



# CPRE's policy on planning

## CPRE's position

**Good land-use planning is the unsung hero of environmental protection. It can encourage urban regeneration, curb urban sprawl, help slow the growth in road traffic, protect the beauty and tranquillity of the countryside and safeguard wildlife habitats. Effective planning is more important now than ever before with economic pressures and a growing population leading to more development intruding into the countryside. Precious Green Belt land is being eaten away despite a Government commitment to protect it. Proposed new legislation concerning the planning for major infrastructure projects presents a serious challenge to the integrity of the planning system.**

## Key planning issues

The Government is promoting the biggest shake-up of planning law for 60 years in the shape of the Planning Bill. This raises urgent concerns. The Bill aims to 'rebalance' the planning system in favour of economic development when the need for environmental protection has never been greater. Major infrastructure projects (such as motorways, power stations and airports) would in future be decided at a national level by a new Planning Commission, eroding community engagement, democratic accountability and proper environmental scrutiny. Also, the proposed removal of the 'needs test' (which requires developers of out of town supermarkets to demonstrate a need for the development) threatens the viability and vitality of our town centres.

## Key planning issues for the countryside

In the 1960s, nearly three-quarters of England was undisturbed by development. Today, urban sprawl, roads, industry and infrastructure intrude across more than half of the country. Planning has a vital role to play in halting the loss of undisturbed countryside and protecting the fragile beauty of our rural landscapes. Good planning can also protect wildlife and safeguard the diversity and distinctiveness of rural settlements. We need to extend and improve our Green Belts, which cover around 13% of England and which for over 50 years have checked urban sprawl and helped regenerate our towns and cities by encouraging investment in neglected urban areas. Recently more than 800 hectares of Green Belt land has been lost each year to development.

## What CPRE wants

- No presumption in favour of economic development: Legislation for major infrastructure should promote sustainable development and allow local communities an effective voice.
- Any new Infrastructure Planning Commission must be democratically accountable: It should have an investigative role only with final decisions taken by Ministers.
- Permanent and meaningful commitment to the Green Belt. Reviews of Green Belt boundaries should only take place in exceptional circumstances and as a last resort.
- New legislation to prevent land banking – the speculative selling off of small portions of land, often in the Green Belt, to investors, often overseas.
- The 'needs test' for retail development to be retained and strengthened to safeguard our town centres.
- Planning to be used as an environmental tool to protect and enhance landscape character and promote biodiversity.
- Effective public and community participation in local plan-making.

## What people can do

1. Write to their MP outlining concerns about the Planning Bill. The CPRE website contains links to sample letters from the Planning Disaster campaign.
2. Take a photo of their favourite Green Belt spot and email it to [campaigns@cpre.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@cpre.org.uk), explaining why it's important to them.