



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

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Embargoed: 00:01 Wednesday 26 May 2010

Six point challenge to the Government to achieve CPRE's 'Vision for the Countryside'

To coincide with the Queen's Speech, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) today (Wednesday) issues a six point challenge to Government to deliver for the countryside.

CPRE's Vision for the Countryside in 2026 sets out a path to the beautiful and living countryside we want to see in our centenary year [1]. For this positive vision to be achieved, the direction needs to be set during this Parliament, starting with the Queen's Speech.

CPRE will be looking for the Government to address challenges the following in six areas:

Housing: the Government is committed to building more housing and has proposed radical changes to the way housing is delivered. CPRE agrees both that the country needs to increase the supply of housing and that local people need more say in how it is delivered. But the Government must ensure that the provision of necessary new housing avoids damaging the countryside or undermining national objectives such as Green Belt protection. There also needs to be a strong emphasis on providing affordable rural housing, not just more market housing which will be beyond the reach of those most in need.

Twenty-first century planning: the Government has committed to a thorough overhaul of the planning system, including the abolition of the Infrastructure Planning Commission and regional planning. The Government's plans to localise the planning system are genuinely exciting. But while localising power is welcome, we also need a planning system that will deliver national environmental objectives such as tackling climate change, protecting the countryside from intrusive development and making better use of previously developed 'brownfield' land. Without a strong and environmentally-led planning system, the Government's aspirations for landscape and habitat restoration will be difficult to achieve.

Protecting the natural environment: the coalition's commitment to delivering a Nature White Paper is welcomed and should be used to promote the value of the natural environment to our quality of life. CPRE also wants a strong commitment to protecting National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty from damaging development. These protected areas can be the

foundation for a new approach to improving the protection of the wider countryside. For example, Ministers should not allow proposals by National Grid for thousands of new 50 metre high electricity pylons in some of our most valued rural landscapes.

Green transport: stopping the third runway at Heathrow and refusing additional runways at Gatwick and Stansted will help safeguard the tranquillity of many rural areas. The Government needs now to make clear its position on airport expansion elsewhere. Ministers should commit themselves to serious local consultation in carrying forward proposals for the new high speed rail line in order to avoid unnecessary damage to the countryside. CPRE also wants more done to promote walking and cycling by lowering speed limits on rural roads.

Promoting urban renewal: there has been substantial progress in regenerating urban areas over the last decade. Control of urban sprawl has contributed to this. In opposition the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have been strong advocates of Green Belt protection and we hope this is maintained in Government. CPRE will follow closely how proposed changes to planning and housing policy will affect pressures on the Green Belt. CPRE also wants the coalition to embrace a policy of medium and higher density development of a high environmental and design quality. This will benefit both town and countryside.

Farming: the new Government has started discussions both in Europe and at home about the future of farming. We are encouraged that both coalition parties support a farmed landscape that is beautiful, distinctive and rich in wildlife. But we need assurances that deregulation will not result in farming and land management practices that damage our countryside and cost taxpayers a great deal to put right.

Shaun Spiers, CPRE's Chief Executive, said: "It is encouraging that the coalition Government has shown such a strong commitment to the environment. This does not just mean tackling climate change, important though that is. We also want to see effective action to safeguard the nation's countryside and other green space; to deliver the right kind of housing in the right places; and to improve the quality of our countryside, both our iconic landscapes and the 'ordinary' countryside that means so much to people.

"We believe that our countryside can become even beautiful than it is now, richer in wildlife and used and valued by more people. But to achieve that, the Government will have to give a strong lead. By meeting these six challenges they will be starting out on the right path."

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. CPRE launched *2026 - A Vision for the Countryside* in May 2009, setting out a positive and optimistic vision for the future of the beautiful English countryside in 2026, the charity's centenary year. The *Vision's* key issues include: affordable, high quality housing; urban regeneration; Green Belts; better planning; green energy; local food and farming; quality of life; light pollution and valuing the countryside as a national asset. For further information go to www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns/environment/2026-a-vision-for-the-countryside.

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