

CPRE SE eBulletin: 10 September 2008

1. Planning

Green Belt. The debate over safeguarding the Green Belt has become too emotional and the designation has "elevated imagination over reality in Britain's planning system", according to the latest attack on the green belt by the Policy Exchange. It calls for local authorities rather than ministers to decide if land in the Green Belt should be used for new housing (Planning Portal: <http://tinyurl.com/6lz2jv>). In another report the Policy Exchange calls for regeneration of the north of England to be abandoned in favour of the South East, which should see major expansion around London, Oxford and Cambridge. Nationally CPRE said that "It is difficult to find anything sensible in this report" (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/5exar9>). Hilary Newport for Kent CPRE said "This is nonsense on stilts, written by an economist without an ounce of commonsense" (Kent News: <http://tinyurl.com/5plcr7>). Oxfordshire County Council leader Keith Mitchell called the report's suggestion that Oxford would swell to 2.5 million people "madness" (Oxford Mail: <http://tinyurl.com/6r73qs>).

Oxford Green Belt. Oxford City Council has asked the Boundary Committee for England to redraw its boundary to take in the land south of Grenoble Road, where the South East Plan has recommended a 4,000 home urban extension to the city. The site is in the green belt and is opposed by CPRE Oxfordshire and South Oxfordshire District Council (Oxford Mail: <http://tinyurl.com/5whffd>). CPRE Oxfordshire has responded to a consultation on the extension saying "we don't believe that any incursion into the Green Belt is warranted, and that there is no credible evidence to justify it (CPRE Oxon: <http://tinyurl.com/5p7m6x>).

Dunsfold, Surrey. The application for an eco-village of 2,600 homes will be decided on 11 September. Surrey Highways has recommended refusal. Dunsfold Parish Council chairman said: "All the eco-benefits in the world don't get you to first base if you are in the wrong place" (Get Surrey: <http://tinyurl.com/6k8tp9>). The developer responded that the airfield could be used for flights again in the houses are not built (Planning: <http://tinyurl.com/5rock9>). CABE criticised the plans for not being futuristic enough architecturally in its eco-village masterplan (Get Surrey: <http://tinyurl.com/58htpd>).

Thanet. CPRE Kent's Thanet group launched a drive to stem the loss of high quality open agricultural land in Thanet's heartland, caused by proposals that include the China Gateway and Thanet Earth (CPRE Kent: <http://tinyurl.com/664pg8>).

Supermarkets. Tesco's plans for a supermarket in Sheringham, Norfolk have been rejected after a campaign supported by CPRE (BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/5ou7eh>).

2. Housing

Design. The government has endorsed the Building for Life standards, which provide 20 criteria for design excellence (BFL: <http://tinyurl.com/6292lp>).

Brownfield. The latest National Land Use Database statistics show that although the amount of brownfield land suitable for housing had decreased by 7% since 2002, the estimated housing capacity of brownfield land in England had increased by 19%, enough for one million homes. The South East has 8,990 ha of brownfield land of which 53% has planning permission for 151,390 dwellings at a density of 33 per ha. Vacant and derelict land in the South East decreased by 15% (CLG: <http://tinyurl.com/6cz6k3>).

Housing slowdown. House building starts are down 20% according to CLG (<http://tinyurl.com/5vjbr4>) and will fall to half the government's targets according to Savills (Planning: <http://tinyurl.com/5gxajf>). The government announced a housing stimulation package (COI: <http://tinyurl.com/6fjqo7>; 24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/656gs4>), raiding £300 million from Regional Development Agencies' regeneration budgets to pay for it (Planning: <http://tinyurl.com/5d77an>). £400 million of the aid package will be for affordable housing (Planning Portal: <http://tinyurl.com/63fw9x>).

3. Eco-towns

Delays. Approval for the eco-towns will not be given by CLG until early next year, amid doubts that the government's hope for ten towns can be met (BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/6d8a2q>;

"Eco-town – the facts"? Shelter, a strong proponent of eco-towns, admitted it had been given £100,000 by the Government to publish a series of 13 pamphlets, one for each proposed eco-town site. Statistics used were provided by the government. Kate Gordon for CPRE said the booklets were one-sided and did not address the most controversial issues about eco-towns: "What is particularly significant is what Shelter leaves out of their leaflets. The briefing massively plays down environmental implications, loss of productive farmland, flooding issues". Shelter has so far produced three leaflets, including Weston Otmoor (Telegraph: <http://tinyurl.com/5lpylo>; Shelter: <http://tinyurl.com/62awc3>).

The planners argue. "Some of the proposed eco-towns derive from a clear planning process, but others represent an undermining of planning policy at both regional and local level", 14 former presidents of the RTPI said in a letter to the Guardian "We find it regrettable that a government which professes to endorse sustainability is pursuing an approach which, except in two or three important instances, is likely to achieve exactly the opposite" (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/5pejzg>). The TCPA responded that the government should "be bolder in our planning and recognise that smaller communities, including those using 'greenfield' sites. Ecotowns should face rigorous planning assessment, but if the nimbys triumph, the causes of responding to climate change and providing good affordable family homes will both have been done a disservice" (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/6f46ek>).

Ecocide and birth. Tesco has withdrawn its plans for an eco-town at Hanley Grange in Cambridgeshire but is still interested in developing the site (BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/59qkcp>; Planning Portal: <http://tinyurl.com/5hj9no>). Of the original 16 shortlisted, four sites have now withdrawn and two look unlikely to go ahead. Three new bidders, Rackheath in Norfolk and two separate sites near Rushcliffe in Nottinghamshire look set to enter the fray. Unlike other bidders, these will not be subject to scrutiny by the Challenge Panel. Kate Gordon for CPRE said the challenge panel process had only ever been a "fig leaf" designed to make the plans more palatable. "Everything we've seen since the announcement of eco-towns last summer shows the government is just making up the rules as it goes along" (Building: <http://tinyurl.com/65cfgb>).

Weston Otmoor. The development would clog the A34 with cars and add half-an-hour to the journey from Bicester to Oxford, according to a local councillor (Oxford Mail: <http://tinyurl.com/5v64b8>).

Bordon Whitehill. Architect Wendy Shillam has been appointed by East Hampshire District Council to oversee the project (Petersfield Post: <http://tinyurl.com/65lrfc>). Housing Minister Caroline Flint visited Bordon Whitehill saying "I think there's a real opportunity here that should be seized with both hands" (Petersfield Post: <http://tinyurl.com/6nlby3>).

Ford. The architects for the scheme have been criticised by CABI for proposing schemes elsewhere that "lack identity" (BD: <http://tinyurl.com/66yblk>).

4. Environment

Tranquillity. The expansion of roads, motor traffic levels and speeds as the main reasons for a huge expansion of noise pollution and consequent loss of tranquillity in rural communities and the countryside, according to a report for the Noise Association by the Transport for Quality of Life Group (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/6fkchr>). Tom Oliver for CPRE said: "It is becoming ever clearer that the quality of our environment is vital to our health and well-being. Tranquillity is a key measure of that quality. But so far, with transport policy, the Government and its advisers, including the Planning Inspectorate, are woefully silent on the issue" (Telegraph: <http://tinyurl.com/5e5e9y>).

Environmental Impact Regulations. Developers who have conducted an EIA to gain outline planning permission may have to conduct a new EIA for details planning permission, following a change in regulations to be an EU directive (Planning: <http://tinyurl.com/5the3t>).

Conservation Covenants. The National Trust has urged the government to increase use of conservation covenants, through which people donate land for conservation. It is seeking to challenge the Planning Bill which will give powers to remove such covenants (Planning: <http://tinyurl.com/5jayr3>).

South Downs National Park. The South Downs Campaign is launching a 'Final Push' campaign on September 9 to get Lewes included in the planned South Downs National Park (Rye Observer: <http://tinyurl.com/66lnmj>).

Climate change. Northern Ireland Environment Minister Sammy Wilson described environmentalists' views on climate change as a "hysterical pseudo-religion" (BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/5fmcbx>).

5. Water: Draft Water Resources Management Plans

The Environment Agency has delivered its verdict on the Draft Water Resources Management Plans published by the water companies at the beginning of the summer. It is generally damning of South East companies telling Southern Water not to implement its plan because it will be environmentally damaging and questioning again Thames Water's dreams of a huge reservoir in Oxfordshire. Companies are urged to work together to develop a shared water resources strategy for the South East. The Agency calls for more action to reduce water consumption to 130 litres per person per day, increase meter use and improve leakage reduction (Environment Agency: <http://tinyurl.com/5rj3qw>).

Southern Water. The Agency criticises the company for not taking account of the river Itchen Habitats Directive and says "Southern Water's draft water resources management plan should not be implemented. This is due to the unacceptable impact it would have on the environment." The Agency praises the company for its metering target.

South East Water. The Agency says that this plan will also have an unacceptable impact on the environment and should not be implemented. "We believe the draft plan is dominated by reservoir developments that are not justified." There is a major conflict between Southern Water and South East Water in how they each represent respective allocations from the shared Bewl reservoir-river Medway scheme.

Thames Water. The Environment Agency calls for revisions and joins CPRE Oxfordshire in criticising the proposals for the Upper Thames Reservoir. The Agency said the agency said that Thames Water needed to do more to demonstrate the need for the £1bn reservoir. The Environment Agency said "in the draft plan we have found that Thames Water has not provided evidence to support how it has fully appraised all of the available options... We recommend that the company includes a full breakdown of costs for each option... this should include a full explanation of environmental and social impacts (see also Oxford Mail: <http://tinyurl.com/6z5e9d>). CPRE Oxfordshire said "We are deeply critical of Thames Water's rush to construct a reservoir of this scale before other options have been exhausted" (CPRE Oxon: <http://tinyurl.com/5dknco>). At an extraordinary meeting, Vale of White Horse councillors unanimously agreed to oppose the proposal and similar opposition has been expressed by Oxfordshire County Council (Oxford Mail: <http://tinyurl.com/589j6z>).

6. Transport

Aviation. Anti-Heathrow campaign group HACAN has accused the government of conducting a "sham" consultation on noise action plans (Planning: <http://tinyurl.com/5lzbwa>; Defra: <http://tinyurl.com/5h5kc6>). The EU said that building a third runway at Heathrow Airport would lead to a significant breach of air pollution guidelines (Planning:

<http://tinyurl.com/5umrlo>). The Competition Commission said that BAA must sell three UK airports (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/5hazco>).

Roads. The Campaign for Better Transport revealed that the cost of the Highways Agency roads in the Government's road building programme has now increased by up to £4 billion (CBT: <http://tinyurl.com/63owdj>). Kent County Council's plans to relieve Operation Stack could mean that lorries are parked on a site prone to flooding. Hilary Newport for CPRE Kent said "The challenge of parking hundreds of 34-tonne lorries on a site such as this and the possibility of what might happen should not be under-estimated" (Kent Online: <http://tinyurl.com/6y42um>). CPRE West Oxfordshire District has launched an attack on the planned Cogges Link Road across water meadows in Whitney, submitting its letter of opposition to the £15m scheme to the County Council along with more than 600 letters of objection (CPRE Oxon: <http://tinyurl.com/55bkea>).

Coastal Path. Farmers and landowners have warned that plans for a £50m national coastal path that would trace the entire periphery of the UK are badly thought-out and underfunded (FT: <http://tinyurl.com/6ktsrj>).

7. Energy

Coal. Sean Furey for CPRE Kent said it was "almost definite" delays to the nuclear programme would accelerate a favourable decision on the Kingsnorth coal fired station. "The democratic process will go out the window. If the nuclear side is delayed, from the Government's point of view they have got to address the energy problem so they will look to coal and get that up and running" (Kent News: <http://tinyurl.com/575nts>).

8. CPRE eBulletin

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