



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England



“ Above all, the protection of the countryside and greening of the town has been the achievement of a reinvigorated, democratic planning system ”

CPRE (2009) 2026: A Vision for the Countryside

**Making localism work for the countryside:  
CPRE's charter for planning reform**

# Our charter for planning reform

A radical reform of the planning system is a significant part of the Government's 'localism' agenda. At the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) we believe this has the potential to revitalise planning and enable us all to play a part in protecting and enhancing the countryside and regenerating our towns and villages.

We welcome the Government's commitment to put local communities in charge of land use planning. CPRE has long called for more public involvement in planning. Of course, any radical overhaul of the planning system will pose both opportunities and challenges for rural communities and the countryside.

In line with our *2026 Vision for the Countryside*, this document sets out the improvements CPRE believes will make a reformed planning system truly successful.

## An open and accessible process

The reforms will make local plans the key tool for protecting and enhancing our countryside. CPRE wants to see a jargon-free, open and accessible process for developing plans to encourage more people to engage with the planning system. It is unlikely that local communities will reach a complete consensus on the detail of neighbourhood and local plans, so the decision-making process needs to be transparent and democratic.

## A sound evidence base

Policies within local plans need to be detailed and clear enough to shape development proposals and provide a steer for developers and decision-makers. The views of local communities should be a starting point for the development of these policies and they also need to consider local evidence. This should include robust housing needs assessments and community landscape character assessments. Discussion with local communities should be framed within the context of this evidence and broader national priorities.

## Greater weight for parish plans

Parish and town councils are well placed to gather the views of local communities and develop plans that will respond to local need. Parish plans, village design statements and similar initiatives should be the basis of the proposed neighbourhood 'modules' and given far more weight in the planning system.

Not all parish and town councils will have the capacity to develop neighbourhood modules, and such bodies do not exist in some areas. All communities need advice, guidance and support from the local authority.

## Locally distinctive communities

We need high quality, well designed, energy efficient and appropriately located homes that meet local needs and enhance distinctiveness.

We are concerned that offering financial incentives to local authorities for granting planning permission for housing could result in large scale house building, regardless of the consequences for the environment or social cohesion.

Incentives should only support the provision of new homes that are in line with the local plan and occupied within a fixed time period.

**'We will radically reform the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live'**

HM Government (2010) *The Coalition: our programme for government*

**'We will make a truly local plan, built out of a process of collaborative democracy, the centrepiece of the local planning system'**

Conservatives (2010) *Open Source Planning Green Paper*



**'We will maintain the Green Belt, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and other environmental protections and create a new designation...to protect green areas of particular importance to local communities'**

HM Government (2010) *The Coalition: our programme for government*



## **A countryside that is valued**

We strongly support the protection and enhancement of designated areas. The planning system also needs to recognise the importance of the wider countryside to people's quality of life.

To protect and enhance the countryside the national planning framework should emphasise the need for land to be used efficiently and give priority to urban regeneration and the protection of soil and farmland. It should set out a sequential, brownfield first approach for all kinds of development, and allow local authorities to include a 'windfall' allowance (for sites which become available for development unexpectedly) when identifying land for new housing.

## **A national framework that protects the environment**

The new national planning framework will play a critical role in shaping the future of development across the country. It should ensure that the planning system fulfils its purpose to protect the environment and facilitate development that is in the wider public interest.

In streamlining existing national policy guidance the emphasis should be on ensuring that national priorities are set out at a level of detail that assists local decision-makers. The focus should not be on simply keeping the document short.

## **A strategic overview**

Local authorities often have different priorities. Seeing the bigger picture and mediating differing views is an important function of strategic planning. A strategic approach is necessary to ensure appropriate consideration is given to the role of the Green Belt, the relationship between urban regeneration and greenfield development, and retail hierarchies. This overview cannot be achieved at the local level alone.

A strategic overview should be secured through a transparent process that fully involves local communities and other stakeholders. Local Enterprise Partnerships, with a narrow economic remit, should not take on a strategic planning role.

## **A fair appeals process**

The current system, whereby only the applicant has a right of appeal, is skewed towards the interests of the developer. It allows businesses to bully and intimidate local authorities and communities. This is the antithesis of localism.

A new, limited, public right of appeal should be introduced to re-balance the planning system, empower communities and improve the quality of planning decisions by ensuring that decisions to grant permission as well as refuse it are fully justified. The grounds on which developers can launch an appeal should also be limited to cases where an application that is in line with the local plan is refused.

## **Greater priority for enforcement**

Effective enforcement of planning controls is crucial to the credibility of the planning system and protecting the environment. If local communities are to be encouraged to engage and believe that their views will have an impact, deliberate abuse of the planning system needs to be prevented.

There should be a statutory duty on local planning authorities to take enforcement action to encourage compliance with planning decisions. This, along with the other measures proposed above, should help increase public confidence in planning.



**'We will create a third-party right of appeal in cases where planning decisions go against locally agreed plans'**

Liberal Democrats (2010) *Manifesto*

**'We will make the system symmetrical by allowing appeals against local planning decisions from local residents, as well as from developers'**

Conservatives (2010) *Open Source Planning Green Paper*



# Campaign to Protect Rural England

**CPRE protects the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England.**

## **Who we are**

Formed in 1926, CPRE is one of the longest established and most respected environmental charities in England. CPRE is a network of over 200 district groups; there is a branch in every county, a group in every region, as well as a national office in London. We have around 60,000 members and supporters and over 2,000 parish councils are affiliated members.

## **What we do**

We believe that good land use planning is the unsung hero of environmental protection. Good planning can help slow the growth of road traffic, encourage urban regeneration, curb urban sprawl, protect the beauty and tranquillity of the countryside and safeguard wildlife habitats.

Through our network of district groups, county branches and regional groups we engage in the planning process on a daily basis. We appear at more public inquiries and local plan examinations than any other organisation, and monitor an estimated 200,000 planning applications a year.

Campaigning to establish, and then improve, the land use planning system has always been a priority for the CPRE. We were closely involved in the establishment of the system in 1947, with the Town and Country Planning Act, and subsequent revisions, particularly the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 and Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

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