

Outlook

CPRE Northamptonshire News



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Issue 8 - Winter 2006

HAPPY NEW YEAR

I hope by now everyone has seen the updated website www.cprenorthants.org that our member Peter Hopkins and Alan Samples have worked so hard on. If you do not have access to a computer and would like to see the website please let me know.

CPRE Northants would like your help please – could you kindly take your copy of “Countryside Voice” (when read) and past copies of the Newsletter to your doctors/dentists’ surgery. Thank you. This will be a very good way of sharing CPRE information with others.

Sally Hanrahan
Development Officer

GOLDEN JUBILEE DESIGN AWARDS

Northamptonshire CPRE is sponsoring, for the first time, a countywide design award scheme to celebrate the Branch’s 50th year. Enclosed with this Newsletter is a nomination form. Could you please support this award scheme by letting us know what you consider would merit such an award.

Alan Mayes
CPRE Northamptonshire

HOW TO CONTACT NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Local CPRE office contact telephone number 01858 433136

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FARMERS’ MARKETS

... have provided this list of certified markets, the NAFM members selling produce within the recommended criteria.

BRACKLEY Location:

Market Place 3rd Saturday monthly
9.00am - 1.00pm

DAVENTRY Location:

High Street 1st Saturday monthly
9.00am - 1.30pm

HIGHAM FERRERS Location:

Market Square Last Sunday monthly
9.00am - 2.00pm

NORTHAMPTON Location:

The Market Square 3rd Thursday
monthly 9.00am - 1.30pm

OUNDLÉ Location:

The Market Square
2nd Saturday monthly
8.30pm - 1.30pm

TOWCESTER Location:

Richmond Road Car Park
2nd Friday monthly
9.00am - 1.30pm

WELLINGBOROUGH Location:

Market Place
Last Thursday monthly
9.00 - 1.30pm

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

All Northamptonshire CPRE events are open to both members and non-members. Please email or telephone Sue Baylis – HYPERLINK “mailto:Sue.Baylis@cprenorthants.org” Sue.Baylis@cprenorthants.org or 01858 433136 – for information on any events.

April 2006 - an update on Planning Roadshow – open to members and Parish Councils

May 2006 – An Evening at Lilford Hall – this will include a presentation/information on the house and the future proposals – gardens, etc. Should be a very interesting evening.

Saturday, 10 June 2006 – Garden Party in the gardens of Major Simon Cox – The Old Rectory Stable House, Farthinghoe – from 5.30 pm onwards.

July 2006 – Summer Ball – location to be confirmed later.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CPRE AGM

The Annual General Meeting of Northamptonshire Branch of the CPRE was held in Parsons Memorial Hall, Great Houghton, Northampton, on Monday 28th November 2005 at 3.00 pm. The following is a summary of the minutes. A full version is available on our website

HYPERLINK “<http://www.cprenorthants.org>” www.cprenorthants.org - Members’ section. Please follow the on-screen directions.

In the absence of Lady Juliet Townsend, Gayle Robinson took the Chair. 34 officers, members and visitors of the Branch were present.

Lady Robinson warmly welcomed everyone to the AGM, and advised that Lady Juliet wished us all well, but apologised for her absence due to ill health. Apologies were received from 29 members.

The Minutes of the previous AGM, held on 29th November 2004, were confirmed by Mrs Usher and seconded by Mr Davidge.

The following list of Elected Members were re-elected en bloc, proposed by Mr Wood and seconded by Mrs Baylis.

President	Lady Juliet Townsend
Vice President	Sheila Walker
Chairman	Gayle Robinson
Vice Chairman	Jeffrey Greenwell
Treasurer	David Watson
County Secretary	John Baylis
Technical Secretary	Peter Hopkins
Membership Secretary	Sue Baylis
Members	David Edsall
	Anne Usher
	Peter Pollak
	Bill Driver
	DavidHugheston-Roberts
Auditors	D Childs, Meadows and Co

Mr David Watson then presented the accounts for year ended 30th September 2005. He reported that the increase in income was due to increased share from National Office resulting from the higher membership numbers, and advised that the county directly benefits from the sale of raffle tickets as we receive a share of the proceeds. Fund raising events have again been very successful, thanks to the efforts of Sue Baylis and Sally Hanrahan. National Office has met Sally Hanrahan's salary for the whole of 2005, and this will continue into early 2006. Increased interest income is the result of having more money in the bank account, and of having switched the account to the Charities Aid Foundation.

Our future commitment to meet all of the Development Officer's costs means that income must continue to increase, and therefore more members are needed – a further 500 in addition to the current 636 would help enormously. We are unable to rest on our laurels, despite the current good financial position.

Lady Robinson thanked Mr Watson for his report, and for the good feeling of having money in the Bank.

Lady Robinson then gave her report (full copy on website) and said that the most important thing for her to do was to thank every volunteer that is working with us. Without them, there would be nothing. She particularly thanked Alan Mayes, who has recently retired as Chairman of the Technical Secretaries after 25 years, and thanked Peter Hopkins who has just taken on the role.

For the Regional Group, Mr Edsall added to his written report by stressing the importance to the county of the work of CPRE at the regional level. Policies locally must conform to legal requirements laid down regionally, and therefore by the time things are applied locally, it may be too late to object or make changes.

The Government is beginning to look at the re-organisation of Planning Authorities. Possible outcomes are unitary authorities, which may cover the whole of the county, to be an amalgamation of several districts. CPRE will therefore need to look at how it is organised to match any new arrangements. This will also be an area of interest to Parish Councils.

Lady Robinson then presented a long service medal to Mr David Edsall and thanked him for all his work on the technical side, at local, regional and national level.

Following the conclusion of the formal business, Lady Robinson introduced Roger Mendonça, Deputy Chief Executive of the West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC) to talk on 'West Northants 2021'

A copy of Mr Mendonça's PowerPoint presentation is available on HYPERLINK "http://www.cprenorthants.org" www.cprenorthants.org (3mB – we recommend for Broadband users only).

John Baylis
County Secretary

Putting the countryside back into transport policy

By Paul Hamblin, Head of Policy (Transport and Natural Resources, CPRE National Office)

Transport is rarely out of the headlines. The discussion is frequently on the inter-urban road or rail networks, congestion and big infrastructure. While important, CPRE believes many of the challenges facing the countryside are being overlooked.

A new briefing paper,

Putting the countryside back into transport policy, explains where action by Government and local authorities is needed to better protect the countryside from transport trends.

Road traffic: a growing problem

While Ministers focus their cites on our congested motorways, rural communities have been experiencing year on year increases in traffic levels too. With some notable exceptions this doesn't lead to standstill congestion. But rather like a sponge, the countryside has been absorbing more and more traffic. The growth on the minor rural road network has been much faster than that on our already clogged main urban roads. And it is a trend that the Government thinks will continue. Traffic is forecast to grow a further 30% between 2000-2010. The volume of traffic is of course much smaller, yet the character of an area - its sense of place, tranquillity, and accessibility for those on foot - can change markedly well before you hit bumper-to-bumper conditions. These more subtle effects are being overlooked.

Reclaiming rural roads

It doesn't take a lot to turn a quiet country lane into a rat-run for motorists, or for a village to lose its distinctiveness as lorries thunder through. There is nothing subtle here. Nor about statistics that reveal that 63% of fatalities from motoring collisions occur on rural roads. Important progress has been made in reducing the carnage on the roads overall, yet fatalities actually went up on rural roads each year between 1999-2003.

Government is putting fuel on the fire

Government plans for road building and massive new housing development threaten to damage beautiful areas of countryside. But they also risk fuelling the growth in traffic, to such an extent that the Highways Agency has been expressing concern over the implications of house-building plans for the Trunk Road Network. Meanwhile Government proposals for massive airport expansion threaten the tranquillity of the countryside from overhead.

Managing traffic needs to be sensitive to the countryside

The rising volume of traffic on rural roads needs managing. We have seen the steady accumulation of road signs, markings and other street furniture. Each no doubt introduced with the best of intentions, such clutter can urbanise the character of the countryside. So we need mechanisms to remove lines and signs, which are no longer necessary, and ensure the design of new measures are sensitive to the character of the surrounding countryside.

And we need to invest in alternatives

For some there will be no alternative to the car in rural areas. However, 18% of rural households do not own a car. For them public transport can be a lifeline. But at a time of concern over climate change and rising fuel prices, it can also reduce car dependency. Some areas have seen welcome improvements in transport provision, especially in relation to so-called 'demand responsive services'. But many rural public transport schemes are suffering the effects of uncertainty caused by insecure funding arrangements. And recent Ministerial comments on the need to look again at rural branch railways lines to consider their value for money has also created anxiety.

Putting these issues on the agenda

If Government is to respond to the many challenges facing the countryside, there should be a high level forum to drive through policies that will do this. The silence from DfT on these matters at present is deafening. It's high time the countryside was placed firmly on the radar of Minister's priorities.

The full briefing, *Putting the countryside back into transport policy*, is available from CPRE's national publications team and from the CPRE national website.

Planning for Renewable Energy: making the system more democratic

By Paul Hamblin, Head of Policy (CPRE National Office)

Proposals for wind farms are mushrooming

The Government has established a target of generating 10% of electricity by renewable energy by 2010, 15.4% by 2015/16 and 20% by 2020. This is part of a wider strategy for tackling climate change. CPRE supports the need for urgent action to tackle climate change, and sees an important role for renewable energy in this regard. But we have been highly critical of the way in which the Government has looked to onshore wind, almost exclusively, to meet its 2010 target. This has contributed towards an explosion in the number of applications for onshore wind development across the country with damaging consequences for the landscape. And the trend is for these developments to be bigger and bigger. According to the latest survey by the British Wind Energy Association (BWEA), there are currently 46 onshore wind farms built in England, five are under construction, and another 32 have been agreed but yet to be built. Applications for a further 42 wind farms are in the pipeline comprising a total of 728 turbines. And yet in 2004, renewables accounted for 3.4% of electricity generation in the UK. While up on the 2.7% achieved in 2003 it falls far short of what would be

needed to hit Government targets. The Government has said it expects wind to largely fill the gap, and that between 2-4,000 additional turbines would be needed.

How applications for renewable energy are considered

Onshore wind farms, like most other forms of development, are usually considered through the land use, or spatial planning process. An application is made and considered by the Local Planning Authority, which is made up of locally elected Councillors. In making their decisions they are guided by the policies in the Development Plan, and other material considerations. Other material considerations include Government policy documents, such as on energy policy, countryside protection and sustainable development. CPRE believes that it is only through the spatial planning process that a proper overview of the issues surrounding a particular proposal can be established, and all the relevant factors taken into account. However, different rules apply to larger wind farm proposals. Most wind turbines generate approximately 2 Megawatts of electricity (2MW). Under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, projects with an output of 50MW or more escape the need for proper scrutiny through the normal planning processes. Instead such proposals are subject to decision by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Unlike with Local Planning Authorities, there is no deadline by which the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is expected to make a decision. However, should a LPA object to an application for an onshore wind farm to the Secretary of State within four months of the application being submitted, then a public inquiry is automatically required. Currently there are five major proposals for onshore wind farms, which fall under Section 36 of the Act. These are detailed below.

Site Size (MW) Application made Status
Little Cheyne Court, Romney Marsh 78 15 November 2002 Approved on 18 October 2005 (Kent)
Whinash (Cumbria) 67.5 29 September 2003 Public Inquiry closed June 2005.
Inspector's report awaited
Keadby (North Lincolnshire) 78 24 October 2003 Public Inquiry to be arranged
Tween Bridge (North Lincolnshire) 84 5 January 2004 Public Inquiry to be arranged
Fullbrook Down (North Devon) 66 21 September 2004 Public Inquiry to be arranged

There is a democratic deficit with the current approach

CPRE believes the anomaly in the Electricity Act 1989 which enables applications for large scale renewables development to be determined by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (effectively the DTI), rather than through the planning process should be tackled. The current approach results in a serious democratic deficit. There are a number of particular problems, including:

The DTI is the same department taking lead delivering on the Government's renewables target. It also has officials tasked specifically with overcoming what is perceived as the 'barrier' posed by the planning system. The danger of a conflict of interest is plain. Planning Authorities can intervene in the process and trigger the need for a public inquiry they can be deterred by the costs of taking such action. Such decisions therefore can be influenced by the availability of funds, rather than on an impartial assessment of planning considerations. As the table testifies, there is no guarantee of obtaining a quicker decision on an application by circumventing the normal planning processes.

Planning is not an obstacle

Planning has come under considerable criticism for stopping new renewable energy developments. According to the DTI, about a third of planning applications are refused. The Government's Performance and Innovation Unit review of Energy identified land use planning as an obstacle. This was echoed in the Government's Energy White Paper, published in February 2003. It said, 'many of those who responded to the White Paper consultation saw planning as one of the big obstacles to new renewables. We recognise that this is a serious problem for renewables' (paragraph 4.30). Of course, many who will have responded will have been developers, keen to make things easier for their developments to get approved. We refute the criticisms of planning, and have won backing for our arguments. 'CPRE objected to the assertion in the White Paper that planning was "one of the big obstacles" to renewables, arguing that planning should be seen as "a key mechanism" in getting the "right renewables in the right places". We agree.' House of Lords Science and Technology Committee Report, Renewable Energy: Practicalities, 2004. Industry bodies promoting wind developments and the DTI itself frequently highlight how records are being broken for the amount of new renewables capacity that is being approved. CPRE believes it is simplistic to judge the success of a policy simply on the basis of the number of projects that are approved. To do so ignores the environmental constraints of different areas, the degree of sensitivity shown in the design of proposals, and the approaches taken by Local Planning Authorities. The key is to ensure we have a robust system for planning for new renewables development that encourages development by guiding it to the least environmentally sensitive areas, and stopping inappropriate schemes.

What do we want to see?

CPRE believes the current arrangements are an anomaly, which should be rectified. The Government is highly unlikely to repeal Section 36 of the Electricity Act altogether. The legislation was first passed to enable Ministers to consider projects that were of 'strategic' significance. New power stations, for example, would fit into this category. As projects for renewables have grown in size and number, however, this distinction is becoming blurred. The reason for this is that onshore wind projects suffer from being intermittent. Onshore wind turbines operate to full capacity for about 30% of the time. The effect of this intermittency is to mean that an onshore wind farm of 50MW of 'installed capacity' is likely to have a continuous output of only around 15MW. Because the trigger for Section 36 of the Act is 50MW of 'installed capacity' this means that it captures more renewable energy projects, even though their actual output is much lower. CPRE wants the Electricity Act 1989 amended so that only onshore wind projects above 200MW of installed capacity should be considered by the DTI.

How you can help?

We want to send a strong message to Government that it is unacceptable that the planning process is sidelined by the current legislation when it comes to major projects. Most MPs, if asked, will talk of the need for local communities to have their say. We are asking them to honour that sentiment and to support our call for changes to the Electricity Act 1989. An Early Day Motion (EDM) has been tabled by a number of MPs and has attracted cross party support. We want as many MPs as possible to express their support for our campaign by signing up to this. You can help by writing to your MP and encouraging them to sign EDM 1031 Planning and Renewable Energy today.

The Early Day Motion

Early Day Motions (EDMs) are a method for MPs to express their collective concern over an issue. The EDM is tabled by

an MP, and it is then circulated in the papers which the MPs receive every day from the House of Commons. If, upon reading the EDM, an MP wishes to express their support for it, they can add their name. Every time an MP adds their name, the text of the EDM is circulated again. A list of all the MPs who have supported it is available on the House of Commons website. Government Ministers are not, by convention, able to sign EDMs. EDMs are a good way for the Government to gauge the level of support for an issue. It is critical, therefore, that as many MPs as possible sign up. Please write to your MP and urge them to support the campaign to put democracy back into planning for wind by signing EDM 1031. At the same time, it would be useful to enquire on their views on the matter. Many MPs have already expressed their support for wind power, and it is important to stress that this campaign seeks to improve the method by which proposals are scrutinised, and communities involved, rather than the benefits and drawbacks of this particular technology. It would be helpful if you could send any responses received to CPRE national office. If you need to know who your MP is, you can find out by going to <http://www.locata.co.uk/commons/> If you would like to know whether your MP has signed EDM 1031, go to the House of Commons website: <http://edmi.parliament.uk/edmi/> which has a comprehensive database of who has signed.

Thank you for your time and support. We hope that through this campaign we will improve the way in which renewable energy projects are considered. The threat of climate change becomes ever greater. Well-planned, sensitively designed renewable energy projects will be an important part of the mix of responses needed. And ensuring the planning process plays a prominent role will be key.

Early Day Motion 1031 Planning and Renewable Energy

'That this house acknowledges that climate change is a significant threat which must be tackled; recognises that reducing energy consumption is the most sustainable response to climate change; believes that a broad range of renewable technologies have an important role to play in a low carbon economy; supports the need for effective community involvement in considering renewable energy projects; notes that the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee Report on the Practicalities of Renewables concluded that planning should not be seen as an obstacle to new renewables development; recognises that the land use planning process plays a vital role in ensuring projects are planned sensitively and community concerns addressed; expresses concern that under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 decisions over renewable energy projects over 50 Megawatts are taken outside of the planning process; and calls for amendments to the Act to address this democratic deficit by ensuring only onshore wind projects above 200 Megawatts that are of a genuinely strategic nature are considered in this way.'

Ten areas CPRE believes transport policy needs to address

1. Rising traffic levels in the countryside
2. Uncertainty over future funding of rural public transport
3. The vulnerability of rural railways to closure
4. Tackling roadside clutter
5. New road building damaging important landscapes
6. Managing traffic in ways that don't divert traffic onto minor rural roads
7. Reviewing housing plans that threaten to generate lots more traffic
8. Making rural roads safer for everyone
9. Improving how transport policy reflects the diversity of the countryside
10. Reviewing the Government's airport expansion plans