



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
OXFORDSHIRE

CPRE Oxfordshire Campaign Briefing October 2011

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In a succinct yet powerful Legal Opinion the CPRE's Honorary Standing Counsel, John Hobson QC, has criticised the Government's draft NPPF for weakening protection of the Green Belt and wider countryside.

The Vale of White Horse District has just published its Interim Housing Supply Policy, which outlines the District Council's proposals to deal with a temporary shortfall in its five year housing supply, caused largely by delays in major development sites at Grove and Didcot. The policy is out for consultation until 25th November. CPRE Oxfordshire is deeply concerned about the proposed policy

CPRE Vale District has objected to a planning application to erect a wind turbine on a 15 metre tower at Down Barn Farm, Sparsholt on the grounds that it would be located most visibly from a wide area of precious open downland, in particular from the Ridgeway National Trail.

On 8th November, the Transport Select Committee's much anticipated report into High Speed 2 was published, following eight months of evidence taking from a wide range of organisations, including CPRE. The report supports arguments made by CPRE that the current proposals give 'undue emphasis' to the need for a world record speed of 250mph.

In its consultation response on Oxfordshire County Council's draft Minerals Plan, which sets out its plans for mineral extraction in the county until 2030, CPRE Oxfordshire said the targets for extracting minerals are unnecessarily high and has called on the County to look again at the amount of sand and gravel to be extracted.

CPRE Oxfordshire has free copies of its new pocket guidebook: 'A Little Rough Guide Around the Hedges', which explains why our hedgerows matter and how you can help, for readers of the Campaign Briefing. To get your free copy, see below.

For more information about these and other issues see: [CPRE Oxfordshire website](http://www.cpreoxfordshire.org.uk).

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CPRE Oxfordshire Campaigns and News:

1. Planning

- National Planning Policy Framework

The government consultation on the NPPF, which CPRE Oxfordshire responded to, closed on 17th October.

It remains to be seen what the final Framework will look like. However, ministers have promised to amend some aspects of it after they have studied the nearly 14,000 responses to the consultation (a third of which came via the CPRE website), and it remains possible that the government will hold a second consultation – one of CPRE's main demands.

Communities and Local Government Minister Baroness Hanham has recently said the government will publish the final version of the document by the end of April 2012, "earlier if possible".

The government has also hinted at transition arrangements for local authorities where local plans are not in place or certified as conforming with the new regime.

Four out of five local authorities in Oxfordshire will be without a planning Core Strategy when changes to the planning system are expected to take effect. This could mean that when the Framework is adopted, more than half the county could be vulnerable to unplanned, poor quality development.

It seems that the government is prepared to delay the point in time at which the NPPF becomes a 'material consideration', or indeed the only consideration, in planning decisions to allow neighbourhoods and local authorities to put their plans in place. According to the Daily Telegraph, councils could be given between 18 months to two years to get their plans finalised. The Planning magazine reports that the government is in talks with the Planning Inspectorate over ways to speed up the examination of local plans to ensure that they comply with the NPPF.

For more information and to read our consultation response see: [CPRE Oxfordshire 'Planning' webpage](#).

- Localism Bill - update

The Localism Bill has completed its Report Stage in the House of Lords. The Third Reading was on 31 October and the Bill was considered by the House of Commons on 7 November. It is now to proceed quickly to Royal Assent unless the houses disagree.

The government has gone part way to assuaging fears over controversial Clause 130. Strongly opposed by CPRE, the RTPI, the National Trust and others, the clause makes “any local finance considerations” material to an application. A government amendment makes it clear that the clause does not establish whether regard is to be had to any particular consideration or dictate the weight given to different material considerations.

- Vale of White Horse District’s Interim Housing Supply Policy

The Vale of White Horse District Council has published its Interim Housing Supply Policy, which outlines the District Council’s proposals to deal with a temporary shortfall in its five year housing supply, caused largely by delays in major development sites at Grove and Didcot. The policy is out for consultation until 25th November.

CPRE Oxfordshire is so concerned about the Vale's proposed policy that we are writing to all the town and parish councils within the Vale to highlight the issue and ask for their support.

We strongly oppose the Vale’s interim plan to open villages to what could be injurious and undesirable development.

CPRE is extremely concerned that planning regulations protecting greenfield sites will be relaxed in order to encourage quick developments, with little consideration given to whether towns and villages have the necessary infrastructure and facilities to accommodate this.

What you can do

To see a full copy of the proposed policy and details of how to respond to the consultation see: [Vale of White Horse District Council website](#).

- Legal Challenge to Oxford Core Strategy thrown out of High Court

The legal challenge to Oxford's Core Strategy, mounted by Sean Feeney, has failed in the High Court. Mr Feeney, resident of North Oxford, tried to argue that Oxford City Council had failed to carry out specific checks under European environmental laws. The habitats directive states councils must assess the impact of proposed developments on important wildlife areas. Mr Feeney claimed an assessment has not been carried out for Port Meadow, which is a designated special area of conservation.

A top judge ruled there was nothing unlawful about the City Council's local plan. Mr Feeney is now considering whether there are grounds for an appeal.

2. Green Belt

CPRE's Legal Counsel says NPPF could 'weaken' Green Belt protection

In a succinct yet powerful Legal Opinion the CPRE's Honorary Standing Counsel, John Hobson QC, has criticised the Government's draft NPPF for weakening protection of the Green Belt and wider countryside.

Despite consistent reassurances from senior Government Ministers that protection for the Green Belt will remain unchanged, John Hobson states that in his professional legal opinion "this is a significant change which may weaken the protection that applies to Green Belts."

He continues: "if the government do indeed wish to carry forward the protection of the Green Belt to the same degree as at present, the express presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt should be reinstated."

For more information and to read Hobson's Legal Opinion see: [CPRE Oxfordshire 'Planning' webpage](#).

3. Energy

- Proposed Wind turbine on 15 metre tower in Vale opposed

CPRE Vale District has objected to a planning application to erect a wind turbine on a 15 metre tower at Down Barn Farm, Sparsholt.

The Vale District objected on the grounds that it would be located most visibly from a wide area of precious open downland, in particular from the Ridgeway National Trail. The development would therefore fail 'to conserve and enhance' this nationally protected landscape and contradict Policy NE 6 of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan, as well as the CRoW Act 2000.

Moreover, the Vale District believed that if approved, the precedent could have unfortunate and far-reaching implications.

In their objection, the Vale District noted the North Wessex Downs AONB's 2006 report on 'Landscape Sensitivities and Constraints to Wind Turbine Development' which shows that the site which is the subject of this application lies within the 'Open Downland Landscape', highly valued for its 'remote, open character and a sense of peacefulness'. As such, the Vale District argued that a turbine of any height in this sensitive landscape, consisting of an open elevated field not providing any screening, would have serious visual impact and damage its character.

- Government changes to renewables policy

Solar

The government has confirmed it is planning to slash solar incentives by more than 50 per cent, cutting the feed-in tariffs available to domestic and small-scale business installations, from 43p per kWh to just 21p per kWh.

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) has since launched a consultation on the proposed changes, confirming it wants the reduced tariffs to come into force as early as

12th December.

This decision comes just weeks after Oxfordshire's largest solar farm was installed at Watchfield, in the Vale District.

On-shore Wind Farms

The government is also consulting on changes to the Renewables Obligation scheme which will give a slight increase in support for offshore wind and reduce subsidies for onshore wind by 10%.

According to Renewable UK approval rates for new onshore wind farms have fallen by 11% to 42% in 2010/11. The number of planning applications refused for on-shore wind farms has increased dramatically from 29 per cent in 2005 to 45 percent in 2010.

And the Telegraph reports that 2,500 turbines have been refused planning permission due to fears of interference with radar, but new technology will solve the problem from 2013. Oxford City Council's proposed wind turbine for Horspath was rejected on the grounds that the MOD was concerned about interference with local radar.

Energy from Waste

Subsidies for energy from waste (incineration) have been halved and those for biomass and anaerobic digestion are being slightly reduced.

In Oxfordshire County Council's draft Waste Plan, which was out for consultation until 31st October, there is a clear commitment to the 'waste hierarchy', meaning that incineration and landfill will be treated as a last resort, while the county will be seeing many more proposals for biomass and anaerobic digestion plants over the next few decades.

To see the Branch consultation response to OCC's draft Waste Plan go to [CPRE Oxfordshire 'Waste' webpage](#).

4. Transport

- HS2 - update

On 8th November, the Transport Select Committee's much anticipated report into High Speed 2 was published, following eight months of evidence taking from a wide range of organisations, including CPRE. The report supports arguments made by CPRE that the current proposals give 'undue emphasis' to the need for a world record speed of 250mph.

Responding to the publication of the report, Ralph Smyth, Senior Transport Campaigner for CPRE, said: "We agree with the Committee on the need to proceed with High Speed Rail but to proceed with caution. The question now is, how High Speed Rail should be delivered - not if. We are delighted the report shares CPRE's view that the Government urgently needs to set out an overall transport strategy and properly assess its proposals for HS2 within the wider context. This needs to happen before it proceeds any further with specific proposals."

The report criticises the tone of the public debate, calling for both sides to stop disparaging the opposite side and instead focus on facts.

CPRE's Ralph Smyth agreed adding: "It's time for those who think HS2 is either the best thing since sliced bread or simply a white elephant to stop shouting everyone else out of the debate. Punch and Judy politics will not deliver the best from HS2 for our economy, society or the environment.

"The Government is expected to announce it will proceed with HS2 this December and the precise route for the first section to the Midlands. When and if it does, we need to ensure HS2 is accompanied by wider planning to maximise the long term benefits for the environment and economy."

For more information see: [CPRE Oxfordshire 'HS2' webpage](#)

- Public Inquiry into Cogges Link Road

The Public Inquiry into the compulsory Purchase Orders for the building of the Cogges Link Road (CLR) in Witney, which started on September 20th and which has already run for 4 weeks, was adjourned until 8th November.

In addition to The Mawle Trust, whose land is subject to compulsory purchase, there have been 14 non-statutory objectors (including CPRE Oxfordshire) who have given evidence. In addition a petition with 3,000 local signatories against the scheme has been presented to the Inspector.

It is difficult to make any predictions on the outcome since there is still some evidence to come and it looks as if the Inspector will not report until the spring of 2012.

5. Minerals

In its consultation response on Oxfordshire County Council's draft Minerals Plan, which sets out its plans for mineral extraction in the county until 2030, CPRE Oxfordshire said the targets for extracting minerals are unnecessarily high and has called on the County to look again at the amount of sand and gravel to be extracted.

Arnold Grayson, CPRE's local minerals consultant, said: "The Council is currently proposing a figure of 1.2 million tonnes a year. We think this could come down by around a third, to 870,000 tonnes. Changes in building design and construction methods mean that less sand and gravel is now needed by the construction industry. There is also a greater supply of marine sand and gravel and recycled material available. In addition, we are asking the Council to investigate the possibility of bringing in materials by rail, such as china clay sand from Cornwall."

In a Press Release, Helen Marshall, Director of CPRE Oxfordshire, said: "These figures are important because they translate directly into holes in the ground and trucks on the roads."

To see the Branch consultation response to OCC's draft Minerals plan see: [CPRE Oxfordshire 'Minerals' webpage](#).

6. Landscape and Environment

Get to know and protect your local hedgerows this autumn!

CPRE has produced a new pocket guidebook, A Little Rough Guide Around the Hedges, to celebrate the richness of our hedgerows, and to remind people of the importance of protecting England's hedgerows for future generations.

The pocket guidebook is packed with useful information including a handy pull-out centrespread with easy to use colour photographs that identify many of the plants that are common in English hedgerows. The guidebook is designed to be used by those with little or no knowledge of hedgerows to get them interested in their local landscape and its living heritage, and to get people out and about in their local countryside this autumn.

CPRE Oxfordshire would like to offer readers of the Campaign Briefing a FREE copy of the guidebook. To get your free copy please email your address to: [Becky Crockett](mailto:Becky.Crockett@cpre.org.uk) or telephone the Branch Office on: 01865 874 780.

South East News

See the latest issue of CPRE [South East News](#).

CPRE National Office News

Planning Help: Supporting Communities and Neighbourhoods in Planning

The Government is empowering people to take a more active role in shaping the future of the areas in which they live and work. The planning system is a key tool that can enable local communities to do this. At CPRE National Office and in partnership with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), we are helping to deliver that important planning advice and guidance.

The project, Supporting Communities and Neighbourhoods in Planning, will run until the end of March 2012 and will deliver the following:

Online and telephone resources

The CPRE Planning Help website, which aims to show you how you can become involved in the planning system.

[Planning Help website](#)

The Planning Help phone line, which is staffed each Thursday between 1.30 and 3.30pm to help you with any questions relevant to the planning system.

Telephone: 020 7981 2868.

Publications and E-learning

A number of guidelines and useful publications about the planning system will be produced and made available along with interactive e-learning modules.

Local events across the country

A nationwide programme of free training events that will deliver essential information about the planning system, why it is important and how to get involved. Some events will also help people consider how they might develop a neighbourhood plan.

For further information about these events, including dates and venues please visit:

[Events](#)

Other sources of support

For further information regarding the support services provided by other organisations under the Supporting Communities and Neighbourhood in Planning project please visit:

[Other sources of support](#)

Funding opportunities

The Government is also making further funding available for 'Neighbourhood Planning Front Runner' pilot projects. Community groups, parish or town councils can apply in partnership with their local planning authority. The first deadline has recently passed but the second deadline for applications is 4th November. Details are at:

Communities and Local Government website: [Neighbourhood Planning Front Runners](#)

Design Council CABE has also launched a Neighbourhood Projects Small Grants Programme. The Programme will award grants of up to £7,000 for neighbourhood projects that seek to improve the design quality of the built environment. The deadline for applications is 1st August. Further details about the grants and how to apply are at:

Design Council website: [CABE - Neighbourhood Projects Small Grants 2011 - 2012](#)

Diary

Saturday, December 3rd, Oxford Green Fair, 10.00 am - 4.00 pm - Volunteers Needed!

The annual Oxford Green Fair will be held on Saturday, December 3rd, at the Oxford Town Hall.

CPRE Oxfordshire will be manning a stall in the main hall. Please come along and say hello!

Monday, 28th November, CPRE Banbury District AGM.

The CPRE Banbury District AGM is to be held at St John's RC Dupuis Centre, South Bar,

Banbury, on 28th November, at 7.00 pm. Helen Marshall, CPRE Branch Director, will be speaking after the committee meeting.

For more information contact Chris Hone (Chairman): 01295 265379 or Jean Tarver (Secretary): 01295 720767.

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