



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

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For immediate release

Could the volcanic clouds have a silver lining?

Despite transport chaos and disruption to travel plans endured by thousands of people, some good could yet come from the Icelandic volcano, , Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) said today, as it called for consideration to be given to planning an annual 'National Quiet Day' .

With most aircraft grounded, people from across the country contacted CPRE to tell us they are enjoying their first bit of peace and quiet in years. The ability to experience tranquillity in urban and rural areas is important to our quality of life. We need to learn lessons from the last week and explore the options for more resilient and quieter ways of getting about.

Graeme Willis, Senior Rural Policy Campaigner at CPRE, says: "The cloud of ash from Iceland's Mount Eyjafjallajokull has left many families stranded and businesses badly affected. Clearly it has been bad news for people whose holidays and travel plans have been disrupted through no fault of their own.

"But this disaster has also revealed to many what they've been missing: overnight the skies were stripped of the sight and sound of aeroplanes, and without the rumble and drone of aircraft people are reporting they can hear the simple sounds of the countryside once more."

As CPRE's tranquillity maps show [1], peace and quiet can be hard to find in modern Britain. For decades tranquillity has been eroded by urban growth, new roads and other infrastructure, and increases in road and air traffic. Yet, tranquillity is important for everyone – for our hearts, minds and bodies. We all need to 'get away from it all' every now and then.

Tranquil areas are a vital resource in a crowded, heavily built-up country. They allow us to escape the noise and stress of cities, towns and suburbs, to be inspired and get refreshed.

For a few days, the volume of our modern mobile lives has been turned down. In tranquillity terms, we estimate that for a while some areas around Heathrow may have been as tranquil as parts of the Norfolk Broads and the Green Belt of Newcastle on a par with the Peak District [2]. This may be a glimpse of what we could aspire to if government were to take tranquillity and its benefits to our lives more seriously (3).

Graeme Willis said: “It’s vital that we learn from this experience to promote a greener, serener approach to the way we do business and travel in future. We need easier access to affordable alternatives for people who need and want to travel, but in ways that minimise the noise and damage for the rest of us.”

One option is to target investment towards greener and more resilient forms of travel such as High Speed Rail. This could contribute to measures to provide better protection for our dwindling tranquil spaces, and to reduce the impact of flights above our most precious landscapes – such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Graeme Willis concluded: “Perhaps the time is right to consider a ‘National Quiet Day’ to remind us all -for one day at least - of what we are all losing in our rush to be somewhere else. A planned approach to making all of our lives a little quieter and more tranquil could deliver some of the benefits of the last few days without the difficulties endured by so many people.”

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. We have developed a method of mapping tranquil areas which builds on our previous work. This methodology takes into account people's experiences of the countryside and what qualities contribute to a feeling of tranquility. It also looks at what factors detract from tranquility — intrusive noise, structures and traffic are key themes. The resulting tranquility maps can be used as an important indicator in helping to protect the countryside. <http://www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns/landscape/tranquillity>

2. Comparisons of the ‘sample places’ with ‘equivalent to’ places compare the tranquillity of the former without any flights vs the latter with normal (mostly high altitude) flights.

3. Earlier this month CPRE, Environmental Protection UK and other organisations called on the European Commission to prioritise the review of the Environmental Noise Directive (2002/49/EC) to secure more effective action by governments across Europe to tackle noise pollution. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published Noise Action Plans for agglomerations (large urban areas), major roads and major railways in March this year but has yet to publish Airport Noise Action Plans as required by the Directive.

· CPRE, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, is a charity which promotes the beauty, tranquillity 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. President: Bill Bryson. Patron: Her Majesty The Queen. www.cpre.org.uk