

CPRE South East eBulletin

News for August 2011

A Not So Silly Season

As members of parliament slip off in July to give us all a well earned summer break, the press usually descends into a frenzy of silly season stories. Not so this year, which will be remembered as the year in which urban riots dragged ministers and MPs back from their dachas to debate the state of the country. There has inevitably been much knee jerk policy creation as ministers and local politicians rush to look decisive. Much of their ire has fallen on the social housing and benefits system. The reaction of housing professionals to this shooting from the hip has been admirable. Rather than just condemning ministers' ideas as unworkable, they have set up an inquiry to seek the views of communities and housing professionals on what steps can be taken to help prevent a repeat of the disturbances (The Riot Report: <http://bit.ly/riotrep>). The planning community on the other hand has been almost silent. It is an unfortunate time to be so. Although the most recent draft of the National Planning Policy Framework acknowledges the role of planning in promoting communities, it omits any reference to place shaping. The spatial aspects of planning, so important since well before the garden cities of Ebenezer Howard, have all but been cast onto the wayside. If society is broken, planning can't itself heal it. But it can help by creating spaces that have the best hope of working for communities.

One knee jerk reaction from ministers is destined to erode our sense of place. After shops were looted and some burnt to cinders, David Cameron promised to sweep away the need for planning permission for steel shutters on high street shops. There will be a understandable demand for steel shutters in riot affected areas. The danger is that shops in quaint country towns will also put up the barricades. And once planning permission is no longer needed, shopkeepers' insurers are likely to insist on shuttering. But who wants to stroll through a historic town when the only thing shops have to offer visitors after 5.30pm and on a Sunday are steel shutters?

None of this is 'silly season news'. Fortunately you can read below of study that predicts the human race may be wiped out by extra-terrestrials if we do not heed warnings about global warming. If this story does not have you roaring with side-splitting laughter, then have you heard the one about coalition ministers attacking CPRE and the National Trust for being run by 'left wingers'. Now that is hilarious!

When politicians throw cheap political jibes at their green opponents, you know they are rattled. The truth is that the government's planning reforms are intellectually bankrupt. They are root and branch bad planning, and are a disaster in the making for the countryside (for which, see my update of Eric Ravillious on page 7). We are heading towards 'an urban dystopia'—as Tom Holme chairman of CPRE Essex so eloquently put it in a letter to the Independent. Tom also quoted Larkin: 'that will be England gone, the shadows, the meadows, the lanes'. Indeed, if the National Planning Policy Framework comes to pass in its present form, it will be England gone.

About CPRE SE eBulletin

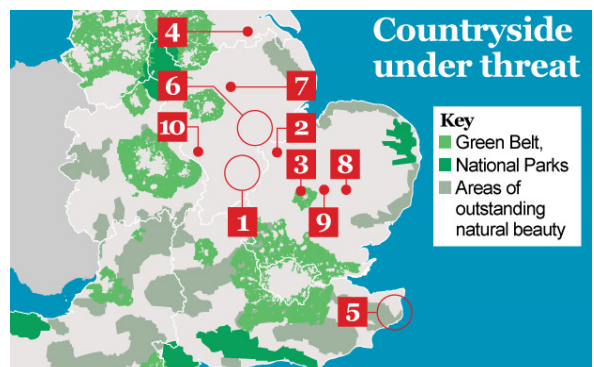
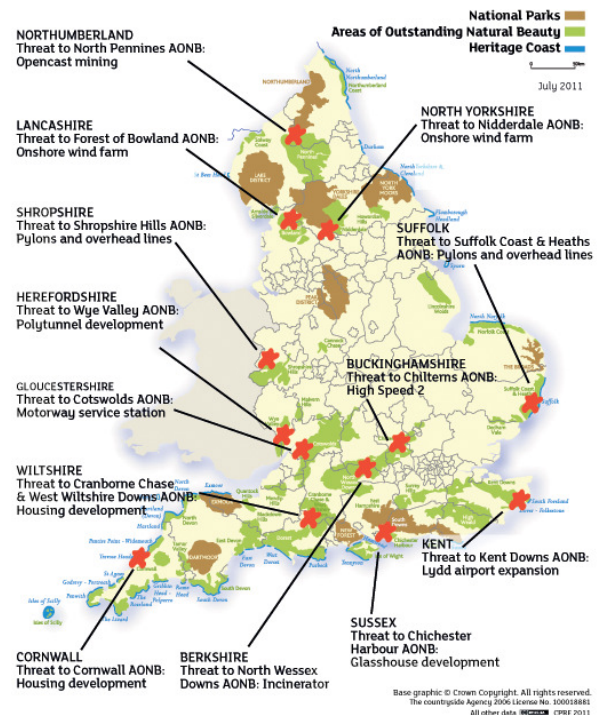
The CPRE South East eBulletin is issued monthly, with occasional special editions when required. We cover all the planning and environmental news with a relevance to the remit of CPRE. Views expressed are those of the editor, not of any part of CPRE. Our audience is CPRE and its friends. Please feel free to circulate this eBulletin. If you are not on our circulation list and want to receive the eBulletin regularly, just let me know at cprenews@gmail.com. **Andy Boddington, Editor.**

Contents

The National Planning Policy Framework Foul-Up	1
Planning	3
Housing	4
Biodiversity 2020	4
Landscapes	4
Climate Change	5
Renewables	5
Other Energy News	5
Waste and Recycling	6
Transport	6
Farming and Food	6
Campaigning	6

The National Planning Policy Framework Foul-Up

CPRE led the assault on the new planning regime, publishing details of plans for large scale greenfield development and criticising weakened protection for the green belt under the draft National Planning Policy Framework. The National Trust also criticised the NPPF for eroding safeguards for the countryside. The attacks hit home, and ministers queued up to snarl at the Trust and CPRE like wounded animals. Local government minister Bob Neill barked: 'This is a carefully choreographed smear campaign by left wingers based within the national headquarters of pressure groups'. In reacting so fiercely, some would say farcically, ministers drew the attention of the broader press to the NPPF which had previously been overlooked as an arcane planning matter.



National CPRE published a map of the ten largest areas for future greenfield housing development, stretching from Scunthorpe to Sandwich. Paul Miner for CPRE said: 'That will be the tip of the iceberg because other councils don't have local plans at all. Current planning laws favour the reuse of brownfield sites but the new rules effectively remove the protection for greenfield land—the countryside'. The Telegraph also reported that CPRE had condemned the draft National Planning Policy Framework and that the '60,000-member CPRE is preparing to take the attack directly to David Cameron, citing a speech he made to the group in 2008 in which he promised to cherish the beauty of our landscape [and] the particular cultures and traditions that rural life sustains' (Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/qPinqF>; <http://tgr.ph/oJJ9Wm>; <http://tgr.ph/pCLObn>; <http://tgr.ph/phiQrd>). Analysis by CPRE of Core Strategies drawn up by councils reveal that swathes of land will be redesignated to allow the development of more than 74,500 new houses. Protected Green Belt land will also reassigned to make way for new business parks, university buildings and transport infrastructure. Paul Miner said: 'There is a lot of Green Belt land already being threatened. 'The new draft planning framework opens up the amount of Green Belt that can be developed and we could see a lot more of the nation's countryside being lost as a result. Ministers insist the new regulations would offer greater protection to Green Belt land—although the official 'impact assessment' of the new proposals warns that they have the potential to make development on it easier (Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/pjTCXu>). Writing in the Yorkshire Post, Ben Stafford of CPRE said 'Ministers should have paused before praying in aid the works of Shakespeare in attacking the current length of planning guidance. After all, there's a lot of good stuff in Shakespeare's plays ... We need economic growth. But we also, for our health, wellbeing and for its own intrinsic value, need to protect the countryside that we are lucky enough still to be able to enjoy in its rich abundance and beauty. Good planning lets us do both' (<http://bit.ly/nQBNeW>).

Local CPRE. 'Down in the marshlands of Kent, battle lines are being drawn.' The Observer reviewed growing protests against development and the new planning regime, including expansion of Lydd airport and housing development in the Slad Valley, Gloucestershire. It suggested that the government will seek an NHS-style 'listening exercise' in the autumn to try to defuse the national planning row (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/pkiV12>; also Kent Online: <http://bit.ly/nKyeT1>). CPRE Surrey branch director Andy Smith said: 'Pressures for development in rural areas are growing all the time, and the threat will be enormous as the economy starts to pick up again. Rural Surrey is extremely vulnerable. With these changes, we risk losing a lot of countryside that's not in the green belt, and the green belt itself being nibbled away, bit by bit' (Get Surrey: <http://bit.ly/ng12e8>). Tom Holme, Chair of CPRE Essex wrote to the Independent criticising the Localism Bill: 'An urban dystopia beckons. The ghost estates of Ireland, vast numbers of unoccupied houses constructed during an unsustainable development boom, morph into our green fields. To quote the words of the prophetic miserabilist Larkin, that will be England gone, the shadows, the meadows, the lanes' (<http://ind.pn/pzAVn9>). 'Every developer is dusting off his old plans and getting ready to put them back into the planning system again. And with a weakened planning system some of them will succeed where they might have otherwise failed', Sean Traverse-Healy, vice-chairman of CPRE East told the BBC (<http://bbc.in/mTFRYV>). Dozens of letters challenging the NPPF from CPRE supporters have appeared in the local newspapers across the country (for example, Yorkshire Post: <http://bit.ly/oLSj3h>).

The **National Trust** condemned the government's new NPPF regime as sounding the death-knell to the seventy-year principle that the planning system should be used to protect what is most special in the landscape, creating a tool to promote economic growth in its stead. Fiona Reynolds said: 'The National Trust shares the Government's commitment to localism but it has got the changes to planning wrong. We urge a rethink of the NPPF before we throw the baby out with the bathwater.' It has launched a 'Planning is for people, not for profit' campaign against the NPPF (<http://bit.ly/ntppf>).

Bob Neill, the Local Government Minister accused CPRE and the National Trust of being 'vested interests' that were peddling 'deeply misleading and simply untrue' claims. He insisted that green belt land, as well as AONBs, SSSIs and National Parks would continue to be fully protected. 'This is more about a small number of interest groups trying to justify their own existence, going out of their way by picking a fight with government' (Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/ocXJxn>; Yorkshire Post: <http://bit.ly/rq97pt>). CPRE retorted 'Bob Neill must have been having a bad day. He'd do better to listen to CPRE's serious concerns about what the government is proposing rather than indulging in bizarre reds under the bed conspiracies' (<http://bit.ly/qhrdC6>).

Greg Clark. On 22 August Clark launched a counter-attack in the Financial Times: 'The principal campaigning point seems to be the loss of the greenbelt. There is nothing in the policy that would lead to a significant loss of greenbelt. A failure to build more homes would represent a huge social injustice'. Clark said the National Trust's claims that areas of green belt would be threatened by the changes were 'risible'. He also condemned CPRE: 'Frankly you couldn't change any element of national planning policy without the CPRE objecting to it; they have objected to every change in planning policy for as long as I can remember'. CPRE responded that the 'crude' message from the government was 'build, build, build' and warned that the prime minister faced a 'huge political battle' unless he ordered a rethink of the proposals (FT: <http://on.ft.com/nN3Amg>; <http://on.ft.com/qdu3IN>; <http://on.ft.com/q9Amde>; Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/o6CLPH>).

Communities Minister Andrew Stunell wrote to the Telegraph: 'The suggestion by certain groups that the Government's planning reforms put the Green Belt in peril is wrong. We must have sustainable growth to provide the jobs and homes we need, but this will not be at the expense of the environment: (<http://tgr.ph/mOWH61>). **Jake Berry**, Tory ministerial aide to Housing Minister Grant Shapps said: 'The CPRE can't have their cake and eat it. It's gross hypocrisy for them to take thousands of pounds of taxpayers cash to assist with the government's planning reforms yet at the same time be shamelessly opportunistic and attack them. Their credibility is completely undermined and perhaps they should think about paying their government funding back' (Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/pjTCXu>). CPRE has responded robustly to Berry's insinuation the government had bought off CPRE with the neighbourhood planning grant.

Treasury. Reportedly referring to CPRE and the National Trust, Chancellor **George Osborne** was bullish: 'We must rise to... confront the vested interests. They are the forces of stagnation that stand in the way of growth' (Daily Mail: <http://bit.ly/oh40Xc>). The economic secretary to the Treasury, **Justine Greening**, said: 'Reform of the planning system is vital.... These changes will keep important environmental safeguards firmly in place while helping businesses to create jobs and invest in local communities for the long term' (Express: <http://bit.ly/nldSiL>).

National Trust response. Responding to Greg Clark's attack the National Trust said: 'Greg Clark and his colleagues at DCLG seem to think that greenbelts and other designated areas of countryside are all that anyone cares about. They are not, as the government should have realised from the forestry debacle earlier this year. The government has... put short term financial gain ahead of everything else' (<http://bit.ly/qBMU5t>). Peter Nixon, director of conservation added that Mr Neill's comments were 'wide of the mark' (<http://bit.ly/nwdtRD>). 'There is an unwritten rule in politics: don't take aim at the National Trust', Dylan Sharpe said in the Huffington Post (<http://huff.to/n2Nhl0>).

CPRE response. In a letter to the Financial Times, CPRE's chief executive Shaun Spears today writes: 'The prime minister has often spoken of his love of the English countryside. Unless he is prepared to see huge damage to the countryside—and a huge political battle – he should order a rethink of the government's planning proposals, starting with the default "yes" to development' (<http://on.ft.com/mULu7g>; also <http://on.ft.com/qbwv2n>). In the Guardian he said: 'I'm under lots of pressure from our branches, who are impeccably Middle England, to take the gloves off and to be much more oppositional and confrontational on this. Our branches are up in arms—and they are not in any way leftwing' (<http://bit.ly/q3b3li>). Shaun, a former Labour MEP, told the Daily Mail: 'It is a long time since I have been described as a Left-winger. I am sure the Labour party will find it deeply amusing... our members have made quite clear that they do not want us to pull our punches on this issue. These are people who could not conceivably be described as Left-wingers. They are deeply committed to protecting the countryside and their concerns are genuine' (<http://bit.ly/nwdtRD>). In an article in the Guardian yesterday, Shaun wrote: 'there is no convincing evidence that liberalising planning will stimulate growth. It is far from obvious that moving towards a Greek-style planning system is the key to a stronger economy, or that Britain needs an Irish-style development boom based on a weak planning system... What is surprising is that David Cameron has let Osborne get away with it. The prime minister genuinely loves the countryside... I know he is busy, but he should pay attention now to the growing row about planning reform, or he will have to do so later... what is being proposed will be bad for the countryside, bad for towns and cities, and will not win public consent. The government should think again' (<http://bit.ly/p4jQOL>).

Other reaction. The Home Builders Federation grumbled that the debate risked being 'hijacked by scaremongering from narrow minded anti-growth groups' (HBF: <http://bit.ly/olpQEL>). Terrance Blacker attacked the NPPF in Independent: 'What has a Cameron government, with the countryside in its bones, actually done? It has gleefully torn up the regulations in place down the years to protect and cherish the landscape'. Greg Clark retorted: 'the status of the countryside is unchanged in the draft NPPF' (<http://ind.pn/qJAXB0>; <http://ind.pn/pzAVn9>).

Last word to the Telegraph. This week the Telegraph leader said: '[This] Tory-led administration has set out to convince rural England that its green fields and bucolic vistas should not be sacrosanct. But it is not making a very good fist of it. Ministers have unwisely picked a fight with such august bodies as the National Trust and Campaign to Protect Rural England... There is deep concern that this provision will skew the system too much in favour of the developer, not to mention an obvious conflict with the Coalition's localist agenda... If ministers believe there is a strong case in favour of building more houses in the countryside, they should make it in a more measured way' (<http://tgr.ph/mSZqGj>).

Planning

Schools planning policy statement. It was always clear that the brief National Planning Policy Framework was never going to be enough to satisfy ministers' urges to direct local planning. Even before the NPPF has been finalised, ministers have issued their first 'Policy Statement', or 'Planning Statement'—they use both terms but carefully avoid calling it a 'Planning Policy Statement'. Just two pages long, it directs planning authorities to adopt 'a presumption in favour of the development of state-funded schools including free schools [and to] make full use of their planning powers to support free school applications.' They must also 'ensure that a streamlined system for submitting and determining school applications is in place'. It tells the Secretary of State that 'appeals against refusals of planning permission for state-funded schools should be treated as a priority' (CLG: <http://bit.ly/ps8ILm>; <http://bit.ly/pcDSOK>).

Myth busters. The Royal Town Planning Institute is to launch a myth-busting campaign in a bid to create a better informed debate about the role of planning and the planning profession (Planning Portal: <http://bit.ly/n8O9qR>).

Core Strategies. 'Plucky battler' Sean Feeney is challenging Oxford City's Core Strategy in the High Court on the grounds that European environmental laws were not followed (Oxford Mail: <http://bit.ly/oBA3Te>). Rochford District Council in Essex has failed to get examination of its Core Strategy delayed in the light of uncertainties from the passage of the Localism Bill and the Cala Homes court case (RDC: <http://bit.ly/nwMI66>).

Security shutters. Chief Planning Officer Steve Quartermain has written to planners asking them to prioritise planning applications for businesses affected by the riots. He also announced that the government proposes to consult on whether security shutters and other security measures should become permitted development. Quartermain notes: 'It is important to ensure that a balance is struck between security and protecting the look and character of our high streets. In addition, the overall street scene should be a welcoming environment at night.' However, he suggests that local authorities make Local Development Orders to grant automatic planning permission for the installation of security shutters (<http://bit.ly/otDDxE>).

Change of use. The London Councils said government proposals to allow change of use from offices to housing without planning permission will lead to 'new homes... of low quality, without conforming to lifetime homes, living space or environmental standards'. It argues the failure to address under-supply of housing in the city is not due to the lack of sites or delays in the planning process, as there are 170,000 un-built homes with planning permission in London (<http://bit.ly/nh277j>). Emails between civil servants reveal that they do not accept ministers' claims the relaxation in rules will deliver 250,000 new homes (Inside Housing: <http://bit.ly/qjY4Hr>).

Outdoor advertising. Chief planner Steve Quartermain has written to planning officers claiming that the public and small businesses are unaware that outdoor advertisements are controlled by planning authorities. He asks them to provide a link to the booklet 'Outdoor advertisements and signs' when dealing with breaches of advertising control (<http://bit.ly/rqNw2j>).

Enterprise Zones. The government announced eleven new enterprise zones including Discovery Park in Sandwich, Kent and Science Vale UK in Oxfordshire (Planning Portal: <http://bit.ly/oSqU10>; CLG: <http://bit.ly/n6fxWg>; BIS: <http://bit.ly/qake0h>; Oxford Mail: <http://bit.ly/rtXCn6>). A report by CPRE North West warned the £400m Airport City enterprise zone could undermine development elsewhere in Greater Manchester and cause a 'prosperity black hole' (MEN: <http://bit.ly/nqfyNk>; <http://bit.ly/qWWjbl>; Regen: <http://bit.ly/qO6mhC>).

Housing

Housing starts have fallen 9% in the quarter to June 2011 and 2% on a yearly basis (CLG: <http://bit.ly/r5NLm8>). Only 110,000 new homes will be built each year in the next four years, according to economics consultancy Cebr (Inside Housing: <http://bit.ly/oCCUIN>).

Eco Towns. Cherwell District Council granted detailed planning permission for 393 new homes (30% affordable) and a renewable energy centre as part of the first 'Exemplar' phase of the NW Bicester Eco development (HCA: <http://bit.ly/riBLYr>).

Affordable rural housing. Research by the Countryside Alliance found that only a quarter of the affordable homes needed to house people in rural areas have been built over the past year. The CA said the lack of affordable rural homes across England, Wales and Scotland could lead to communities breaking up and rural services closing (FWI: <http://bit.ly/pr6uxo>; CA: <http://bit.ly/nFuSq7>).

Biodiversity 2020

Wildlife strategy. Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman launched 'Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services' (<http://bit.ly/n28DjJ>). She said: 'This strategy sets out how we will stop the loss of species and habitats, so that this generation can be the first to leave our natural environment in a better state than they found it.' The Biodiversity Strategy's goals include:

- ◆ **Creating better habitats:** 90% of priority habitats will be in a favourable or recovering condition with a minimum of 50% of SSSIs in favourable condition by 2020.
- ◆ **Bigger and better wildlife sites:** an extra 200,000 hectares of priority habitats will be created and there will be no overall loss of habitats that are a priority to save.
- ◆ **Adapting to climate change:** A minimum of 15% of very poor wildlife sites will be restored to help adapt for and mitigate against climate change; for example, canals full of rubbish or abandoned parks.
- ◆ **A joined up approach:** at least 17% of land and inland water will be improved through more effective and integrated management including the creation of Nature Improvement Areas. NIAs were announced in the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper (see: <http://bit.ly/pbMDGZ>)

Indicators. Defra has also issued a technical discussion paper on a new set of indicators to measure progress on Biodiversity 2020 (<http://bit.ly/ns5Hpg>).

Reaction. Neil Sinden for CPRE said: 'Delivery [of the plans] will be frustrated, if not impossible, without a fundamental rethink of the government's proposals for planning reform. Recently published draft national planning policies threaten large areas of countryside, which will make the desired landscape-scale approach to wildlife conservation very difficult to achieve.' Peter Nixon of the National Trust said: 'Under the draft NPPF, local authorities are faced with having to find an additional 20% of land to make available for development. Now, Defra is demanding 17% of land to be improved through more effective and integrated management through the creation of Nature Improvement Areas. Where is all this land to be found?' Andy Atkins for Friends of the Earth called the plans 'vague'. Mike Clarke of the RSPB, warned the strategy has no specific plans for endangered species: 'Species are the fundamental building blocks of biological diversity and must be a central part of this plan. Without this focus it will not be a plan for nature' (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/n3FOJj>; Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/nCKjOk>; CPRE: <http://bit.ly/pYUE5Z>).

The value of biodiversity. Two reports published by Defra estimate the wildlife covered by the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and SSSIs is worth approximately £1.5 billion per year to the UK. Martin Harper, RSPB conservation director, said: 'These reports highlight how, if properly managed, the most important places for wildlife in the UK deliver a range of additional benefits... Every £1 spent on maintaining Sites of Special Scientific Interest delivers benefits to society worth more than £8' (Defra: <http://bit.ly/nrtZzh>).

Landscapes

South Downs National Park. The new authority has called in plans for homes in Midhurst after concerns over poor design and lack of car parking (M&P Observer: <http://bit.ly/qEiSJJ>). The authority has also asked the people of Petersfield to shape 'The Petersfield Plan', a strategy that will determine how the town develops under national park laws. Park authority chairman Margaret Paren said: 'I don't know of a single national park in the world, outside the South Downs, that has got market towns in it... all the other national parks when their boundaries were drawn deliberately left out towns' (Post: <http://bit.ly/mSQIVV>).

Outdoor Nation. The National Trust has published three videos summing up the outcomes of its campaign to get more people out into the countryside (<http://bit.ly/pszsBC>).

Biodiversity. The Guardian reports that habitat protection, hunting controls and captive breeding have led to significant successes for Britain's threatened species (<http://bit.ly/r4lhQd>). The charity Butterfly Conservation said continuing survival of Britain's most-threatened butterflies has been put at risk by Natural England axing funding for recovery schemes for 24 butterfly species (Independent: <http://ind.pn/nKOKl0>).

Hedgerows. CPRE has published a pocket guide to to hedgerows and species identification: 'A little rough guide around the hedges' (<http://bit.ly/cprehedger>).

Badgers. Shadow environment minister Mary Creagh has written to more than 25,000 supporters of previous countryside and animal welfare campaigns to ask them to lobby their MPs on the cull (<http://bit.ly/pE21Ek>). 'It will be a very brave and very determined group of farmers which signs a 'TB Management Agreement' with Natural England. The bureaucracy associated with such agreements will be formidable... I find it hard to envisage a badger-culling licence ever being issued' (Anthony Gibson in TI Gloucestershire: <http://bit.ly/r2qo4P>). More than 24,000 people have signed the 38 Degrees petition against the cull (<http://bit.ly/naTxpz>).

New enforcement regime. Natural England has launched a short public consultation on a new enforcement regime to protect wildlife and the natural environment, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The new regime of civil sanctions will complement the current criminal sanctions and will also cover breaches of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) Regulations. Natural England considers that its current powers for enforcing wildlife and natural environment regulations are too disproportionate and not sufficiently flexible. The new powers will include penalties of up to £250,000 per offence to negate the motivation of financial gain, restoration and stop notices (Closing date: 30 September 2011; <http://bit.ly/pVnrDj>).

Quarrying. Villagers in the Oxford green belt are opposing reopening of a stone quarry which is now a SSSI (BBC: <http://bbc.in/p16zsu>). Eric Pickles has called in for public inquiry an planning application to expand Aylesford Quarry in Kent into an area of ancient woodland (Planning: <http://bit.ly/oBYC3I>; BBC: <http://bbc.in/nuDyD5>).

Light Pollution. To predictable complaints from the motoring lobby, the Highways Agency announced lighting on sections of the M1 in Bedfordshire will be permanently switched off and removed to reduce carbon emissions and light pollution (Dunstable Today: <http://bit.ly/r24yMC>).

Waterways. Defra is consulting on abolition of the Inland Waterways Advisory Council ahead of plans to transfer the management of inland waterways from British Waterways and the Environment Agency to a new charity in April 2012 (closing date: 14 November; <http://bit.ly/pCJIQb>).

Heritage. Simon Thurley, chief executive of English Heritage responded to remarks by CLA president William Worsley that England has 'a crumbling heritage system'. Referring to the NPPF Thurley asked 'what does sustainable mean?' He said 'that's the debate that English Heritage (EH), the CLA, the Historic Houses Association, the CPRE, the National Trust and other interested heritage and countryside bodies will now have with the Government'. he admits that conservation staff in local authorities have been reduced by 11.9% (Country Life: <http://bit.ly/pjuerX>).

Climate Change

Little green men think green. Scientists from Pennsylvania State University warned extraterrestrial beings might view changes in Earth's atmosphere as symptomatic of a civilisation growing out of control. They suggest ET might destroy humanity to protect other civilisations. They also caution that humanity could be wiped out when a more advanced civilisation accidentally unleashes an unfriendly artificial intelligence, or performs a catastrophic physics experiment that renders a portion of the galaxy uninhabitable (Business Green: <http://bit.ly/etisgreen>). Unfortunately, there is no escape from these threats as the last bus from rural England to Alpha Centauri left a month ago (as did the last bus to anywhere else).

Energy efficiency. An Ipsos MORI survey found that when asked to choose from a list of things that people can do to help improve the environment, over half (52%) chose 'recycle bottles, cans, paper and other materials'. Just 15% of respondents chose 'turn down the home heating' and only 22% chose 'make fewer car journeys' and 'use public transport'. Central heating/hot water is the second highest factor (24%) in a household's total impact on the environment, yet turning down the heating was ranked at only 11th place on the list of options (Edie: <http://bit.ly/oFLKfk>).

Renewables

Biomass. Energy minister Charles Hendry approved plans for two new large-scale Drax biomass power stations at Selby in Yorkshire and Immingham in North Lincolnshire. They could each produce 299MW of electricity, enough for more than 500,000 homes. But Drax said the plants may not go ahead due to uncertainty over renewables subsidies (FWI: <http://bit.ly/pl7Ihu>; Guardian: <http://bit.ly/nOP2RM>; Business Green: <http://bit.ly/oGIhju>; <http://bit.ly/r5OiFx>). Drax generated about 6% of the UK's total renewable power in the first half of this year, through burning straw and other biomass. The company believes it could burn 50% biomass if subsidies are increased (Business Green: <http://bit.ly/pvj5ql>). US farmers are growing the first corn plants genetically modified for the specific purpose of putting more ethanol in gas tanks rather than producing more food, with aid agencies warning the new GM corn could worsen a global food crisis (Business Green: <http://bit.ly/oms78>).

Wind. The MoD is blocking applications for new windfarms across a large area of north-west England and south-west Scotland, claiming that vibrations will interfere with the operation of its seismological recording station at Eskdalemuir, near Lockerbie (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/r7iaLY>). Timing is everything in campaigning. Donald Trump says he would never have gone ahead with his fiercely opposed plans for a golf centre near Aberdeen if he thought a nearby wind farm would be given permission (Edie: <http://bit.ly/piPPSm>). Vestas, the world's largest wind turbine manufacturer, has confirmed it could build a factory at Sheerness in Kent within a year if it secures sufficient orders for its new offshore wind turbine (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/oSZUsh>). Meanwhile, development of the 10MW Britannia prototype by Clipper Windpower in Newcastle has shuddered to a halt (Business Green: <http://bit.ly/qEnVcZ>). Wind farms are good for almost all sea life living around them but bird deaths 'would have to be accepted', according to new research backed by the wind industry (Edie: <http://bit.ly/ptPu23>; Business Green: <http://bit.ly/pkyylc>). Howard Rogers from the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, which in part is funded by the gas industry, said that Britain's power network is not built for wind power supplying more than a third of capacity on the system. Greater than 28 gigawatts of wind would mean that turbine owners would regularly have to be paid to keep capacity off the system. The government estimates that 58 gigawatts of wind is likely to be built in a 'medium activity' scenario by 2030, out of a total system of 80 gigawatts of capacity (Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/qRo3m8>).

Other renewables. Scotland's first grid-connected, commercial-scale tidal turbine came online in Orkney for a two year trial (Business Green: <http://bit.ly/nEIFDi>). More than half of the coverage of renewable energy solutions in the mainstream British press is negative according to analysis by the Public Interest Research Centre (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/qoAz61>). An advanced gasification facility in Stockton-on-Tees that would convert household and commercial waste to gas, may not go ahead due to uncertainty over renewables subsidies. The plant would produce enough energy for 50,000 homes and diverting 300,000 tonnes of waste a year from landfill (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/nOP2RM>). Between 40 and 50 farmers are seeking planning permission to set up anaerobic digestion plants (Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/naoWiV>).

Other Energy News

Pylons. CPRE Lancashire is raising concerns over power lines that are threatening the Forest of Bowland 'a truly splendid area of tranquillity, isolation and grandeur that is cherished by many' (LEP: <http://bit.ly/q0UIZv>).

Gas. Energy minister Charles Hendry approved a £600M gas power station in Essex (Edie: <http://bit.ly/r5LIVR>).

Coal. Campaigners were evicted from the site of a new open cast mine in Telford after 18 months (Shropshire Star: <http://bit.ly/nKFTDW>). The Canadian government is to phase out of coal-fired power plants that do not incorporate carbon capture and storage (Business Green: <http://bit.ly/rm3kre>).

Oil. Investigations are underway after 1,500 barrels of oil spilled out of Shell's Gannet Alpha platform, the largest leak in the North Sea for a decade (Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/q51YIa>; BBC: <http://bbc.in/q13D8x>; Business Green: <http://bit.ly/nZIFLj>).

Nuclear. Sellafield's loss making Mixed Oxide Fuel (MOX) plant is to be closed following the Fukushima disaster in Japan at the cost of around 1,000 jobs (Edie: <http://bit.ly/p87TFW>).

Waste and Recycling

Recycling. Surrey County Council has achieved a 50% recycling rate for household waste almost a decade ahead of the government's target. It is heading for 70% by 2014 (Edie: <http://bit.ly/oApz6k>).

Carrier bags. Tesco has abandoned biodegradable carrier bags over concerns that they break easily, and that they might do more environmental harm than good (Business Green: <http://bit.ly/nRC6IF>). Boris Johnson said he wanted to 'make London a plastic bag free city' (LES: <http://bit.ly/pzqDMB>).

Transport

High Speed 2. London Assembly Transport Committee is calling on the Government to rethink its proposals for HS2 to address concerns about the impact on London. It is calling for a Crossrail 2 and a smaller footprint for the expanded Euston to save green space and housing (Rail News: <http://bit.ly/mWhJBq>). A report from lobby group Greenguage 21 calls for a link from Birmingham to the East Midlands and questions the need for the Oak Common interchange in London (<http://bit.ly/olMMIV>).

Thames Estuary Airport. As an alternative to 'Boris Island', architect Lord Foster has instigated a project for a giant four-runway airport on the Isle of Grain in Kent. It would be the biggest hub in the world with a capacity for 150 million passengers, and would be powered by the North Sea. A spokesman for Foster and Partners—which designed Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok airport on an artificial island—said Lord Foster instigated the airport project himself. At an estimated to cost from £40 billion to £50 billion, the scheme could be completed by 2030 (LES: <http://bit.ly/nK1WbE>). I believe the website for Foster's proposal is <http://thamesestuaryairport.com/> but the site has been out of bandwidth and inaccessible for several days. Must be the fog on the Thames...

Sustainable travel. A report from Friends of the Earth and Sustrans said only a tiny fraction of the £6 billion allocated to councils for Local Transport Plans is being spent on sustainable travel (Sustrans: <http://bit.ly/n1Hy0u>). The London School of Economics reported that the recent boom in the number of people cycling is worth around £3bn to the national economy (Business Green: <http://bit.ly/phrSUG>).

Rail. Green groups attacked above inflation fare rises. The Campaign for Better Transport said: 'We need affordable rail travel – not only to give passengers a fair deal, but to protect the economic health of our major cities, and to address the urgent imperative to cut carbon emissions'. FoE added: 'It's a national scandal that train fares are to increase above inflation' (Business Green: <http://bit.ly/oAoJv3>). The proposed East-West Rail Link connecting Oxford and Aylesbury with Milton Keynes and Bedford could generate more than £38 million a year for the UK economy, a report by Oxford Economics said (EWR: <http://bit.ly/pCY8Pl>).

Buses. The House of Commons Transport Committee urged transport ministers not to 'wash their hands of all responsibility for local bus services'. Their report found that local councils have slashed bus funding this year, forcing many operators to withdraw services and raise fares. The Campaign for Better Transport said that reduced services could lead to increased carbon emissions as more people are forced to use cars (Business Green: <http://bit.ly/pyPXeo>; Report: <http://bit.ly/ojhlDY>).

Roads. CPRE Lancashire has joined forces with other groups to call on the Government to withdraw its support for the Heysham-M6 link road (Lancs Guardian: <http://bit.ly/pDBIAU>).

Farming and Food

Farming. Dairy farmers' confidence in the milk industry has slipped with 13% planning to quit; 48% of those decreasing or ceasing production saying the main reason was because dairy farming was not profitable (FWI: <http://bit.ly/neGzoY>).

Food. More than a third of shoppers think genetically-modified foods should be allowed to be sold in the UK (FWI: <http://bit.ly/pJ5GEK>).

High streets. Eleven percent of town centre shops were vacant in May, according to a survey by the British Retail Consortium (Planning: <http://bit.ly/qOHOHC>). David Cameron's appointment of a 'shops tsar', the controversial Localism Bill, and increasing opposition to supermarkets and other chain stores could mark a turning point in the struggle to save Britain's high streets (Ecologist: <http://bit.ly/nCrRpZ>).

Tesco has become 'an almighty conglomerate' abusing its unfettered market power to dominate towns at the expense of small retailers, the Labour party claimed. Shadow local government minister, Jack Dromey, said: 'Tesco want to rule retail, in particular the southern swath of England.' Dromey called on the Portas review to recommend a 'competition test' to prevent grocery retailers acquiring a dominant position in a locality (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/mWJM3U>). Tesco is planning legal action against a £10.4m fine imposed by the Office of Fair Trade for fixing cheese prices (FWI: <http://bit.ly/nTUI75>).

Campaigning

Tidy merger. Environmental charities Keep Britain Tidy and Waste Watch have merged following a year-long strategic alliance in an attempt to project a 'stronger unified message'. Both the Keep Britain Tidy and Waste Watch brands will be retained. A review will take place later this year with a new strategy and business plan being published in April 2012 (KBT: <http://bit.ly/qLyjzW>).

And Finally...

Woodcut and landscape artist Eric Ravilious (1903–1942) was inspired by the landscape of the South Downs. Some of his cherished landscapes are now threatened as the government bulldozes through its new planning regime. On the next page, you will find my reworking of Wiltshire Landscape painted by Ravilious in 1937.

