



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
OXFORDSHIRE

CPRE Oxfordshire Campaign Briefing September 2011

Since the last issue of the Campaign Briefing (June 2011), the government has published its draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), described by Shuan Spiers of the National CPRE, as "fatally skewed in favour of economic development". He says commitments to the countryside and natural environment are "hedged and equivocal"; those on economic growth, "explicit and unambiguous". Indeed, the word 'countryside' appears four times in the NPPF; while the word 'development', 327 times!

Having frozen CPRE out for weeks, ministers are now talking to CPRE and other critics of the draft NPPF and the argument is beginning to get through that the NPPF as drafted, really will damage the countryside. Meanwhile, at Branch level we have written to all our members and parish councils requesting they write to their MPs opposing the reforms. And we are encouraging our members and the public to respond to the government consultation.

In a Press Release issued by CPRE Oxfordshire on 21st September, we argued that the Government's proposed changes to the planning system could put 41 villages in the Oxford Green Belt at risk of development, leaving the Oxford Green Belt looking like a piece of "Gruyere cheese, full of holes".

The July hearings into the draft SODC Core Strategy have now been completed, and the Inspector's report received. In his preliminary conclusions, the Inspector accepted our case that the extension of Wheatley would harm the Green Belt and rejected the District Council's proposal. However, the Inspector has judged sound the District's proposal to review the Green Belt at Berinsfield.

The energy company Regeneco, has submitted a Scoping Request to Cherwell District Council to assess the suitability of a site in north Oxfordshire for 5 to 8 wind turbines.

The public inquiry into the compulsory purchase of land for the Cogges Link Road, began on Thursday 22nd September. CPRE West Oxfordshire District will be making a representation at the Inquiry, putting forward the Shores Green option as an alternative to the Cogges Link Road scheme.

OCC is consulting on its draft planning strategies for minerals and waste development. The new plans will determine where mineral working and waste facilities should be located in the county upto 2030. CPRE Oxfordshire will be responding to the consultations.

CPRE Oxfordshire has welcomed the decision by the OCC Planning Committee to reject Waste Recycling Group's (WRG) amended application for a huge Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) plant at Sutton Courtenay.

For more information about these and other issues see: [CPRE Oxfordshire website](#).

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CPRE Oxfordshire Campaigns and News:

1. Planning

- Government consultation on planning reforms – 10 days to go!

The government's consultation on its reforms to the planning system, set out in its draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), ends on 17th October. CPRE Oxfordshire is calling on its members and supporters to respond to the consultation, opposing the government's planning reforms.

We believe the NPPF includes a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development', threatening to allow developers free-for-all access to our countryside and green spaces. We believe the government's ideas have not been thought through and are unacceptable.

The five major flaws in the proposed National Planning Policy Framework are:

- **FAILURE** to define "sustainable" development. Unless it is properly defined, virtually any scheme could get the go ahead.
- **FAILURE** to balance environmental and social needs against economic aspirations – the key role of the Planning System.
- **FAILURE** to prioritise previously developed land; this will lead to brownfield sites lying derelict while green fields are built over.
- **FAILURE** to reflect the intrinsic value of the countryside in its own right.

- FAILURE to allow real Localism, by not giving communities the right to say “no” to undesirable development.

What you can do

Please contact your local MP to urge the Government to:

- Make sure the planning system isn't just seen as an economic tool but supports the right building in the right place.
- Allow local people to say 'no' to damaging and inappropriate development.
- Ensure the countryside as a whole is protected from damaging development - not just our best landscapes.

Please also respond to the [Government's consultation on the NPPF](#).

The deadline is **Monday 17th October**, so please act quickly!

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

- Localism Bill - update

The Localism Bill is now at the Report stage in the House of Lords. A line by line examination of the Bill took place during the fourth day of report stage on 14th September. Amendments discussed covered clauses 16, 17, 18, 19, and schedule 4 of the Bill. Further line by line examination of the Bill is scheduled for 10th October. There will then be a further reading of the Bill, prior to the consideration of Royal Amendments. Thereafter, the Bill is likely to receive Royal Assent in early 2012.

2. Green Belt

- Oxfordshire villages in the Green Belt at risk from NPPF

In a Press Release issued by CPRE Oxfordshire on 21st September, we argued that the Government's proposed changes to the planning system could put 41 villages in the Oxford Green Belt at risk of development, leaving the Oxford Green Belt looking like a piece of "Gruyere cheese, full of holes".

Helena Whall, Campaigns Manager for CPRE Oxfordshire, said: "The government is wrong to say that its draft national planning policy framework (NPPF) will not undermine the Green Belt. In fact, it will make it easier for developers to get permission to develop in villages currently protected by the Green Belt, meaning this precious planning tool will suffer the protracted death of a thousand cuts. The new planning guidance will undermine the whole purpose of the Green Belt and make it at the very best a shadow of its former self."

Helena Whall continued: "A major worry is that villages currently "washed over" by the Green Belt, i.e. which are in every respect part of the Green Belt, will be taken out of the Green Belt altogether. This is because the NPPF states that a village whose character does not contribute to the "openness" of the Green Belt should be excluded from it."

Paragraph 141 of the draft NPPF states: "If it is necessary to prevent development in a village primarily because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included in the Green Belt. If, however, the character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons, other means should be used, such as conservation area or normal development management policies, and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt.'

There are a total of 34 villages in Oxfordshire which are completely "washed over" by the Green Belt and therefore at risk of being excluded from the Green Belt, making them more vulnerable to development under the new proposals.

And a further 7 villages in the county that are half in and half outside the Green Belt, and are vulnerable to being excluded for that reason.

CPRE Oxfordshire urges all residents who currently enjoy the benefits of village life in the Green Belt to consider carefully what the government's proposed planning changes might mean for them.

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

- Green Belt review for Berinsfield

The July hearings into the draft SODC Core Strategy have now been completed, and the Inspector's report received. The remaining sessions will be held during 1st to 11th November, particularly focusing on how South Oxfordshire's large and self-imposed housing targets will be distributed amongst the towns and villages.

At the initial round, CPRE Oxfordshire was represented at the session on the Environment, where we argued strongly against the proposed review of the Green Belt to allow an extension into Green Belt at Wheatley, and to remove Berinsfield from the Green Belt entirely on the grounds that there are no 'exceptional circumstances' to justify a review.

In his preliminary conclusions, the Inspector has completely accepted our case that the extension of Wheatley would not only harm the Green Belt, but cause a "joining up" of a string of development from Horspath to the M40 and beyond and rejected the District Council's proposal.

The Inspector said of the District Council's Wheatley proposal: "The local communities understandably place significant value on the narrow breaks between these settlements, considering such gaps important contributors to their independent characters and an indicator of the Green Belt fulfilling its purpose. The implication of the CS [Core Strategy] is that Wheatley would be extended eastwards down to Wheatley Bridge, facilitated by exclusion from the Green Belt of open land to the east of the village and the outlying industrial area. This would emphasise Oxford-related 'sprawl' and urban encroachment into the countryside by stretching the above 'beads' almost as far as the M40, thereby offending two of the Green Belt's five main purposes without justification by clear exceptional circumstances."

CPRE Oxfordshire welcomes the Inspector's decision to reject SODC's proposal to extend Wheatley into the Green Belt, but we believe the green fields between the village and the services next the M40 remain at risk from future development.

As far as a review of the Green Belt at Berinsfield is concerned, the Inspector said: "It is relatively unusual for a village of this size not to be inset from the Green Belt within its own defined boundaries and this factor, along with all the others discussed above, lead to the conclusion that circumstances at Berinsfield represent exceptional circumstances justifying a local green belt review not confined to drawing the boundary tightly around the existing built-up area."

At the 'Site Allocations' stage, we will need to watch how far into the Green Belt the District Council proposes to extend the village boundary, and if necessary take further action.

For more information see: [SODC Core Strategy website](#).

3. Energy

Wind farm proposed for north Oxfordshire

The energy company Regeneco, has submitted a Scoping Request to Cherwell District Council to assess the suitability of a site in north Oxfordshire for 5 to 8 wind turbines. The proposed site lies just north of Banbury, near the village of Hanwell. The site cuts across the Warwickshire/Oxfordshire border and is adjacent to the M40. The wind turbines will be 130 metres high, from ground to tip.

The Scoping Request is designed to obtain feedback on the content that would be required for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Only once the viability of the site has been established would an initial scheme be proposed. This is not likely to happen until 2013 once a number of feasibility studies and on-site wind monitoring have been completed. An application for a meteorological mast has also been submitted to Cherwell District Council.

CPRE Oxfordshire will be keeping a close eye on this proposal and we will respond accordingly.

For more information see: [Ironstone Wind Farm webpage](#).

4. Transport

Public Inquiry into Cogges Link Road

The public inquiry into the compulsory purchase of land for the Cogges Link Road, began on Thursday 22nd September at the Methodist Church, High Street, Witney. CPRE West Oxfordshire District will be making a representation at the Inquiry, putting forward the Shores Green option as an alternative to the Cogges Link Road scheme. The inquiry is expected to last for two weeks and is open to the public.

For more information see: [CPRE Oxfordshire 'Cogges Link Road' webpage](#).

5. Minerals and Waste

- Oxfordshire County Council Consultation on Minerals and Waste policy

Oxfordshire County Council is currently consulting on its draft planning strategies for minerals and waste development. The new plans will determine where mineral working and waste facilities should be located in the county upto 2030. The eight week public consultation period runs from 5th September to 31st October 2011.

CPRE Oxfordshire will be responding to the consultations. A copy of our consultation response will be posted on our website shortly. See: [CPRE Oxfordshire 'Minerals and Waste' webpage](#) .

What you can do

To see the consultation documents and to respond to the minerals and waste plan consultations see: [OCC website](#).

- WRG's proposal for MBT plant at Sutton Courtenay rejected

On September 12th, the OCC Planning Committee rejected Waste Recycling Group's (WRG) amended application for a huge Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) plant at Sutton Courtenay, with members voting 9-4 against the proposal.

CPRE Oxfordshire was delighted with this decision. The proposed MBT plant would have urbanised this open and rural part of Oxfordshire and we are urging WRG not to appeal against the decision.

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

6. Open Spaces

- Warneford Meadow for sale!

Friends of Warneford Meadow recently heard from the Department of Health that they have decided to dispose of the Meadow and that advisers are now being appointed to assist in the sale process.

Having regard to the Government's proposals in the Localism Bill for Community Right to Buy, the Department have said that they will give Friends of Warneford Meadow (FoWM) the opportunity to confirm whether they would wish to make a bid. A bid to purchase the Meadow could be made by FoWM alone or in conjunction with other groups. FoWM now await further information from the agents, once they have been appointed and the terms of sale have been decided.

Friends of Warneford Meadow welcomes the news, which shows that the Department recognise that there is no prospect of building on the Meadow now it is registered as a Town Green. FoWM has said they "look forward to working with the Department and their agents, and with the City Council and with other bodies concerned to protect Oxford's environment, to ensure that the Meadow is conserved and enhanced for future generations to enjoy."

- Defra consultation on registration of town greens

Defra is holding a consultation which seeks views on proposals to reform the system for registering new town or village greens.

CPRE National Office is responding to the consultation and the Oxfordshire Branch has fed in the views of the Friends of the Trap Grounds and the Friends of Warneford Meadow.

Both groups have serious reservations about the proposals to reform the system, not least the proposal for a 'character test' - ie: that land must be open and unenclosed in character and 'free of encroaching scrub'. As Catherine Robinson of the Friends of Trap Grounds said: "The land should certainly be unenclosed and easily accessible; but to require it to be 'free of encroaching scrub' would exclude sites such as ours."

Furthermore, Catherine Robinson does not support the proposal which would rule out making a greens registration application where a site was designated for development in a proposed or adopted local or neighbourhood plan, saying: "This would lead to large numbers of pre-emptive planning applications and give far too much power to rich landowners, at the expense of local communities."

In summary, the Friends of Trap Grounds said: "On balance we are opposed to the proposals for change, most of which seem designed to favour developers at the expense of community groups."

The consultation ends on 17th October.

For more information see: [Defra website](#).

South East News

See the latest issue of [South East News](#): 'The Great Planning Row, 50 Days of the National Planning Policy Framework campaign' (12th September 2011).

CPRE National Office News

What CPRE wants to see from the NPPF

This month, CPRE National Office has outlined what it wants to see from the NPPF. According to CPRE, the NPPF must:

- recognise the intrinsic value of unprotected countryside which covers more than half of England, and set out stronger policies to protect the Green Belt and specially designated areas;
- retain the 'brownfield first' policy to promote urban regeneration and efficient use of land by ensuring previously developed land is used to meet development needs before greenfield sites and effective integration of transport and land use planning;
- define sustainable development so that environmental limits are respected, rather than giving primacy to economic development;
- reinforce the plan-led system, including by ensuring effective transitional arrangements are put in place to allow time for up to date plans to be developed; and
- promote, rather than undermine, the delivery of affordable housing in appropriate locations to meet identified needs, particularly in rural areas.

For the full document see: [What CPRE wants to see from the NPPF](#).

For more information about the NPPF and what CPRE National Office is doing see: [CPRE National Office 'Planning' webpage](#).

Diary

Sunday, October 2nd, FoWM Apple Day, 12.00 - 4.00 pm.

The Friends of Warneford Meadow will be holding their annual Apple Day on Sunday, October 2nd. Fun activities for all the family. Remember to bring empty bottles for your freshly squeezed apple juice.

For more information see: [FOWM website](#).

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. As always, CPRE Oxfordshire will be manning a stall.

If you would like to volunteer on the day, please contact: [Becky Crockett](#).

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