

CPRE South East eBulletin for November 2010

Welcome to the CPRE South East eBulletin: a monthly roundup of national and local news with a particular focus on the South East of England. Our audience is CPRE and its friends. Please feel free to circulate it. If you are not on our circulation list and want to receive the eBulletin regularly, just let me know at cprenews@gmail.com.

This month is a bit of an anti-climax as the Localism Bill faces delays. It probably missed the last bus from rural England. The government has announced major reforms to social housing and is rewriting the rulebooks on housing standards. There is a surreal climatic activity from the quangos about to be abolished. The Commission for Rural Communities and CABI are producing some of their most thoughtful reports as the CRC faces abolition and CABI struggles to reinvent itself in the face of savage cuts. Prince Charles meanwhile is gearing up to advise people not just on buildings, but also the new neighbourhood plans. Architects are worried that most people will agree with the Prince. And sssh... Don't mention High Speed Two, shaping up to be the biggest campaign since Terminal Three.

Andy Boddington, Editor

1. The New Planning Regime

Localism bill delayed. The bill was expected last week but has been delayed, officially due to "parliamentary congestion". There are rumours of a row over the powers to be given to elected mayors outside London. Angus Walker has produced a useful summary of the likely contents of the bill (<http://is.gd/hSssN>). Communities Minister Greg Clark said local authorities should actively consider pooling planning powers, sharing planning staff and carrying out much more joint working. He said that developers will have to consult residents on major applications (Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/hRxvn>). Commenting on forthcoming bill, Richard Knox-Johnston, the chairman of Protect Kent, said: "Planning affects everyone throughout our beautiful county and is at the core of what Protect Kent does. Getting these reforms right will be vital if we are to safeguard Kent's countryside and towns for future generations" (Protect Kent: <http://is.gd/hCZ8Z>). The new National Planning Framework will be published by April 2012 (Planning: <http://is.gd/hV1EH>).

Neighbourhood plans. Greg Clark claimed that new neighbourhood plans would not replace wider local plans (Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/hRxvn>). Junior planning minister Bob Neill said the government will not define how neighbourhood plan boundaries are set. "Some will define themselves. Wards are a start and parishes are a natural unit in rural areas. We are fairly open as to how it's done as long as it is done. Abolition of binding local plans reports doesn't mean there isn't a role for inspectors in establishing compliance with national policy, but we are not trying to prescribe much beyond that" (Planning: <http://is.gd/hUSsc>). A study for the National Housing Federation found that it would take a well-staffed urban authority six years to get neighbourhood plans in place. Short-staffed rural authorities may need to spend at least £500,000 on hiring consultants. Town planners challenged the estimates as too high (Planning: <http://is.gd/hUsW0>). Funding will be in place to help town and parish councils to develop neighbourhood plans by April 2011 (Planning: <http://is.gd/hV1EH>).

Neighbour Prince. The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment said it wanted to take a greater role in community planning. It is lobbying to co-ordinate community groups. "This is dangerous," architect Will Alsop said. "We already know that the vast majority of people would favour the Prince of Wales's attitudes, but architecture, like all forms of art and science, thrives on the new and asking interesting questions as well as protecting the old". The Prince's Foundation hit back: "It is telling that architect Will Alsop is concerned that the great majority of people in Britain support the Prince of Wales's view, as his comment reveals that the fear that greater community engagement will disempower the hegemony of the profession on design issues" (Guardian: <http://is.gd/hYB7H>; Planning: <http://is.gd/hYBqO>).

Regional Spatial Strategies abolition delayed. Cala Homes succeeded in its High Court bid to have the government's immediate revocation of RSS declared unlawful. There is a lack of clarity on how this affects Core Strategies and current planning applications. Eric Pickles announced that it changed "very little" as he still intended to revoke the RSS and this intention must be taken into account as a material consideration in planning matters (CLG: <http://is.gd/hUsys>; <http://is.gd/hUPUX>). The building firm, which has aspirations for 2,000 homes at Barton Farm, Winchester returned to seeking a court declaration that the government's intentions are not a material consideration. On Monday a judge placed a temporary block on the government's claim that its plans to abolish Regional Strategies must be regarded as a material consideration in planning decisions until a full hearing can take place (Planning: <http://is.gd/hYzhn>). A government review has found that officials and advisers had clashed over how to handle the abolition of RRS (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/hSrdj>).

Local growth. The government has published its plans for local growth, including 24 local enterprise partnerships and the £1.4bn Regional Growth Fund (BIS: <http://is.gd/hYGx6>). There are huge gaps in the map of LEPs, apparently because central government did not approve of the local solution to enterprise (<http://is.gd/hYHGg>).

The **Community Infrastructure Levy** is to be retained but reformed to ensure neighbourhoods share the advantages of development by receiving a proportion of the funds councils raise from developers. Decentralisation Minister Greg Clark said: "Neighbourhoods will now get a direct cut of the cash paid by developers to councils - to spend how they wish to benefit the community, from parks and schools to roads, playgrounds and cycle paths" (Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/hD1xX>; CLG: <http://is.gd/hU6dE>).

2. Planning

Flooding and erosion. Defra and the Environment Agency have published a consultation on a new national flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy for England which aims to allow greater local involvement in planning and prioritising flood defences (Closing date 16 February: <http://is.gd/hMc9T>). The Court of Appeal has supported a housing development on the flood plain in West Oxfordshire, saying it is a matter of planning judgment for the council to decide what weight, if any, to give to flooding (Planning: <http://is.gd/hVaSz>).

Heritage and design. Prince Charles' Foundation for the Built Environment has signalled its interest in taking over some of the design review responsibilities provided by CABE (Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/hV4u8>). English Heritage has promised to protect its planning function and 200 jobs as it battle cuts. However, the director of planning and development Steven Bee is being made redundant. He is credited with making English Heritage more development friendly (Building: <http://is.gd/hsWiy>).

Climate change. The Planning & Climate Change Coalition, which includes CPRE, has launched a new guide designed primarily for local authorities and the Local Enterprise Partnerships who want to both tackle climate change and enable greater use of renewable energy. "Planning for more renewable and low-carbon developments should be at the heart of good planning by communities: it is neither optional nor additional", it says. The report sets out a number of Low Carbon Policies (LCPs). LCP3, for example, sets out what communities could expect from local plans and how plans should support renewable and low-carbon energy generation. It concludes: "Communities that ignore the challenge will find the cost of impacts and of insurance rising sharply, threatening their economic and social fabric" (<http://is.gd/hV5hy>)

Local Development Frameworks. Fareham Borough Council has approved its Core Strategy, which includes proposals for 7,000 new homes on green fields. The plans have been criticised by CPRE South Hampshire which complained the consultation was flawed (Planning: <http://is.gd/hMeAK>; Daily Echo: <http://is.gd/hU2ZX>; The News: <http://is.gd/hU39V>). Mid Sussex District Council will build just 370 homes a year over the next five years - a reduction of 57% on the target imposed by the previous government (24dash: <http://is.gd/hU3jf>; This is Sussex: <http://is.gd/hU3ot>).

3. Supermarkets, Regeneration and Town Centres

Regeneration failing. A report from Cabe says many supermarket-led regeneration schemes are failing to create attractive places to live in. In a study of 30 major developments it found multi-purpose schemes were built with little relationship to their local neighbourhood, including poorly designed housing and public amenities. Supermarkets often repeat their out-of-town store design, big plain buildings with large car parks, in town centre schemes, ignoring local character and the changing needs of neighbourhoods. CABE calls for councils to play a stronger role in planning such schemes, to ensure that the competing needs of local economic development, commercial viability for a store and sustainable place-making are balanced (CABE: <http://is.gd/hMskU>).

Retail giants eating into centres. Almost 90% of all new shop space given planning approval last year went to the big four supermarkets. The Association of Convenience Stores said the aggressive supermarket expansion and poor planning controls has wiped 12,000 shops off British high streets. It said more than 12,000 independent shops closed their doors in high streets across the country in 2009; in October 2010, town centre shop vacancy rates reached 14%; the 'big four' supermarket companies have accounted for 87% of all retail development given planning approval since 2008, with Tesco alone taking up 60% of development approvals (ACS: <http://is.gd/hMp1X>; Daily Mail: <http://bit.ly/axBBm7>).

Town centres first. The Department for Business has published a short health check for high streets and town centres (<http://is.gd/hV6ql>). Business Minister Mark Prisk reaffirmed the Government's commitment to town centre first planning policy in a debate in Parliament. "This Government strongly supports a localist approach to planning for the high street, which is why we have a clear commitment to the "town centres first" planning policy. In practice, it gives local authorities the ability to consider the vitality, viability and diversity of shopping districts when considering controversial planning applications." Any specific changes to national planning policy will be brought forward through the national planning framework "however, to be very clear, the principle of "town centres first" is a vital part of that framework" (<http://is.gd/hMrh6>).

The Sun to rescue. The Sun newspaper has launched a campaign & charter to save the High Street. Its campaign is backed by the British Retail Consortium, champion of retail giants and out-of-town superstores (<http://is.gd/gzp8G>).

4. Housing

New Homes Bonus. Under the scheme the government will match the council tax raised from new homes for the first six years. CLG is currently proposing that the bonus should be split 80:20 in two-tier areas outside London. Councils and communities will "work together" to decide how to spend the extra funding. Fiona Howie for CPRE said: "It's important therefore that developers aren't able to take advantage of cash-strapped councils, by proposing development that we live to regret. The reuse of brownfield land and protection of green fields is vital." The scheme could be extended to include long-term empty property (Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/hD1g6>).

Housing estimates fall. CLG published 2008-based household projections predicting 20,500 fewer households per year between 2008 and 2031 in England compared with the 2006-based projections. The South East however has the largest absolute increase in households of 39,500 per year from 2008 to 2033 (28%), unchanged from 2006-based estimates (<http://is.gd/hRs8j>; <http://is.gd/hRs5l>). CLG has reluctantly published academic research commissioned by the Labour government on estimating housing needs (<http://is.gd/hMjco>).

Affordable housing. The Commission for Rural Communities has published a report on improving the effectiveness of delivering affordable rural housing through section 106 agreements, rural exception sites and Community Land Trusts (<http://is.gd/hU8lw>). The New Economics Foundation said reducing the cost of land and the interest rates paid by social landlords could fund one million new homes in the next five years. It suggests setting an 80% capital gains tax rate on all land sales of £80,000 per acre or more, with the revenues going to a land fund to subsidise social housing (<http://is.gd/hUfyX>).

Empty homes returned to use will now count towards housing supply targets. The number of empty homes has reached 726,000 in England (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/hDuQb0>).

Second homes. The NHF said that the growth of second homes was pricing locals out of the market. Aylesbury Vale in Buckinghamshire took the third place on the list with an increase from 217 holiday homes to 410 (BBC: <http://is.gd/hRkY9>).

Housing standards. The government has redefined the zero in zero-carbon homes. In July, housing minister Grant Shapps said: “This government are committed to ensuring that all new homes post-2016 can be zero-carbon”. This week, it became clear that a “zero-carbon home” is one that has cut its emissions by as little as 44% compared with the 2006 building regulations and will be far from zero carbon (ZCH: <http://is.gd/hRjEj>; CLG: <http://is.gd/hUQEP>). The Homes and Communities Agency revealed it had granted exemptions from meeting level three of the code for sustainable homes for one-third of the schemes that were given funding from the 2008/11 national affordable housing programme (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/hSpV5>). CLG has published a number of revisions for the Code for Sustainable Homes (<http://is.gd/hU2cp>). Grant Shapps has scrapped proposals by the HCA to introduce Core Housing Standards for homes on public land from next April, a move that the Royal Institute of British Architects called ‘deeply troubling’ (Regen: <http://is.gd/hRvGc>; Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/hSqWX0>). Instead, a new local standards framework will be introduced (NHF: <http://is.gd/hYEnw>). The government has allocated £2 billion for decent homes (<http://is.gd/hUQPR>).

Eco-towns. Cranbrook, Devon’s first free-standing settlement since the Middle Ages, received planning consent from East Devon District Council (Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/hV4hK>). The MOD has found its proposals for development of housing on a brownfield site outside Bicester in Oxfordshire unwelcome as Cherwell District Council continues to promote its greenfield eco-town site (Oxford Times: <http://is.gd/hV84T>).

5. Social Housing Consultation

The government launched to much publicity and a degree of confusion its new proposals for social homes (CLG: <http://is.gd/hD45K>). A quarter of a million social homes remain overcrowded, and more than 400,000 under-occupied. Social landlords are questioning whether the finances add up, while giving a limited welcome to proposals for flexible tenancies. The headlines are:

- ◆ The government says it is investing £4.5 billion in new affordable homes over the Spending Review period, which combined with the reform of social housing it claims should deliver up to 150,000 new homes over the next four years.
- ◆ “Social homes for life are allocated to people who may have only a short-term housing crisis, which means households continue to occupy a social home and to pay low rents, even if they no longer need this support.” Councils will now have the option to offer flexible tenancies and greater local discretion to decide allocations. They must offer minimum contracts of two years. New tenants will be guaranteed one succession to a spouse or partner, with landlords free to grant further succession rights.
- ◆ They will have greater flexibility to help homeless families find appropriate housing, and existing tenants who may be trapped in unsuitable accommodation, or unable to take up a job offer because they can’t move. The ‘reasonable preference’ categories for those with the greatest housing needs will be kept, to ensure priority for social housing continues to go to the most vulnerable in society and those who need it most.
- ◆ A new ‘Affordable Rent’ tenancy will be offered by housing associations to some new tenants of social housing from April 2011. Affordable Rent properties will offer fixed term tenancies at a rent higher than social rent - with landlords able to set rents at up to 80% of local market rents.
- ◆ Greater mobility - it will be easier for any of the eight million social tenants in England to move when their circumstances change. Only five% of social tenants moved home over the past year compared to almost a quarter of tenants in the private sector.
- ◆ Housing revenue will be returned to social landlords, not kept by central government, but the landlords will take on an as yet unspecified debt from government for existing housing.
- ◆ £100 million available to housing associations to bring 3,000 empty homes into use.

Reaction. Housing professionals urged government to think again (New Start: <http://is.gd/hM6pv>). Hometrack said that 80% rents could lead to an extra 7,800 homes a year in England, 1,200 in the South East (Inside Housing: <http://is.gd/hU6Fu>). The National Housing Federation said the plans could provide a disincentive for people to take on better-paid jobs. Chief executive David Orr said: ‘It’s difficult to imagine a more powerful disincentive to do well than the threat of losing your home if you start earning too much’ (<http://is.gd/hZ2rL>). He said it believed fixed term tenancies could be a positive move towards helping more people access social housing, but it is vital housing associations have the option to continue offering long term tenancies and life term tenancies (<http://is.gd/hDODu>). Earlier, the NHF warned the Government’s new approach to housing will cut the overall number of social homes in England by 123,000 over the next four years – denying 300,000 people a social rented home (24dash: <http://is.gd/gPWHA>).

6. Landscapes and Biodiversity

“Countryside is terrifying”. City dwellers are becoming “terrified” of the countryside as urban pressures leave many disconnected from the great outdoors, Fiona Reynolds the director general of the National Trust warned. The trust is launching a six-month campaign to investigate whether the nation is losing touch with the countryside and to see what can be done about it (Guardian: <http://is.gd/hWAZO>; <http://is.gd/hWB2b>; NT: <http://is.gd/hWBd2>).

National parks. CPRE said government plans to reform national parks threaten to destroy the country’s most precious landscapes by forcing managers to promote economic development. Neil Sinden said “There’s been a long running debate ... whether, in addition to protecting the landscape and promoting public enjoyment, there should be a third duty to promote economic progress. That would subvert the other objectives. It would be inappropriate to give it equal status to the original objectives” (Guardian: <http://is.gd/hRqIH>; Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/hUtaC>; Defra: <http://is.gd/hUtdR>, consultation closing date 1 February). Henry Robinson for the CLA rejected the argument saying CPRE and the Campaign for National Parks do not understand how landscapes are paid for and managed. “Rural communities are dying through depopulation, lack of good-quality jobs and second-home owners... Our national parks need... flexible planning policies so a profitable rural economy can underpin the communities and landscapes of our national parks. This does not mean they will be concreted over” (<http://is.gd/hRqx3>).

Green belt. Kent CPRE criticised a move to delay decision on a care home, saying the council should have refused the application outright based on environmental and social grounds (<http://is.gd/hUggz>). Sevenoaks District Council has slapped an Article 4 direction on green belt land sold by land bankers to prevent erection of fences, walls and gates. It said such sites are “very unlikely” to be granted planning permission (24dash: <http://is.gd/hWALf>).

Green spaces. The Open Spaces Society has launched a campaign to capitalise on the government’s plans for a new green spaces designation (<http://is.gd/hRxED>). CABE has published a guide to the issues involved in transferring ownership and management of public space from local authorities to community groups (<http://is.gd/hM4Tf>).

Forests. Defra has confirmed it is considering selling off all or part of the publicly owned forestry estate managed by the Forestry Commission but has insisted that any changes in ownership “will not compromise the protection of our most valuable and biodiverse forests” (<http://is.gd/hV4Dq>; Planning <http://is.gd/hV8yW>). Friends of the Earth said “if its real intention is to sell off much loved sites to make a quick buck, its vision of a Big Society is somewhat questionable” (<http://is.gd/hV8EL>). Green Party leader Caroline Lucas said “This is a classic case of “selling off the family silver”, and one which we should oppose” (Guardian: <http://is.gd/hWqam>). Lord Clark of Windermere, former chairman of the Forestry Commission said: “We hold these magnificent green spaces in trust for our children. Once they’ve gone we will not get them back. Government claims... that the environmental and public benefits would be maintained if forests are sold off simply do not stand up to scrutiny” (Guardian: <http://is.gd/hWqnz>). “Selling England’s woodlands will not be easy” (Guardian: <http://is.gd/hWA3v>). 38 Degrees has a petition against the sell off. More than 78,000 have signed (<http://is.gd/hWqw9>).

Natural England will shed 400 staff by May next year, and that figure could rise to 800 within four years. It would represent a 33% drop in workforce, compared with average job losses of around 25% across Defra (Farmers Guardian: <http://is.gd/hV7H6>).

Beauty matters. Eight out of ten people think everyone should be able to experience beauty on a regular basis. Only 18% of people think that beauty matters less if you are poor. The findings form part of a project called People and places, commissioned by CABE (<http://is.gd/hMxDK>; <http://is.gd/hUffH>).

Biodiversity. Butterflies and bees are declining because of the loss of wild flowers in the countryside (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/hWABm>).

Noise. The National Physical Laboratory has developed and validated a new low-cost technique for directly mapping noise pollution (MNT: <http://is.gd/hRwNN>).

Light pollution. After research by Newsnight indicated that 43% of authorities are switching off streetlights to save money, Transport committee chair, Louise Ellman MP, slammed the ‘panic reaction’ of councils as putting lives in danger to reduce energy bills (BBC: <http://is.gd/hURp1>; LocalGov: <http://is.gd/hUPQE>). The Daily Mail screamed “New dark age on our streets” (<http://is.gd/gUvDG>; see also Express: <http://is.gd/hV9Wu>). “Experts warn of spike in accidents as street lamps are switched off” the Mail moaned. Well, not quite. The experts said that road safety implications should be considered before switching lights off (<http://is.gd/gXOqN>). Emma Marrington at CPRE more sensibly said: “The decision by many councils to explore a reduction in the levels of street lighting will be welcomed by many. This move may have been driven by financial cut backs, but it is certainly the right choice if we are to reduce light pollution and energy consumption” (CPRE: <http://is.gd/hU7q7>). Rural campaigners have praised councils such as Wokingham for switching off street lights (get Wokingham: <http://is.gd/hMBAO>) and Craven CPRE said turning off lights would save money and be ecologically sound (<http://is.gd/hU6vZ>).

7. Transport

Aviation. Transport for London deputy chairman Daniel Moylan called on the government to include a new international hub airport that will serve London and the south-east in the new national aviation policy (Planning: <http://is.gd/hM7FF>). Campaign group Fight the Flights has begun a legal challenge against the expansion of flights at London City Airport (Planning: <http://is.gd/hU2Fd>; FTF: <http://www.fighttheflights.com/>).

Roundabout clutter. CPRE South Yorkshire is objecting to Doncaster Council’s proposals to set up 130 free-standing signs that would carry messages from the council, and include a panel for a sponsor’s name (Star: <http://is.gd/hCZl0>).

Rail. DfT announced it will fund in full the second phase of the £5.5bn Thameslink project and will order 1,200 new carriages for the north-south cross-London route (FT: <http://is.gd/hWz6e>).

8. High Speed Two

The debate. The High Speed 2 Action Alliance put the case against saying: “HS2 is wrong because it is unaffordable, uneconomic and environmentally destructive... and will only exacerbate the North-South divide” (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/hU4VU>). Transport Secretary Philip Hammond said he is “not blind to the environmental impacts of high speed rail. And I am determined that we will do everything we practically can to mitigate the noise and visual effects on local communities.” He said the consultation in the New Year will cover both the government’s overall high speed rail strategy and the route of the London-Birmingham phase of HS2 (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/hRrzd>). CPRE said the Government should abandon plans to make HS2 the fastest railway in the world. Ralph Smyth said: “The Government’s own research shows that travelling at 220mph as opposed to 186mph would only save 3.5 minutes from London to Birmingham”. Such excessive speeds require much straighter routes which make it harder for new tracks to follow valleys, rail lines or motorways. This means that only routes that largely cut through open countryside are being considered (CPRE: <http://is.gd/hU7Mu>; Daily Mail: <http://is.gd/hV6Jk>). “Boondoggle means work or activity which is wasteful or pointless but gives the appearance of having value,” says Russ Peterson, who is fighting high speed train proposals in California (BFP: <http://is.gd/hU537>).

The South East. Conservative MP for Wycombe Steven Baker told the House of Commons: “HS2 should certainly not be driven through Buckinghamshire, where it would have an egregious effect on some of our finest countryside, but it is not clear at all that HS2 should be driven through any part of our country. HS2 appears economically irrational... Less money could be better spent” (BFP: <http://is.gd/hMgbc>; Planning: <http://is.gd/hMakM>). “Middle England is on the march and we mean business,” Steve Rodrick chief officer of the Chilterns Conservation Board said. Great Missenden resident Mrs Free, 77, said: “I will lie down in front of the bulldozers. They cannot wreck such a beautiful part of England” (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/hUgB6>). The National Trust has hit out against the route because it would cut across its Hartwell House estate (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/hV163>). About 2,000 people gathered at a rally in Great Missenden to listen to MPs Cheryl Gillan and David Lidington and others (BFP: <http://is.gd/hUY6r>).

Beyond the South East. Gerald Kells, West Midlands policy campaigner at CPRE, said: “Ministers’ attempts to boast about having the fastest rail line in the world come at huge cost to the tranquillity and beauty of the countryside in the West Midlands” (Express: <http://is.gd/hV3TC>). Staffordshire County Council is opposing HS2 (LB: <http://is.gd/hU4Ne>). The HS2 Tamworth Action Group has been formed (This is Tamworth: <http://is.gd/hU5bg>).

Legal matters. The Stop HS2 campaign has approached Public Interest Lawyers and has launched a funding appeal for a judicial review because it believes the evidence is “stacking up” against HS2 London and Birmingham (Planning: <http://is.gd/hV9Qt>). Conserve the Chilterns and Countryside has called on the government to pursue a lawful consultation on HS2 rail link, citing the Aarhus Convention on public consultation, strategic environment assessment and the government’s statutory duty to protect AONBs (Planning: <http://is.gd/hUFec>).

9. Climate Change and Energy

Global warming. Global temperatures are higher than ever but the gradual rise in temperatures over the last 30 years is slowing slightly due to pollution (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/hWvna>). Emissions of man-made carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are set to be the highest in history after a smaller than expected dip due to the worldwide recession (Independent: <http://is.gd/hWvv4>). International climate negotiations resume today in Cancun, Mexico to “repair the mess left by Copenhagen” (Independent: <http://is.gd/hWw2a>; Guardian: <http://is.gd/hWw6E>; <http://www.oneclimate.net/>). The Geological Society warned that it could take the Earth one hundred thousand years to recover from global warming (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/hWBla>).

Renewable targets. The UK is on course to meet its 2020 renewables target, according to the National Grid. Avoiding planning delays is crucial as only 20% of the proposed new projects that have connection agreements actually have planning permission (EEN: <http://is.gd/hSs3s>).

Community energy. The TCPA and Combined Heat and Power Association has put together a guide on planning for community energy projects and decentralised energy sources (<http://is.gd/hM9cx>). Launching a new community energy website, Climate Change Minister Greg Barker said: “Community energy is a perfect expression of the transformative power of the Big Society” (<http://is.gd/hRsPL>; <http://ceo.decc.gov.uk/>).

Wind. There are more than 230 local campaign groups against wind farms in the UK. In the 12 months to September there was a 50% drop in planning approvals in England (Independent: <http://is.gd/hVaj9>). “Selfish” opposition to onshore wind farms could cost England £1.3 billion in investments and jobs over the next 20 years, says RenewableUK (NEF: <http://is.gd/hV06W>; RUK: <http://is.gd/hV516>). Local councils will be able to keep business rates from wind farms under plans to stop local communities “sabotaging” renewable energy projects (Independent: <http://is.gd/hVa6A>). DECC claims to have reached a “tipping point” in helping to solve the problem of radar interference from wind farms. Around 40% of wind farm applications face objections due to radar issues and cannot proceed (NEF: <http://is.gd/hV0vY>). MP Chris Heaton-Harris gained parliamentary permission for a 10-minute rule bill to give local authorities powers to set minimum distances between homes and wind turbines (Planning Portal: <http://is.gd/hRwnL>). John Gummer said: “nimbies haven’t found the no-regrets answer - they have, as usual, simply shifted the problem” (Planning: <http://is.gd/hYABu>).

Biofuels. Plans to make European motorists use more biofuels could take an area the size of Ireland out of food production by 2020 and accelerate climate change, a report by the independent Institute for European Environmental Policy said (Guardian: <http://is.gd/hWzjJ>; Independent: <http://is.gd/hWzoz>). UK 'green' fuels will destroy 1.6m ha of natural habitat by 2020, a report for FoE, Greenpeace, RSPB and Action Aid said (<http://is.gd/hWzQN>). A Waitrose store on the Isle of Wight will be fully powered by biomass fuels (<http://is.gd/hV4Pr>).

Solar. CPRE Oxfordshire is to oppose solar panels at a windfarm in the Vale of the White Horse on the grounds they will be visible from the Ridgeway (Herald: <http://is.gd/hUhGO>). Farmers are being offered up to £50,000 a year to fill fields with solar panels. Dustin Benton, senior policy officer at the Campaign to Protect Rural England, said: "There is a real push now by developers to make the most of the short time-window. Solar panels are a useful form of renewable energy but there are many places where they should not go" (Daily Mail: <http://is.gd/hV0QF>). "Farmers are being offered subsidies as high as £1,500 an acre to cover their green fields, guaranteed, tax-free for the next 25 years" (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/hWzBO>). Ecotricity has won planning permission to build a 1Mw solar park adjacent in Lincolnshire (GW: <http://is.gd/hYF1r>).

Fossil fuels. A global gas glut which could last a decade will act as a "major barrier" to the development of renewable energy, cleaner coal plants and nuclear power, according to the International Energy Agency (Guardian: <http://is.gd/hWzvH>). Drilling is to commence near Rowlands Castle in the South Downs National Park (News: <http://is.gd/hCZUH>; Argus: <http://is.gd/hD023>).

Carbon capture. With only one coal plant showing interest, the government has opened up its carbon capture & storage competition to gas (<http://is.gd/gQ4RI>). DECC also announced that it had given the green light for a 900MW Combined Cycle Gas Turbine power station to be built in Spalding, Lincolnshire because space remains next to the site to retrofit a carbon capture plant in the future (EST: <http://is.gd/hcDmM>).

10. Rural Affairs and Economy and the Big Society

Local Enterprise Partnerships. The Commission for Rural Communities said "it will be imperative that LEPs embed their rural areas into their evidence gathering and analysis; into their dialogue and partnership with local business and other communities; into the development of strategies and plans; and that the rural voice is given fair and full measure in their decision processes" (<http://is.gd/hU67x>).

Rural costs. The Commission for Rural Communities and the Rowntree Foundation said that people living in rural areas typically need to spend 10-20% more than people in urban areas to reach a minimum acceptable living standard. These higher costs mean a single person living in a village needs to earn at least 50% above the minimum wage (currently £5.93 per hour) to make ends meet. With low pay more common in rural areas, many rural workers fall well short of being able to afford their essential needs (<http://is.gd/hMk37>; <http://is.gd/hMm1H>).

Public back the state. A report by the Institute of Public Policy Research found that the public were enthusiastic to get involved in the coalition Government's Big Society agenda by taking more responsibility for public service delivery. But 90% of people believe that the state should remain primarily responsible for delivering most key public services (<http://is.gd/hMdb4>).

Broadband may soon be delivered to remote rural areas by satellite after the launch of Hylas-1, partly sponsored by the UK government (BBC: <http://is.gd/hRjYT>). The Commission for Rural Communities published a report saying many rural areas do not enjoy the same levels of mobile or broadband coverage and speeds as their urban counterparts and there are concerns this is putting the rural economy at a competitive disadvantage (<http://is.gd/hUQfw>).

Pubs. Conservative MP Bob Neill has been appointed as Community Pubs Minister (Morning Advertiser: <http://is.gd/hRk6D>).

11. Farming, Food, and Retail

Industrial farming. Nocton Dairies in Lincolnshire have submitted an amended planning application for the UK's largest dairy farm. The new plan is for 3,770 cows, the original plan for 8,100 cows was withdrawn in April after protests. CPRE said: "It could have serious consequences for the future of traditional dairy farmers and the countryside." (Planning: <http://is.gd/hSpvK>). It will still be the biggest dairy farm in Western Europe and the developers are expected to extend the unit to 8,000 cows within two years. Compassion in World Farming and WSPA (World Society for the Protection of Animals) said they would fight a, "united, high profile, science-based and consumer-led campaign," against the plans (Telegraph: <http://is.gd/hWvco>). The Women's Institutes are preparing for a relaunch of their campaign for British dairying, with an emphasis on the importance of British sourcing for butter, cheese, cafe coffees, chocolate and other products derived from milk (YP: <http://is.gd/hM5j6>). NFU president Peter Kendall launched a stinging attack on retailers, accusing them of creating a climate of fear in the dairy sector through ruthless and erratic negotiation (FWI: <http://is.gd/hUto1>). The Sustainable Livestock Bill fell short of the 100 votes it needed to keep on track (FoE: <http://is.gd/hUgMV>). Agriculture Minister Jim Paice made a commitment that the Government would continue to work with the livestock industry towards sustainability (Defra: <http://is.gd/hUhlI>).

Polytunnels. Campaigners in Kent have vowed to fight a planning application for the largest area of polytunnels in the country. Hugh Lowe Farms wants permission to have 165 hectares, which is the equivalent of 200 football pitches, of clear plastic-covered tunnels in any one year, across a total area of 557 hectares. Natural England has objected to the planning application as it does not include assessments of the visual impact of the polytunnels from viewpoints within the Kent Downs AONB, which lies within a mile of the proposed farm site (Kent News: <http://is.gd/hU1v3>).

Common Agricultural Policy. As the EU set out plans for CAP reform, CPRE's Ian Woodhurst said: "The European Commission has taken a significant step towards creating a greener Common Agricultural Policy, but we will need to be bolder if tax payers are to get real value for money and the improved environmental and economic outcomes we want to see" (<http://is.gd/hU76T>). The CLA said the reforms were broadly on the right track (<http://is.gd/hWyJJ>).

12. Water, Minerals, Recycling and Waste

Defra has begun a consultation on the waste water National Policy Statement (Closing date: <http://is.gd/hU2pp>).