing and employment in many part of the South East.

In the meantime, the government continues to see the regions as a means of promoting the economy of the nation. In the South East, the aim for the region is to retain its fundamental strengths, despite the loss of confidence and reduced business activity. To do this, a South East Economic Delivery Council has been set up, jointly chaired by Jonathan Shaw MP and Jim Brathwaite, Chairman of SEEDA, (Rob Douglas from November 2009). We should press for environmental representation on this body.

The Secretary of State’s proposed changes to the South East Plan consultation period closed on 24 October 2008. CPRE South East concentrated on the core strategy, while the branches worked on the sub regions. This followed the pattern of the EIP. It also led to much intensive work and collaboration by the branches, and we are very grateful for the work done in such as expeditious manner. Some 8,300 organisations and individuals responded to the public consultation. This amounted to 25,000 policy responses, less than the South West Plan changes. This perhaps meant that success in achieving a broadly acceptable level of housing targets has gained wider public recognition. We wanted to know issues regarding the downturn in the economy, had impacted on household projections. The final approval of the South East Plan was in spring 2009, and we ended up with a housing requirement of 32,700. This seems to be close to the annual figure achieved in the region over recent years.

The new Chairman, Marie-Hélène Baneth from Storrington, was unable to continue beyond September, for family reasons. She was replaced by Christine Drury, who, as one of the two Vice Chairs, stepped in as Acting Chairman. Rodney Chambers, who is also chair of Sussex branch, continued as vice chair.

Chairman’s Overview

2009 was another busy year for CPRE South East. Our Regional Director, Edward Dawson, strongly supported by the Management Group and regional and branch volunteers, worked with the Chairman, Marie-Hélène Baneth, on the final stages of the South East Plan, and on the broad range of policy areas in which CPRE is involved in the South East. However this was also a year of deep recession when the financial position of CPRE was put under severe strain, and National Office, of which CPRE’s regional organisation is a part, went through a period of painful restructuring. New arrangements were agreed which recognize the strong working relationship with the Branches and the need to maintain a very active CPRE regional focus during the transition period of establishing the new post Assembly planning structures under SEEDA. This will continue through into 2010, when further change is possible after the General Election, and CPRE internal funding arrangements need to be reviewed by September. This Chairman’s overview report has been prepared by Edward Dawson and by Christine Drury, who succeeded Marie-Helene Baneth in an Acting Chair capacity in November 2009. This was a smooth transition, as Marie-Helene continues her involvement with CPRE as a member of the Policy Committee. It was decided to defer appointment of a new chair until the regional task was clearer after the General Election in 2010. The Regional Director continued his close involvement with all aspects of Regional Policy; the Acting Chair resumed her membership of behalf of SEFS of the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Advisory group. The Regional Chairs meeting chaired by Shaun Spiers continues to be a very useful forum to network with other regional Chairs. The Region’s finances and secretariat are managed by Brian Wood and Gloria Keene; Brian Wood also being a CPRE Board Trustee.

This was a year when new regional governance came in, in the form of the Partnership Board, and this formed a backdrop to the South East Plan discussions. The form of regional ‘governance’ will change, but no one is yet sure of the shape it will take. The Conservative Party’s pledges regarding the abolition of ‘regional government’ compounded this uncertainty. It is fortunate that Edward Dawson has been well placed to monitor the changes and provide us with regular dispatches from the front line.

The matter of Eco Towns in the region was a major pre-occupation for the branches involved. At a regional level, we maintained an active overview of the various proposals as they emerged, advising branches on the best campaigning approaches to the schemes. The Eco Towns agenda is certainly of regional significance. These proposals formed part of the wider New Growth Points agenda for concentrating housing in the regions. CPRE nationally was not against the principle of Eco Towns when the 15 possible locations were identified, with three in the South East.

The topic groups continued to make progress on the critical issues of water, waste and transport, continuing work on water policy, supported by Graham Warren, who has been an incisive critic of the Thames Water Management Plan and of the proposals for the Abingdon Reservoir. The Waste Group made a number of site visits last year which have contributed to our expanding understanding of the real issues related to waste. Under John Beech's chairmanship, the group has refined a draft Position Paper on waste, which is soon to be finalised. Alan Drinkwater stepped down and was replaced by Gary Thomas in leading the Transport Group. The group has developed a comprehensive set of papers on Roads in the Countryside and on Rail in the South East. The South East Transport Group has also been actively developing close working relations with our National Transport Adviser.

Delivery of the Forward Plan

A key focus of 2009 was the South East Plan proposed changes. Our effort continued to be aimed at influencing the process, ensuring all aspects of concern to CPRE came through. Our approach was focused on branch concerns, including the Housing Inquiry and Eco Town proposals. CPRE took part in consultation events on issues from transport to water; the aim was to put forward policies that retain and enhance the regions landscapes. The FP 2009 -12 was a well-balanced document, which aimed at a wide range of strategic issues.

Regional Transport work

CPRE maintained its links with the Regional Transport Board, via SEFS. The approach to infrastructure of the RTB was reflected in the South East Plan. The Plan foresees better infrastructure and behaviour change as essential to alleviating congestion, but considers that a reduction in car use during the Plan period is unrealistic. The Plan also accepts that traffic congestion will be helped by focussing development in urban areas. The CPRE Transport Group first led by Alan Drinkwater, then changed to Gary Thomas, worked on draft reports: 'Roads in the Countryside' and 'Railways in the South East'.

Regional Spatial Strategy

The South East Plan was issued in final form on 6th May 2009. CPRE put out a press release to coincide with the publication. It sets a target of 32,700 homes a year, marginally lower than the previous figure of 33,250 in the Proposed Changes issued in July 2008: Milton Keynes, Reigate, Brighton, and Winchester have slight reductions. The Plan confirmed Green Belt reviews at south Oxford and north east Guildford; references to 'minimum' housing numbers have been removed; infrastructure programmes will have to be agreed before major new developments. Many of the changes set out last July by GOSE were maintained, such as the removal of strategic gaps from the policy framework. While CPRE was able to welcome many aspects of the Plan, green belt reviews and other anathemas remain a problem. Several legal challenges were mounted, including by Oxfordshire CPRE on the Green Belt review. The government conceded all of them. At December 2009 the final outcome was awaited. Nevertheless the Plan is now the Development Plan, under the 2004 Act, and county Structure Plans are repealed. This completes a journey started in 2003, with the original project brief.

Work of the Group

The group meets on a quarterly basis, discussing selected regional policy issues. It often has an outside speaker, and in 2009 these were: **John Lancaster**, of Hampshire Rural Housing Enablers and **Catriona Riddell**, of the Partnership Board. The later focused on the need for strategic planning in the regions.

In reviewing our achievements for 2009 we can note many successes for CPRE South East:

- Responding to the final version of the South East Plan and tracking it at all stages;

- written submissions put forward on a range of regional strategies and policy reviews;
- gaining powerful publicity for CPRE, including national and regional media outlets;
- assisting in the creation of the South Downs National Park and its wider acceptance;
- preparing detailed written evidence for the House of Commons Housing Inquiry;
- advocating retention of greenfield sites, while ensuring affordable housing provision;
- widely regarded as a pre-eminent body on environmental campaigning regionally.
- Working with others for the long term good of the region and its environment.

Rural Programme

Rural Forum for the South East

The Rural Board has moved from its interim status to a permanent body. As previously reported, it is mainly a forum for the agencies with a rural interest. In February, the Board held an away day to define its role. This includes maintaining a healthy natural environment, in good condition with long term viability; public access which inspires people to value their environment; sustainable land use with resilience and adaptability to change where economic and social actions also deliver environmental objectives. In terms of sustainable food and farming, the aim was to improve environmental performance of farming; sustainable consumption and production; climate change and agriculture; animal health and welfare; and using sector champions. The Board will be chaired by Paul Bettison from the LGA and the Rural Forum will be chaired by Ray Ellis.

Mapping local food webs

The January meeting heard a report on mapping local food webs. Graeme Willis (Project Manager) and Rachel Sutton (SE Co-ordinator) gave an update on the project, funded by the Plunkett foundation and the Big Lottery Fund. The overall aims are to reconnect people with the land through food and community enterprise. A number of organisations are working together to promote community food enterprises, and give advice to help others access local produce. Rachel Sutton has now moved to Norwich, and she has been replaced by Karen Gardham. Rachel will continue with, and complete the pilot project in Hastings. The launch event for this was chaired by Christine Drury, and also attended by Thea Platt, the project co-ordinator. It was well attended and very successful. The next town selected was Haslemere, in Surrey, which proved to be very responsive to the ideas we put forward.

Consultations and responses

Eco Towns

CLG published a summary of the Eco-Towns consultation responses. It has also produced an Eco-Towns PPS, with accompanying Sustainability Appraisal, and a Sustainability Appraisal of the whole programme. Our response to the PPS consultation had to complement branch submissions by February 2009. Eco-Towns are meant to be the Government's response to three challenges: climate change; the need for more sustainable living; and the need to increase housing supply. CPRE expressed concern at regional level regarding spatial planning, and the apparent intention to disregard the plan-led process. Eco Towns should not be in addition to housing targets set out in the South East Plan. The high standards suggested for eco towns should reasonably be applied to all major new development proposals. Indeed, the standards may not be particularly high. The Government may not have fully thought through the sustainable community implications of the concept. A good case has been made against Ford, and against Weston Otmoor and Cherwell.

Regional Economic Strategy

CPRE South East submitted comments on the Regional Economic Strategy monitoring report for 2006-2016 from SEEDA. We emphasised the importance of Smart Growth, including higher activity rates, and reducing the development footprint, as well as Sustainable Prosperity. The report also explains that GVA growth rate dropped from 2.8 per cent in 2006 to 1.9 per cent in 2007 and down to 1.2 per cent in 2008. We asserted in our comments that rural areas needed reasonable levels of rural development that addressed local needs. Declining services and deprivation in rural areas remain a problem, with rural affordable housing a particular concern. Rural businesses are increasingly lifestyle enterprises. There is also a need to foster the local food sector, with appropriate outlets.

Regional Governance

The Sub National Review took up much time and effort over 18 months. CPRE South East responded formally to the consultation. One of our key concerns was the loss of stakeholder involvement. We deplored the loss of the partnership-style Assembly, and believed this would lead to a weakened structure, with less acceptability across the sectors, and a much reduced democratic accountability to the region. The Government listened to our concerns, and there would be a joint duty between SEEDA and a local authority leader's board to produce a single Regional Strategy. The Assembly closed at the end of March 2009. A new Partnership Board emerged and CPRE South East was closely involved in this.

Household Projections Study

CPRE SE, as well as individual branches, agreed to contribute financially to the research on household projections co-ordinated by National Office. The work used the ONS/CLG forecasts due in March 2009. The methodology behind these forecasts uses the Chelmer Model, which the Regional Director has often referred to as a 'black box', possibly now understood by no one, not even Panel Chairs. The main new inputs since the revised 2004-based projections are the 2006-based population projections. These have higher fertility rates and greater longevity. The CPRE study applied all this data, and not surprisingly came up with high figures for the South East, which are treated work this as background.

Working with others

In the heritage sector a key indicator is success in the popularity of the historic environment. This is in addition to other issues, such as heritage-at-risk and levels of funding. An important aim is to increase public attendance and participation at heritage sites. Some 75 per cent of the population visited a historic property in 2008, in the South East. This figure is contained in *Heritage Counts 2008*, recently issued by English Heritage, and compiled by the South East Historic Environment Forum, on which CPRE sits as an active member. We are also one of the members of SEFS (South East Forum for Sustainability). SEFS has so far put forward three seats to the Regional Assembly. The SEFS Planning Group, where we have been well represented by Edward Dawson, has been working on spatial planning.

South Downs National Park

On 31 March the Government announced that it would designate the South Downs as a National Park which covers a large area of the South East region. The news was heavily trailed and welcomed by all commentators. The final push in relation to the National Park was to encourage Defra to include the Western Weald, Lewes and Ditchling in the designation. Some councils were concerned about the impact of new planning powers. The County Councils welcomed the announcement, which will include the East Hampshire AONB boundary. The inquiry recognised the important contribution made by historic parks and wildlife, despite the role that human intervention has played in their existence.

Relations with Regional Partners

Working with our regional partners is an important element of strategic engagement. This enhances rather than inhibits our ability to be a forceful critic. CPRE can campaign for positive outcomes, always endeavouring to be constructive and decisive. We have been pleased to work as regional partners within the Regional Assembly, and with SEEDA and GOSE. CPRE South East has continued its engagement with both the Regional Housing Board and the Regional Transport Board, partly through SEFS. Engagement also continued through sub regional groups on the South East Plan.

Future Plans

The Forward Plan for 2009-12 reflects the current work areas for the Regional Group and the transition year that 2010 will be. The Partnership Board that has replaced SEERA is working on the Single Regional Strategy. The task will be to continue to counter the reduction in formal stakeholder engagement. However the major issue will be adapting to what ever changes emerge flowing the General Election in 2010, since there are very big differences in political approach emerging from opposition statements during 2009. Whatever the political outcome on 2010, the impact of the downturn also requires further assessment, as the South east emerges from recession: housing, planning and rural agendas are all areas of policy in which CPRE South East is an important player.