



OUR FORESTS SAVED!

On Sunday 13th February I went on a "Demo" - my first for at least 30 years. It was at Chopwell Wood near Gateshead and was a protest against the forest sell-off. There were several hundred people there, which reflected the concern you have all been demonstrating – I have received more emails from CPRE members about this than on anything else in my five years as your Regional Chairman – including my first from Lord Joicey.. Anyway, just before we went to Press it was announced that at the Prime Minister's instruction, Caroline Spelman has abandoned the whole idea!

I wrote to around a dozen MPs. Five replied – four Labour and one Liberal Democratic. All of them expressed serious concern about the enabling clause in the Public Bodies Bill that will permit the sale of publicly owned assets "without any guarantees about how the land is managed", which gave an impression of dishonesty because it negated all Caroline Spelman's assurances about 'preserving our rights of use and access of our public forests. Her intentions may have been honourable but if she is replaced in a reshuffle by a hard line Right-winger, this clause meant that there can be no guarantee that the forests will not be sold off to the highest bidder, whoever they may be and whatever they intend to do with them. This clause has now been withdrawn. I did not receive a reply from Guy Opperman, the Tory MP for Hexham but he abstained in the recent vote on the subject. Chi Onwurah MP tabled a Question about the fate of Kielder Forest and got limited assurances about the future of this "predominantly commercial" (the Minister's description) forest..Lord Liddle of Carlisle, a Cumbrian and an old friend, firmly supported our campaign too.

This change of heart was the result of a remarkable campaign on a variety of fronts, including the national petition organised by www.38degrees.org.uk which gathered over half a million signatures. All concerned, including

ourselves in CPRE. Can be proud of having won a notable victory.

Someone recently suggested that this might be the Coalition Government's Poll Tax but they saw sense before it could drag them down!

Howard Elcock - Regional Chair

Whither or wither the North East?

The dismantling of regional structures continues apace. Govt Office NE disappears at the end of March ('11) and One NorthEast (ONE) in March '12. And the main reason why ONE is surviving so long is so that its assets and liabilities can be transferred appropriately. Meanwhile Government has approved the formation of two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), one covering the five Tees Valley local authorities, under the auspices of Tees Valley Unlimited (formerly Tees Valley Joint Structure Unit). Personally, I'd like to see CPRE Durham working with CPRE North Yorkshire to keep an eye on the Tees Valley LEP. The other, the North Eastern LEP (sic), covers the seven local authorities of Co Durham, Tyne & Wear and Northumberland. Details are sketchy, but LEPs generally are concerned with promoting economic growth and will take an interest in planning, transport and housing – maybe with particular powers – from that point of view. The Association of North East Councils (ANEC) continues and is hosting the newly formed North East Economic Partnership.

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) will disappear when the Localism and Decentralisation Bill is enacted, so we need to ensure that the 'best bits' make their way into emerging LDFs. Co Durham has produced a veritable logorrhoea of LDF consultations since the Autumn, and we are expecting eight of our twelve local authorities to consult of LDF Core Strategies in 2011. The joint Newcastle-Gateshead consultation is already underway.

CPRE is responding to this change in emphasis, with my job changing from Regional Policy Officer (RPO)

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CPRE, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, is a charity which exists to promote the beauty, tranquility and diversity of rural England. We advocate positive solutions for the long-term future of the countryside. Founded in 1926, we have 60,000 supporters and a branch in every county. Patron: Her Majesty The Queen. President: Bill Bryson.

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Diary Dates

Mar 21	Big Meeting Newcastle
Apr 12	RGQM Durham
Apr 19	CPRE Northumberland
May 31	CPRE Northumberland
Jul 12	RGQM Newcastle
Jul 19	AGM Northumberland
Sep 6	CPRE Northumberland
Oct 11	RGQM Durham
Oct 18	CPRE Northumberland
Oct 24	Big Meeting Newcastle
Dec 6	CPRE Northumberland

Northumberland Branch

St Osyth - Unable To Enable Facilitation

Several months ago, I came across an article which concerned a part of the world in which I spent many months working. It is a most picturesque place, surrounded by agricultural land, but situated close to many holiday parks. Many of these parks are built on land reclaimed from the North Sea.

The result of this holiday activity is an increase to the population of six hundred percent for a large part of the year. The centre of St Osyth village is, as I remember it, quite fragile in infrastructure terms and probably just about coping with such an increase to the indigenous headcount.

The purpose of the article was to highlight the SOS [Save Our St Osyth] village campaign, against a property-development company proposal to build a large number of new homes on the outskirts of the village. The company, which specialises in converting listed buildings, bought St Osyth Priory Estate at the turn of the century. The purchase was made by the family who are the majority shareholders in the company [City & Country].

The first application, to build nine hundred new homes on the outskirts of the medieval village, was rejected in 2004. In 2009, a new application was made to build one hundred and ninety new homes, this time within the grounds of the 380-acre estate. Although the proposal has been scaled back since, it is the use of the clause in planning law of "Enabling Development" which sends a clear message as to the possible outcome of many such schemes throughout the country.

The agreement between, in this case English Heritage, and the developer, requires a certain amount of the profit to be spent on the Priory, which is on the Buildings at Risk register. However, the developer is not required to provide any infrastructure improvements under a Section 106 agreement with the District Council. Therein lies a guaranteed twenty percent profit to the developer, the rest of the proceeds being spent, in this case, on the Priory. Needless to say, there are another two hundred new homes planned for another part of the estate.

Of course, planning consent will be needed for these proposals, and a further condition of the law requires the property to be put back on the market to allow another individual to secure the future of the "Building at Risk". However, the owner does not have to accept any offer, and it is a requirement of English Heritage, in this instance, to decide on rescission of enabling development concessions if any proposals are deemed unacceptable.

The question is this: If ancient buildings are crumbling into decay, what pressures are placed upon public bodies to agree to proposals that are not necessarily in the local public interest. Looking at

ancient sites and estates throughout the country, fortunately, or unfortunately, as the case may be, Northumberland has a large amount. We need to be on our guard, especially when the larger development companies start to show an unhealthy interest in conservation!

The SOS campaign mirrors that of many community organisations faced with large-scale disruption, and the questions asked of *Localism* are not only, whether or not, mutual agreement between indigenous residents and developers can be implemented. In this case it is about hard-pressed taxpayers having to fund infrastructure improvements that they did not want in the first place.

Phil Bell - Acting Chair CPRE Northumberland

CPRE - Dark Skies Campaign

During the week commencing 31st January 2011 the members will be aware that CPRE were asking members of the public to take part in our "Star Count" exercise. Hopefully the results will have been useful to National Office and the British Astronomical Association, who are responsible for the collection and interpretation of the data.

I took part in two live radio broadcasts, for Radios Newcastle and Tees, plus two recorded broadcasts for Radio Tees and Look North, who did a feature on "Star Count" for their weather slot hosted by Hannah Bayman. Hannah is a most intrepid reporter, who did the filming and recording whilst, at the same time, conducting the interview.

I feel that we must pass on CPRE's thanks to all the radio and television staff at the BBC for their kind interest in the "Star Count" week, and hope that they will take a keen interest in our future campaigns.

One thing which I learned from researching the issues of light pollution, is that some councils are switching over to the use of "White Light" systems for road and street lighting. South Tyneside Council appear to be leading the country, by using Cosmopolis to replace all their street lights. It is clearer, brighter, and easier to direct on to the ground where it is needed. Because of these advantages, the spacing of lights, further apart, provides a substantial saving of money to the lighting budget.

In the Tyneside and Northumberland conurbations, I'm sure there could be substantial savings made using this system, whilst, at the same time, preserving the darkness that is so essential for nocturnal animals, including astronomers!

Phil Bell Acting-Chair CPRE Northumberland

Northumberland AGM

We would like to let all members know that the AGM will be held on Tuesday 19 July 2011. The venue has yet to be confirmed but further details will be in the next issue of Overview.

Durham Branch

C.P.R.E. Co Durham Branch

There was time for reflection when the Co Durham Branch had its 2010 AGM recently. The year felt dominated by Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). These sets of documents published by local authorities are the planning policy used when deciding planning applications. To develop them the Councils issue consultation documents and submitting comment is one of the positive parts of our work. It gives the opportunity to influence Councils, though it can be time consuming. In 2010 we considered 36 documents, culminating with Durham County Council issuing 7 documents (4 more than 100 pages long) at one time in mid December! Of especial interest were the documents relating to green belt which gave great cause for concern. In general though the documents viewed from both Durham and other authorities in the historic Durham area were positive and contained the sorts of policies C.P.R.E. wishes to see, which is heartening. Of note was how many mentioned and used the concept of tranquillity as a factor in policy.

Needless to say wind farms were also an important part of our work, though more of a waiting game this year. The various sub groups around the county are each monitoring and responding to proposals in their area so when anything comes along they are ready to go.

Financially this has been a year of challenges. A falling membership meant falling income, a situation common to many charities and it has taken careful husbanding of resources to keep the Branch in the black. There was work done on fundraising and increasing membership with a particularly inspiring meeting led by Lucy Stirling on 11th February 2010. Various initiatives were explored, resulting in particular in a collaboration with regional magazine *Informnorth* which donated valuable advertising space and an number of excellent posters. Another useful initiative was an A5 Branch promotional leaflet many members distributed to houses in their localities, copies are still available if anyone would like some.

With regard to litter it was again a year of consolidation and development with LitterFree Durham working in particular in the schools and with various local authorities. This was always going to be a long term project, but there is a sense a difference is being made. With support given to both groups and individuals who litter pick in their area there are many places much cleaner than they once were. For more information see our website where there is information and a fact sheet.

The Co Durham Branch website (www.cpredurham.org.uk) continues to be a great asset and we are particularly proud of the food database which can be searched by farms, manufacturers, restaurants and cafes, retailers and

wholesalers, plus by using the interactive maps. In addition there was a national C.P.R.E. project investigating food webs and in the North East Hexham and Darlington were the 2 places researched. Those who helped with the interviews found it gave a great insight into how inter-related the food business is. The results have now gone to CPRE National Office and we are looking forward to seeing the final report.

Overall a positive year we decided, and a sound base for 2011.

Durham Green Belt Under Threat

Publication of 2 consultation documents as part of developing "The County Durham Plan" lead us to believe Durham County Council has no commitment to Green Belt.

One, the "North West Durham Green Belt", gives, in our opinion, all the reasons for designating a green belt in the North West of the County, but then recommends that none is designated.

In the other, "Durham City Green Belt Assessment Phase 2", a number of sites are assessed for development. True it recommends 4 sites do not go forward to the next stage, but 5 sites are to be assessed further.

We find it incomprehensible that sites within the Green Belt should be under any consideration for development and have made our views known to Durham County Council.

It's now a waiting game. The revised "Core Strategy" is due out in the summer and we need to see what is in it. If there are plans to change the green belt boundaries we need to be ready. At the moment the sites most likely to be involved are:

- Site 1** Sniperley (all parts)
- Site 2** North of the Arnison Centre and Newton Hall (parts i, ii, iii)
- Site 5** Sherburn Grange, south of Belmont (part i)
- Site 6** South of Sherburn Road
- Site 7** Merryoaks and Mount Oswald (all parts)

If you would like to be kept informed of what is happening e-mail:

cpre_durham_green_belt@yahoo.co.uk. There will be an initial check the e-mail with some information, then occasional updates. The value will be when something happens there will be a network of contacts who can be mobilised to defend the Green Belt if necessary.

Gillan Gibson - Co Durham Branch Secretary



INTERNATIONAL
YEAR OF
FORESTS
2011

Senior Policy & Campaigns Officers (SPCO). About half my time will be committed to significant planning applications and local planning responses and the other half to sub-regional and cross-boundary structures and policy – with a little time available to help with branch development. So do feel free to ask (or continue to ask) me for help.

Nic Best - RPO (soon to be SCPO North East)

Making Localism Work for Rural Communities

The long awaited Localism Bill was presented to Parliament on 13 December and had its Second Reading in mid January. Following months of speeches and press initiatives by Ministers about how they would reform the planning system part 5 of the Bill, which implement the changes, held few real surprises.

Neighbourhood Planning

The Government sees the creation of neighbourhood plans as a key part of their Big Society agenda. The Bill enables communities, either through parish councils where they exist or new neighbourhood fora, to develop neighbourhood plans or neighbourhood development orders. Where these plans receive sufficient support through a local referendum they will become part of the local development plan.

CPRE welcomes the Government's aspiration to get more people involved in planning and their intention to give more weight to the views of communities through neighbourhood plans. There is a need for clarity, however, about what will be able to be decided at the neighbourhood level. The Bill requires neighbourhood plans to be in line with the strategic elements of local plans. Neighbourhood plans will not, therefore, be able to rule out development that is included in the local plan or set lower housing targets. The Government has also been very clear that it is 'pro-growth' and neighbourhood plans should not be seen as a tool to prevent this.

This means that local plans will remain an important focus for CPRE branches that want to influence the future of their area.

Community Right of Appeal

One of the biggest disappointments for CPRE was the lack of a limited community right of appeal in the Bill. We see this as an essential safeguard to ensure that the appeals process is fair and no longer skewed towards business interests. We also believe that if the

reforms really are to empower local communities the legislation should grant them a right of appeal where a local authority approves a planning application that is not in line with the local or neighbourhood plan.

In order to truly rebalance the appeals system we would also like to see the grounds on which developers can launch an appeal. This should be limited to cases where an application that is in line with the local or neighbourhood plan is refused.

As part of our lobbying to encourage Ministers to include a limited community right of appeal in the Localism Bill please consider raising the issue with your local MP.

Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

Perhaps one of the only surprises in the Bill was that it did not include the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' that was referred to in the Coalition Agreement. Instead it will be a central part of the new national planning policy framework. We are yet to see a draft of the framework.

When the presumption was first set out in the Conservative Green Paper we were concerned that it was seen as a policy to enable a 'major upswing in development and construction'. CPRE is pleased, therefore, that such a presumption, one that would simply aim to encourage growth regardless of the environmental consequences, was not included in the Localism Bill.

Through our work on the national planning policy framework we will be aiming to ensure the presumption does not undermine the plan-led approach. We believe it should be, therefore, a presumption in favour of sustainable development that is in line with the development plan. The development plan would include local and neighbourhood plans, where these exist. If the presumption is to promote development, regardless of the policies of the development plan, this would make community involvement in the local planning system and future neighbourhood plans largely irrelevant.

Further information

For a more detailed overview of CPRE's position please download a copy of Second Reading briefing at: <http://www.cpre.org.uk/filegrab/localism-bill-house-of-commons-second-reading-cpre-briefing.pdf?ref=4598>.

Fiona Howie

Please note - New Contact Number for Northumberland Branch is 07852 133 838

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