

## **CPRE Devon and development**

It's a fact that CPRE is better known in some quarters for what we oppose rather than what we support. That's partly the nature of campaigning - the media are invariably more interested in protest than support. It's also because there are developments which really do need to be opposed because they damage the landscape, the natural environment and rural communities. We will carry on fighting those development proposals, without apology.

At the same time, we need to remind everyone that we support the right sort of change in rural Devon. We want to see:

- Prosperous and supportive rural communities, with jobs and services locally, so that people don't have to travel long distances for the essentials of life.
- Small groups of well-designed new housing in those rural communities which want and need it, at affordable prices so that people are not priced out of their own towns and villages.
- Viable farm businesses, so necessary to sustain the landscapes we love, which produce the food we need and support local as well as national food chains.

CPRE nationally has recently produced a new policy guidance note on housing<sup>1</sup>, and we have asked them to consider developing as a priority new policy on rural economies and communities. We have more to say about farming, and land use, in this newsletter.

## **The County Branch Forum - and an award for Tim Hale**



At CPRE Devon's 2013 AGM (more news inside) Sir Ian Amory, our retiring President, presented Vice-Chairman Tim Hale with an certificate confirming his appointment as Emeritus President of the CPRE County Branch Forum in 2007. Tim was the driving force behind the setting up of the Forum, which brings together CPRE's county branches to discuss policy issues and coordinate action across the country. Initially seen by some as an irritant ginger group, the Forum is now respected as the only self-governing mechanism within CPRE which represents the diversity of county branch views, and is regularly consulted on new national policy positions before they are adopted by the national CPRE board.

<sup>1</sup> CPRE Policy Guidance Note: Housing, available at <http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/housing-and-planning/housing/item/3270-cpres-policy-on-housing>

## Food supply and land use

### *Can we really leave our food supply to the global market?*

For decades, British governments have refused to acknowledge the need for a national food supply policy. Whenever anyone asked, the answer was always the same: if there's a market for it and it's not grown here, we import it. As a policy statement made in the dying months of the last Labour government put it: "Global trade offers a way to manage volatility by spreading risk, encourages productivity growth, keeps prices competitive and increases diversity of supply - it is critical to global economic prosperity and food security"<sup>2</sup>. No connection is made in government policy between food security and self-sufficiency in food production: they are seen as separate issues.

Currently, we import about 40% of our food. That's 40% of our food which is subject to supply disruption factors over which we have no control. These include: increasing populations worldwide, market changes (for example the increased demand for meat in China), transport interruptions (fuel shortages, wars), and climate change (leading to water shortages, soil erosion). The extreme and unusual weather over the past year or so, not just in the UK but around the world, has put severe pressure on food supplies and pushed up prices.

The combination of these factors was identified in a 2011 Government Office for Science Foresight report<sup>3</sup> as a major threat to food security in the future.

### *Keep calm and carry on*

The present government appears to be committed to the global market policies of its predecessors. Its response to increasing concerns about food security is that British agriculture should produce more while at the same time improving the environment<sup>4</sup> - so-called "sustainable intensification". Leaving aside the technical challenges in achieving this goal, what is important is that many of the materials needed to produce food more intensively - oil, gas, fertilizers, feed and machinery - are also imported and so are at risk of transport interruptions.

While urging farmers to produce more at home, the government remains complacent about our most precious resource of all - agricultural land. As we demonstrate later in this newsletter, current planning policy puts "economic growth" as the determinant of all decisions - as if farming was not a component of economic growth - which allows housing, renewable energy structures and other development to sprout across the countryside.

### *So what does this mean for land use policy?*

Agricultural land is disappearing. In the greater south west region for the four years 2007-2010 the annual average proportion of land used for housing development that was previously agricultural land was 38%<sup>5</sup>. This occurred when Regional Spatial Strategies set housing targets for each local authority area.

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<sup>2</sup> *Food 2030*, HM Government, January 2010, page 22, available at <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/pdf/food2030strategy.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/foresight/docs/food-and-farming/11-546-future-of-food-and-farming-report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See for example *Green Food Project Conclusions*, Defra, July 2012, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-food-project-conclusions>

<sup>5</sup> See Land Use Change statistics for England, table P225 at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-land-use-change-statistics>

Centralism in housing has been replaced by centralism in renewable energy. Appeals by developers against decisions by local planning authorities to refuse consent for wind turbines and industrial-scale solar panel ranges are regularly upheld by the Planning Inspectorate on the grounds that the structures are needed to meet the government's renewable energy generation targets. Arguments that this means a loss of agricultural land fall on deaf ears.

Why? It's simple. Until regional plans were abolished, there was a housing policy but no food policy. There is now a renewable energy policy but no food policy. Energy plant is treated as infrastructure, food production plant - in other words, the soil - is not. Inspectors refer to renewable energy policy to justify their decisions, but there are no comparable food policy statements to enable them to balance conflicting demands properly.

Outside the planning system, there is virtually no control over land use changes not involving development. So fields can be turned from food production to, say, energy crops production on the landowner's whim. Defra's "Green Food Project Steering Group" noted last year that "Future demands on land for energy production could have further impacts on food production" and that "the demands on land for bioenergy cannot be considered in isolation from food production"<sup>6</sup>. However, the project steering group didn't explain how this would be achieved.

Without a coherent approach to land use planning which factors in all the relevant land uses and not just those which take the fancy of the government of the day, there is little prospect of sensible and far-sighted land use decisions being taken on this small island. Full-blown self-sufficiency in food may be neither achievable nor necessary, but protecting our land to produce food in the event of shocks to the "global market" should urgently become a goal of government policy. If you agree, please write to your MP.

## **Localism in action**

The long battle against the Batsworthy Cross wind factory was finally lost in the High Court when judgement was given in May<sup>7</sup>. Against huge opposition from North Devon District Council and a range of parish councils, local groups and individuals, a Planning Inspector overruled the council and gave permission for nine giant wind turbines at Batsworthy Cross, Knowstone. The High Court found that the Inspector's decision was reasonable when the provisions of the NPPF were taken into account.

Led by the Two Moors Campaign, with strong practical support from CPRE Devon, the campaign against the turbines has lasted for 7 years and raised tens of thousands of pounds in donations. It began in an era when a functioning planning system meant that the odds were not stacked against people who disagreed with simplistic central government policies. As the High Court judgement makes clear, the NPPF has changed all that.

In particular, the judgement makes it clear that a local plan is out of date if it does not comply with the provisions of the NPPF. Statements in local plans which seek to prevent renewable energy developments where there would be adverse impacts on the landscape are seen as incompatible with the NPPF because they do not provide for the

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/69575/pb13794-greenfoodproject-report.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69575/pb13794-greenfoodproject-report.pdf) , para 4.42.

<sup>7</sup> The well argued judgement by Mr Justice Kenneth Parker is referenced [2013] EWHC 1138 (Admin), available on line at <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2013/1138.html>

sort of cost-benefit assessment implied by the NPPF. This was the Inspector's reasoning, and the High Court supported it.

If landscapes and communities are to be protected from the worst aspects of the renewable energy juggernaut, local planners will have to find much cleverer wording for their plans in future. Easy to say, but difficult to achieve. Central to the problem is that the NPPF's requirement for cost-benefit assessment is skewed in favour of developments for which targets or growth policies have been set by central government. As we point out above (page 3), no such targets or policies exist for food production, so it is impossible for planners to factor the value of agricultural land into a cost-benefit assessment. Indeed, the logic of the NPPF as interpreted in the Batsworthy Cross case is that even the much-trumpeted best and most versatile agricultural land categorisation is of no consequence, because there is no food supply policy to underpin it.

### **The way the wind blows**

Previous newsletters have reported on the tsunami of wind turbine applications, particularly in Torridge and North Devon Districts. We won't quote figures because they'll be out of date by the time you read this, but we are trying to keep an up to date record on our website<sup>8</sup>.

*A Devon nightmare?*



We should, perhaps, also keep a record of wind turbine collapses. Members in North Devon may already be familiar with the events of 27 January when a 35-metre turbine at Bradworthy collapsed. The manufacturer subsequently admitted faults in the way the structure was fixed to the ground. The immediate cause of the collapse was - wait for it - strong winds.

There are signs that the government, rattled by opposition to the proliferation of wind turbines from CPRE, other groups and even some of their own MPs, is coming up with sweeteners. In particular, a scheme to provide payments to communities who consent to wind turbines has been floated by ministers, though at the time of writing no announcement has been made. CPRE Devon considers this as no more than a bribe to try and minimise local opposition. It will do nothing to minimise damage to the landscape.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.cpredevon.org.uk/renewable-energy/renewable-energy.html>

Meanwhile, campaigners look to the courts to restore sanity to the planning free-for-all. The High Court recently ruled that Milton Keynes Council, in Buckinghamshire, was entitled to adopt planning policies setting minimum separation distances between turbines and houses. Although such rules may have little impact on landscape issues, they are very important in minimising disturbance to residents. We are urging Devon's local planning authorities to include minimum separation distances in their planning policies.

### **But will it be sunny?**

Despite the dreadful weather, developer enthusiasm for huge fields of solar panels continues unabated. While turbines protrude upwards, industrial scale solar panels cover acres and acres of fields. The government is giving strong support to the growth of solar energy sources.



*A nice field for sun-bathing?*

And this time the government intends not to be caught napping. In a speech in Truro, energy minister Greg Barker said: “We don’t want solar to become a bone of public contention like onshore wind<sup>9</sup>”. Barker made some welcome statements, such as preferring brownfield land for major panel developments; and he said “Impacts on the local community, on landscape and on consumer bills have to be a real consideration”. A government strategy for solar is promised this summer.

Words are fine. But they need to be translated into specific government planning policy documents which force the Planning Inspectorate to take these factors into account when deciding whether or not to overrule local authority decisions. Unless that happens, we will be left with inspectors able to make such statements as: “Nowhere does the NPPF state [...] that the level of local objections in itself should be a reason to withhold permission” and to rely on general government support for renewable energy as a material consideration<sup>10</sup>.

### **Oops, the planners may have the housing figures wrong again!**

New figures from the Office of National Statistics based on the 2011 census cast further doubt on the reliability of the housing need forecasts being worked into some of Devon's local plans. The new projections are in the table on the next page.

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<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/gregory-barker-speech-to-the-large-scale-solar-conference>

<sup>10</sup> From the conclusions of a planning inspector's report upholding an appeal by the developer against Torridge DC's refusal for a 35-metre turbine at Shebbear.

Local authority	Percentage change in households based on 2011 projections	Percentage difference between 2011 and 2008 projections
East Devon	9.34	-3.7
Exeter	6.64	-2.73
Mid Devon	10.83	-3.48
North Devon	5.85	-4.79
Plymouth	4.58	-5.12
South Hams	5.45	-3.63
Teignbridge	9.45	-2.3
Torbay	7.45	-3.02
Torridge	14.55	-2.7
West Devon	13.83	+0.46

So, in all of Devon's planning authorities except West Devon, the projected numbers of households are significantly less than previously assessed. These numbers confirm the doubts that CPRE Devon and others have cast on the assumptions underlying some councils' housing plans.

## CPRE Devon Branch news

### **Our 2013 Annual General Meeting**

CPRE Devon's 2013 AGM was held at Kentisbeare in East Devon on 20 April. Some 40 members attended to hear outgoing Chairman Robin Hogg present the annual report, which was posted out to all members well in advance.

After four years in the demanding role of Chairman, Robin has stood down, though he will continue an active role as CPRE Devon's President, as our webmaster, and as our (and CPRE South West's) expert adviser on waste issues. The AGM elected Tony Milton, from Chagford, as his successor as Chairman. We are delighted to welcome Tony, already known to some as Chairman of CPRE's South West Regional Group.

The meeting was also the last as President for Sir Ian Amory. We are very grateful to him for having filled the role - which is one of quiet but valuable support - for the past 14 years.

### *Guest speaker*

Our AGM guest speaker was Professor Michael Winter OBE, Director of the Centre for Rural Policy Research at the University of Exeter. A distinguished academic and adviser to governments, Michael gave a thought-provoking presentation on the challenges involved in making land use allocation decisions. He drew attention to a range of drivers of future change, including world population, changes in diet, soil degradation, development pressures, continued concerns over biodiversity and animal/plant diseases, changing weather patterns and the growth of emotive issues

such as badger control and GM crops. He questioned whether present patterns of land ownership and land occupancy, and our long tradition of non-intervention in decisions not involving development, helped optimise the use of scarce land for delivering food security and ecosystems services.

This is a hugely important debate, and one in which CPRE should actively participate. It links directly to our concerns about food security outlined earlier in this newsletter, and it raises familiar issues about the future purpose and appearance of our landscapes.

## **News from the districts**

### *Torbay*

Events in Torbay have continued to challenge CPRE Torbay. CPRE members working on Neighbourhood Plans ask is it really worth it - does the Localism Bill mean anything? With inward migration falling in Devon, why do we have to build so many houses when jobs and skills should be the first priority?

This was the question raised recently at South Devon College by CPRE Torbay Chairman Carole Box with Totnes MP Sarah Wollaston and Richard Benyon, Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries. Referring to the new Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) which include Torbay, Mr Benyon spoke about protection of our precious environment, importance of fisheries and tourism. Carole asked how could he on one hand plan to protect the bay when another part of the government was telling us to build 10,000+ houses, many on greenfield sites? This highlighted the lack of infrastructure for new housing, water run-off from developments and storm drains releasing sewerage into the same Bay that needed marine protection! She stressed that we should be looking at training and skills to create jobs in particular marine research, food research and future food security, a point endorsed by Professor Winter when she raised it at our AGM (see above).

CPRE Torbay continues to stand up for our Countryside and encourages local members to speak up about the excellent opportunities we have in Torbay. We are so fortunate to have Sutton Seeds new trial grounds, state of the art new facilities at South Devon College, a £20 million Brixham Fish Quay and Astra Zeneca Environmental Laboratory. Help us promote jobs, skills, careers, by training in marine, fisheries, horticulture, food tourism, food research and food security. Keep our Greenfields we will need them in the future! Remember our motto 'Build on Success not Greenfields'

### *Plymouth and South Hams (PaSH)*

Apart from the ongoing desperate defence battle against the army of wind and solar factories advancing towards us from the North, the major recent event has been the District's AGM. This was held in Stoke Fleming village hall to encourage more involvement from members in the East of our region, and took the form of a minimalist AGM followed by an open meeting with invited speakers.

We were very fortunate in having both Dr Sarah Wollaston, MP for Totnes, and Cllr Richard Foss, Chairman of the South Devon AONB, as complementary speakers. While the intention was to clarify the different roles of central and local Government in planning procedures, the current widespread intervention of central Government to overrule local decisions in both housing and industrial wind and solar power installations dominated the discussions.

To demonstrate the CPRE commitment to renewable energy at a local scale, there were displays on small-scale tidal (TidePod) and wave (SeaRaser) energy as well as "molenergy" (Mole Valley Farmers) with on-site solar and wind installations for domestic, agricultural and community projects.

The AGM consisted of brief reports from the officers and topic co-ordinators for renewables, housing, forestry, farming and waste management, and the re-election of the current committee - followed by a desperate plea from the District Chairman, Bob Harvey, for e-mail addresses. It is planned to send a monthly e-bulletin specifically for events in the PaSH area but he has so far only about half the members on the e-mail list. For both temporal and financial reasons such a bulletin is impossible by post, so if you want to know what we are doing in your name, please let Bob know so that he can let you know ! His email address is [clyston@waitrose.com](mailto:clyston@waitrose.com).

## Website update

CPRE Devon's website is regularly updated. We make changes not only to reflect new developments but also to make it easier for people to locate the information they want.

There is much useful information on the website, so it's well worth a visit. Just go to [www.cpredevon.org.uk](http://www.cpredevon.org.uk)

## Contacting CPRE Devon

Full contact details are in the District Groups section of our website at [www.cpredevon.org.uk](http://www.cpredevon.org.uk) . This provides email addresses and phone numbers for our district group leaders and the branch officers. For those without internet access, phone numbers of district leads are given in the box below.

East Devon and Exeter	Tim Hale	01404 822213
Mid Devon	Julie Rudge	01363 877528
North Devon	Bob Barfoot	01398 341623
Plymouth & South Hams	Bob Harvey	01803 712662
Teignbridge	Vacancy	As Devon enquiries
Torbay	Carole Box	07770 623785
Torridge	Penny Riches Mills	01409 231636
West Devon	Martin Taylor	01822 840265
Devon - general enquiries	Marion Trotter (Secretary)	01395 597405

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