



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England  
South East

## CPRE South East eBulletin

January 2012

### “Did you fight to save this England?”

*Just a month ago I was half heartedly lamenting the lack of protest songs. To everyone's surprise, a good old fashioned protest song reached number 4 in the HMV download charts over Christmas. Its subject? High Speed 2, with the chorus: “Did you fight to save this England? Did you stop the HS2?”*



*Whether the HS2 project can be stopped - and not all environmentalists think that it should be - we will learn later this month when Justine Greening announces her decision. The very fact that the announcement has been delayed to consider a longer tunnel under the Chilterns suggests that approval remains odds on.*

*There are, in my book, only two rules in campaigning. To win the current battle and, win or lose, to be fitter for the next one. There is no doubt that planning and environmental campaigners are fitter after 2011. Protests reached record levels, and for the first time hundreds of thousands of people protested about changes to arcane planning policy. The use of social media in campaigning, largely pioneered during the climate change COP15 negotiations two years ago, has also come into its own. To take just one example, the Independent Panel on Forestry received nearly 35,000 responses through the 38 Degrees website alone.*

*The challenge now is to keep this level of campaigning going and to treat the efforts of 2011 not just as win or lose campaigns, but as an investment for environmental campaigning. Whatever the results of the NPPF battle, HS2 and a myriad of local campaigns, we will need to be stronger to win future battles in a planning system that will inevitably be tipped against the environment.*

*The rallying call of Dirty Mavis - “Did you fight to save this England?” - is a rallying call for protestors everywhere. Welcome back to the protest song!*

*You can hear ‘The Oak Tree Lament’ by Buckinghamshire band Dirty Mavis here (<http://dirtymavis.co.uk/>); see also: <http://bit.ly/ugVPjA> for the full story).*

## National Planning Policy Framework

**A welcome report.** Campaigners cheered as the Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee called for ‘significant changes’ to the draft NPPF. In a report published just before Christmas the committee defined planning as: “a balancing act, which requires consideration of the preservation, use and development of land for this and future generations, within the context of agreed social, environmental and economic needs” (Report: <http://bit.ly/tyiEp8>; PDF: <http://bit.ly/vMgA0e>). The report said new development should be guided by the principles of “brownfield first” and “town centre first” but fails to recommend an explicit commitment to protecting undesignated countryside.

**Sustainable development.** The committee criticised the draft NPPF, which “conflates the term ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainable economic growth’, thereby making the document unbalanced”. It said that there is “no conclusive research that planning policy is a particular constraint on economic development”. It calls for a stronger definition of sustainable development and provides a provisional text:

*“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of existing communities and future generations to meet their own needs. It is central to the economic, environmental and social success of the country both that these three aspects of development are addressed positively and equally and that planning both serves to protect and to enhance and add value to the environment. This is the core principle underpinning planning.*

*Policies in plans and decisions on development should be assessed against the principles that the nation and areas within it should live within their environmental limits; should achieve a sustainable economy and should seek to ensure a strong, healthy and just society.*

*The achievement of sustainable development through planning should be based on the responsible use of a sound evidence base and developed through an open and democratic system.”*

The committee called for local flexibility in defining sustainable development: “it is both good practice and in the nature of localism that local authorities should be encouraged to apply the definition of sustainable development in a way that meets their local circumstances”.

**Local plans.** The committee says the proposed ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ could undermine local plans. The NPPF should unambiguously reflect the statutory supremacy of Local Plans. “Where there is an adopted Local Plan in place, the Local Plan should be the starting point for planning decisions... The relationship between the NPPF, Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans needs to be set out clearly and cogently within the body of the NPPF, including the way in which strategic and local priorities are to be taken into account, especially when these priorities conflict.” The “default yes to development” should be rejected because it “is weighted too far towards a single interest that the planning system must address, and is inconsistent with both the plan-led system and the more measured presumption in favour of sustainable development”.

**Land supply.** Local authorities should be able to prioritise the use of brownfield land within their six-year supply. The government should also allow windfall sites to be included in the six-year supply where local authorities can demonstrate a track record of such sites coming forward. Unsustainable development should not be allowed to proceed as a result of appeals against local authorities which have not allocated the full six year supply.

**Town centres.** The NPPF should continue the existing Town Centre First policy by bringing offices back within its ambit. The application of the sequential test for development should remain a requirement rather than a preference. Developments that fail the sequential test should be deemed unsustainable. The government should ensure that arts, culture and tourism uses are included in the Town Centre First policy. There should be new provisions for communities to secure “absolute protection” of town centres from out-of-town development where there is evidence of widespread community support, and when it can be demonstrated that the outstanding qualities of the town centre would be threatened by the proposed development.

**Transport.** “We consider that the transport section of the NPPF is a good illustration of lack of balance in the document as currently drafted; by the use of such phrases as ‘where reasonable’, and ‘where practical’, it gives the impression that the ‘sustainable’ part of ‘sustainable development’ can be jettisoned almost at will. Local authorities should be able to expect that they can reject or enforce changes to development on transport or environmental grounds.”

**Process.** “We see a strong case for a short consultation to allow practitioners to make comments on the technical aspects of the revised NPPF.” A sensible transition period to the NPPF should be put in place with a clear and realistic timetable to give local authorities time to put Local Plans in place where they have not already done so. Current planning guidance should be reviewed and that which is operationally useful should be retained “lest councils spend valuable time reinventing numerous wheels.”

**Reaction.** In a letter to the Telegraph, Shaun Spiers praised the report but warned “there will also be unnecessary loss unless the NPPF recognises the intrinsic value of the countryside as a whole, not just Green Belts and designated areas” (<http://tgr.ph/uO21Mp>). The Daily Telegraph leader said: “had it not been for the National Trust, the Campaign to Protect Rural England and the debate conducted through the columns of this newspaper, what is clearly a flawed policy would have been nodded through by now. Indeed, a wilful attempt to close down the discussion has been an unfortunate feature of this exercise from the outset... the government should recognise that it has an obligation to future generations to get the policy right” (<http://tgr.ph/tRqXwZ>). The TCPA welcomed the report and the National Trust said it provides “irresistible pressure to improve the NPPF” (24dash: <http://bit.ly/vSuAew>). Civic Voice said the report was “a welcome dose of much needed common sense which would bring sensible reforms to planning policy” (<http://bit.ly/vcX6S7>). The WWF declared the recommendations were ‘pragmatic and constructive’ (<http://bit.ly/vZihFF>).

## Mary Portas Report on Town Centres

**The report.** In May 2011 David Cameron commissioned the self-styled Queen of Shops to find ways of improving town centres. The Portas review, published on 13 December, draws extensively on work by urban Pollinators (Report: <http://bit.ly/mportas>; Urban Pollinators: <http://bit.ly/n09aa7>). It comes against a background of closure of high street chains threatening up to 40,000 jobs and plans by food retailers to build an additional 44.4m sq ft of shopping aisles - more than Tesco’s existing estate (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/tLT14g>; <http://bit.ly/tLT14g>; Daily Mail: <http://bit.ly/sPRatm>). The review delighted many town centre planners and retailers, though there was a predictable backlash from the backers of out of town stores.

**Recommendations.** Portas calls for a vision of the high street as a destination for more than shopping alone. Her report makes 28 recommendations on ways to turn around high streets, including cutting red tape, monitoring car parking charges and setting up ‘Town Teams’ (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/sRdolv>). The main recommendations are:

- ◆ Create visionary, strategic and strong operational management Town Teams that focus on making high streets accessible, attractive and safe.
- ◆ Make an explicit presumption in favour of town centre development in the NPPF.
- ◆ Introduce a Secretary of State “exceptional sign off” for all new out-of-town developments and require all large new developments to have an “affordable shops” quota.
- ◆ Strengthen successful Business Improvement Districts.
- ◆ Run a high profile campaign to get people involved in Neighbourhood Plans and promote the inclusion of the High Street in the plans.
- ◆ Launch a new National Market Day.
- ◆ Remove unnecessary regulations so that almost anyone can trade on the high street.
- ◆ Give business rate concessions to new local businesses.
- ◆ Make it easier to change the uses of high street properties but control betting shops through a separate ‘Use Class’ of their own.
- ◆ Free controlled parking schemes.
- ◆ Empower local authorities to step in when landlords are negligent with new “Empty Shop Management Orders”.
- ◆ Support imaginative community use of empty properties through Community Right to Buy, Meanwhile Use and a new “Community Right to Try”.
- ◆ Run High Street Pilots to test proof of concept.

**Government response.** David Cameron said: “I am delighted that Mary Portas has produced such a clear vision on how we can create vibrant and diverse town centres and breathe life back into our high streets. The government will... publish our response next spring” (BIS: <http://bit.ly/vEu6lW>).

**APPG for Town Centres.** Eastbourne MP Stephen Lloyd, co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Town Centres, said he had been tasked with exploring the report’s recommendations. The APPG plans to draw up a town centre charter and Lloyd is proposing designating Eastbourne as a pilot area (Herald: <http://bit.ly/vLYEnL>).

**Other Reaction.** CPRE said: “Portas makes it clear that it is not good enough to take a laissez-faire approach to planning if we want to achieve the right kind of economic growth. This approach will lead to more out of town mega stores and supermarkets that suck the life out of town centres” (<http://bit.ly/thKGvU>). Describing the report as ‘intelligent’, architect Richard Rogers said: “Soulless out-of-town sheds destroy the countryside, blight our cities, and contribute to climate change” (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/vORIN1>). Towns across the country welcomed the report in the hope of rejuvenating their town centres and limiting out of town retail developments. Margate was particularly pleased to be singled out for praise in the report (Kent News: <http://bit.ly/tddGEp>). Retail development consultancy CBRE said that it unlikely that major retailers would change their preference for out of town stores if the Portas recommendations were implemented. The Association of Convenience Stores was more positive: the report “puts the focus on a crisis facing our high streets and sets out a blueprint for government action” (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/s4RBLi>). A Daily Telegraph poll showed only weak support for the High Street among its readers (<http://tgr.ph/tr6amH>). Michael Hanlon in the Daily Mail said “Portas is right, the High Street is dying but her recipe for action is doomed to fail” (<http://bit.ly/sTSXkJ>). Planning Magazine said: “Her demand that that the wording of the NPPF be made more precise is in itself too vague to really force the government’s hand. Similarly, it’s not clear how “the exceptional sign-off idea” would really change things given that the secretary of state has only chosen to call in one of the 146 out-of-town schemes referred to him since 2008” (<http://bit.ly/u2pPxr>).

## Planning

**Lib Dem rebellion on NPPF.** The Independent claimed that a confidential Lib Dem report said that the party’s MPs and peers have rejected as “unacceptable” the proposal to include “a presumption in favour of sustainable development” (<http://ind.pn/sGZTbv>).

**Hazard waste and flooding.** The environment, food and rural affairs select committee said the national policy statement for major hazardous waste infrastructure projects must be improved because “it contains ambiguities which could lead to lengthy and expensive legal argument.” Efra also recommends that the Environment Agency be given the power to veto applications on ground of flood risk (Efra: <http://bit.ly/rw9Eey>; Angus Walker: <http://bit.ly/uCi5d5>).

**Local enterprise partnerships.** Eric Pickles gave his backing to plans by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership to boost growth across Essex, Kent and East Sussex (EADT24: <http://bit.ly/rLVRH2>).

**Around the South East.** CPRE and the National Trust said plans to develop a golf course at Cherkley Court, the former Surrey home of Lord Beaverbrook, will damage an area of natural beauty. Tim Harold for CPRE said: “Do we need another golf course? We already have 140 in Surrey” (BBC: <http://bbc.in/tznVNO>). More than 70 people joined a demonstration organised by the Save Our Sussex Alliance outside Horsham’s Conservative Party headquarters to protest against threats to the countryside and environment (County Times: <http://bit.ly/sLORhc>).

## Housing

**Appeals.** More than two-thirds of large housing applications refused by councillors against their officers’ recommendations in the last year were approved at appeal (Planning £: <http://bit.ly/vg2dTW>).

**Conversions.** Reports suggest that the government is planning to drop proposals for secondary legislation to exempt conversion from offices to homes and will instead include a new statement in the NPPF (24dash: <http://bit.ly/rIVo1o>).

**Travellers.** Plans for a travellers site on green belt in Chalfont St Giles were rejected by Chiltern District Council (BFP: <http://bit.ly/sLOgxK>). Travellers have been refused planning permission to remain on a green belt site at Leatherhead which has been their home for the last eight years (Comet: <http://bit.ly/rRSp9G>).

**Around the South East.** CPRE Hampshire said the New Homes Bonus is a bribe to build on green belt land and councils will be tempted to “fill shrinking coffers” by permitting developments (Echo: <http://bit.ly/tQEBHL>). CPRE Oxfordshire said that a plan for 49 homes outside the village envelope at Marcham is just one of many schemes in the pipeline and there is a risk of development in the Vale of White Horse “without consideration to infrastructure and the countryside” (Oxford Times: <http://bit.ly/w2rW3Y>). Oxford council agreed plans for a 1,200-home estate at Barton West despite fears about how it will link to existing suburbs and complaints that the decision meeting was overloaded with agenda items. Sietske Boules for Oxford CPRE said: “There were 16 speakers and only 10 people were allowed to speak because there was agenda overload. It was undemocratic” (Oxford Times: <http://bit.ly/vNw9af>; <http://bit.ly/vkF5gm>). Resubmitted proposals for a 32-caravan travellers site in Shalford, near Guildford, are being opposed by Stonebridge Action Group (STAG). The National Trust, CPRE and STAG are backing a plan by the Wey & Arun Canal Trust to create a mooring basin on the land as part of a canal restoration project (Get Surrey: <http://bit.ly/tv3VrT>). West Berkshire Council is being urged by campaigners to drop plans to build 1,000 new homes on a greenfield site in Sandleford, the area which featured in the novel Watership Down (24dash: <http://bit.ly/sxYdta>; Newbury Today: <http://bit.ly/vawoXD>).

## Landscapes, Environment and Biodiversity

**Green belt.** The Oxford Mail called for a green belt review: “Whatever your opinion, the city’s housing issue must be solved and the answer will be hard for some to swallow” (<http://bit.ly/uq3NR0>). Plans are being put forward for a cemetery in the green belt south of Oxford (Oxford Mail: <http://bit.ly/sJo9Xt>).

**Forestry.** The Independent Panel on Forestry published its progress report. It has received 42,000 responses to its consultation; nearly 35,000 of which were via the 38 Degrees website. The Panel sets out a broad vision of woodlands providing a wider range of benefits to more people, and will explore the role of not just the public forest estate but of all woodlands, including those in other ownerships, in delivering more for society, the environment and the economy. CPRE welcomed the report but emphasised the need for stronger protection for trees in national planning policy (Report: <http://bit.ly/vfSvYE>; <http://bit.ly/svfdXg>).

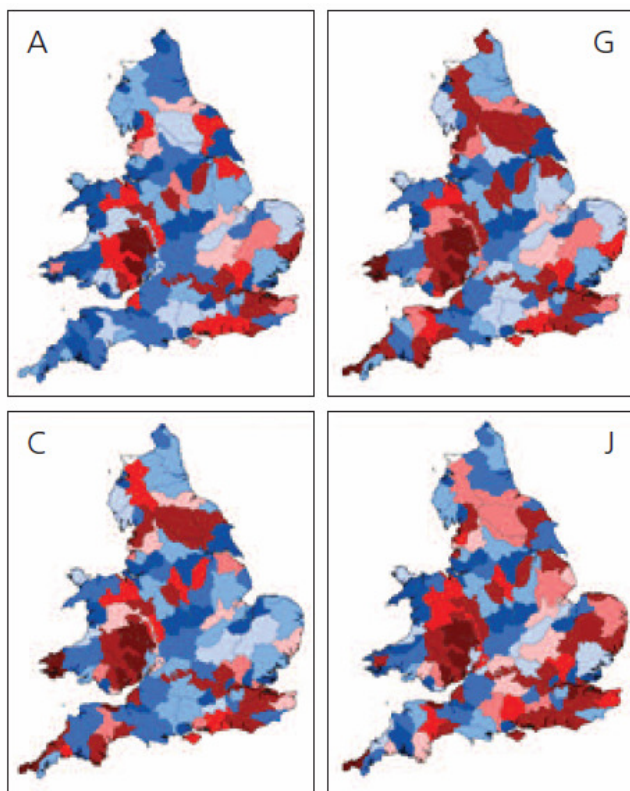


**Oil.** Energy Minister Charles Hendry wished the oil and gas sector a “prosperous 2012” as he approved 46 new licences to explore for hydrocarbons in the North Sea (<http://bit.ly/greenestever>). Approval has been given for drilling an exploratory oil well at Hookwood in Surrey (C&H Observer: <http://bit.ly/uViwad>).

**Nuclear.** The government was accused of sneaking out announcements on an updated waste transfer policy and revised funding for decommissioning, which Greenpeace claims will cost taxpayers a “fortune” (Edie: <http://bit.ly/uCEhmg>).

## Recycling, Waste and Water

**Water White Paper.** Caroline Spelman published the long delayed water white paper. She announced plans to reform the water industry and deregulate water markets to drive economic growth, and also committed to “improve the condition of our rivers by encouraging local organisations to improve water quality and make sure we are extracting water from our environment in the least harmful way”. The white paper says the energy industry is likely to increase its demand for water as it pursues low carbon technologies, including carbon capture and storage. The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust expressed disappointment, warning that the white paper delayed measures to reduce water use and safeguard wetlands, while concerns about urban flooding and over-abstraction has been “fudged”. A draft Water Bill is expected early in 2012 (Defra: <http://bit.ly/uE1OD0>; Edie: <http://bit.ly/s7SNOn>). In reports to accompany the White Paper, the Environment Agency warned that climate change and population growth could lead to water shortages in the future and that drought will be ‘commonplace’ by the 2050s (<http://bit.ly/w4h48M>).



Water stressed areas (red) in 2050 under different scenarios; all assume demand is not reduced

## Thames Water formally drops Upper Thames Reservoir.

Thames Water has launched a seven-week public consultation on its updated plans for meeting demand for water between 2010 and 2035, after Defra rejected the initial plans. One significant change is the removal of the proposed Upper Thames Reservoir, though Thames Water continues to explore options for the site (closing January 31: <http://bit.ly/uE9PQu>; Edie: <http://bit.ly/urcXup>). It is also consulting on its amended drought plan (closing 8 February: <http://bit.ly/vePCLw>). As the probability of a 2012 drought grows, seven campaigns targeting the seven tributaries of the River Thames were launched by Thames Water and the Angling Trust, linking local water use to the impact on rivers (Edie: <http://bit.ly/sXGWw8>).

**Waste.** Defra is consulting on tougher recycling targets for metals and plastics, and better recycling of glass but it has said that it will not ban food waste from landfill (Defra: <http://bit.ly/tDDyVc>; Edie: <http://bit.ly/rHtQS4>). SITA UK’s long running attempts to build an energy from waste plant in Surrey look set to go ahead. Eric Pickles decided not to call in plans for a green belt site in Shepperton because the site was already operating as a waste management facility. The SITA UK ‘Eco Park’ will include a batch oxidation gasification facility and an anaerobic digester, alongside recycling and waste transfer facilities (Lets Recycle: <http://bit.ly/v1qCVP>; Get Surrey: <http://bit.ly/tQ3Bk2>).

## Transport

**Aviation policy.** A DfT report predicted that the number of passengers using the country’s airports will rise from 372 million a year in 2008 to 540 million in 2050. The Campaign for Better Transport described the figures as fanciful and CPRE said: “It is not just that airport expansion of this scale would trample over villages and sprawl across Green Belts. All the extra flight paths needed would criss-cross the countryside so much that by 2050, trying to find tranquillity in much of the English countryside could become as hard as looking for a needle in a haystack” (Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/uaelcn>). A report commissioned by the WWF said Britain can deal with a steep rise in aviation demand in the coming decades without building any new airports or runways. Theresa Villiers, aviation minister, said that the “immediate challenge” was to improve airports “within the constraints of existing runways. However, in the longer term we have committed to producing a sustainable policy framework for aviation” (FT £: <http://on.ft.com/rAqJHq>; WWF: <http://www.wwf.org.uk/>).

**A new South East airport?** A suggestion by Kent County Council leader Paul Carter that an airport should be built in Thurrock, Essex received a robust rejection from the leader of Thurrock Council. Carter said: “I support the national government in its endeavour to look at increasing the capacity in the South East... If the government is interested in a Thames Estuary Airport, I believe in a scheme other than the Isle of Grain... With a third Thames crossing needed in line with a second Thames flood barrier, north of the river has, in my view, real potential” (Enquirer: <http://bit.ly/rSZIU3>). Canvey town councillors are joining forces with parish councils in Kent to oppose the plans to build an airport in the Thames Estuary (Echo: <http://bit.ly/rQG2hf>).

**A new South East airport?** (continued) Transport Secretary Justine Greening clashed with MPs on the transport select committee when she claimed Boris Johnson was not proposing a new airport in the Thames Estuary but a new “hub airport” in the south-east of England (BBC: <http://bbc.in/twBahT>). Nicholas Faith in the Independent said: “Boris Island must never be able to get off the ground” due to birds, politics and cost (<http://ind.pn/u8eAZs>). “Selling Heathrow won’t pay for a Thames airport” (Director of Finance: <http://bit.ly/ulirfb>). Flybe has said it pull out of Manston International Airport in Kent in March (BBC: <http://bbc.in/toQD2B>).

**High Speed 2.** Daniel Moylan, deputy chairman of Transport for London warned that the tube system would not cope with the rush hours passengers delivered by HS2. “There is simply no space for this volume of additional passengers without having to close Euston Underground station on a daily basis, completely undermining the time-saving benefits of HS2... It is Transport for London’s and the Mayor’s view that a commitment to a new Underground line serving Euston needs to be built into Government plans from the outset” (Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/vS3JJg>; <http://tgr.ph/tPdE6U>). Shadow Welsh Secretary Peter Hain asked Justine Greening to back £500m proposals for a “Heathrow Hub” for HS2 to improve links between South Wales, the airport and Europe (Wales Online: <http://bit.ly/rN4Vlh>). The Scottish government are asking HS2 to draw up detailed plans for a line to Scotland which would begin construction after 2025 (Herald: <http://bit.ly/tA2Yx9>). A protest song again HS2 reached the top five of the HMV download music chart (BBC: <http://bbc.in/tf8Wci>).

**Local transport.** The DfT announced an £854m investment in 21 local transport schemes, including the controversial Norwich Northern Distributor Road. Ministers will consider the equally controversial Bexhill - Hastings Link Road in the spring and say they are “aware of concerns regarding the proposed scheme, including its environmental impact [and] they want to be sure that it offers the best approach for regenerating the area and also to consider other transport options to achieve this, including local trunk roads such as the A21, A259 and local rail” (<http://bit.ly/rNps7>).

**Sustainable travel.** The Campaign for Better Transport has issued a Campaigners Guide detailing policies that can be used to reduce the need to travel and how campaigners can resist planning policies and decisions that would increase, rather than reduce the need to travel (Ecologist: <http://bit.ly/sEwMHt>).

## Rural communities and economy

**Rural Growth Networks.** Defra announced that the £15 million pilot project to support rural businesses and grow the rural economy is open for applications. Rural Growth Networks (RGNs) will consist of a relatively small number of ‘enterprise hubs’, each with between ten and twenty micro or small enterprises on underused business parks, brownfield sites or sites which already have outline planning permission for commercial or industrial development. The enterprise hubs might be generic or focus on a specific sector (<http://bit.ly/sLDGa1>).

**Broadband.** The Countryside Alliance said plans for fast broadband in rural areas have stalled with work yet to begin in the four pilot areas (BBC: <http://bbc.in/sq4a0L>).

**Big Society.** David Cameron’s big society project is confusing the civil service, charities and the public because it lacks a clear plan and a leader, according to the public administration select committee (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/u6zu5h>). The Royal Society of Arts called for the big society to be refashioned as a longer term project (Guardian: <http://bit.ly/t3Jw7Y>).

**Pubs.** The British Beer and Pub Association warned that over 1,500 pubs could close in Britain in the next two years due to punitive rises in beer taxes and an increase in red tape (Telegraph: <http://tgr.ph/sPIOs9>).

## Campaigning and people

**Honours.** Margaret Paren, Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority was awarded an OBE in the New Years honours list for services to the environment. Gerald Williams, Chairman of the Friends of Bedgebury Pinetum in Kent also received an OBE for services to the environment.

**CPRE.** Felicity Simpson has stepped down as chair of the Maidstone branch of CPRE Protect Kent and is replaced by Stanford John (Kent Messenger: <http://bit.ly/v7ZUrZ>). CPRE Oxfordshire’s Campaigns Manager Helena Whall has departed for a role within the Advocacy team at Oxfam, in connection with the Arms Trade Treaty. We wish them both well.

## And finally, it is not easy being green

**The Shoreham Six.** The silliest environmental story of 2011 was the case of six green sheep, now known as the Shoreham Six. They were installed on a Shoreham roundabout at the end of November, as part of sponsorship deal by the South Downs National Park. Sadly, several drivers confused the artificial green sheep for the real, mucky white variety. After “panic calls” to West Sussex County Council the clearly dangerous sheep were promptly secured behind safety barriers (BBC: <http://bbc.in/rACnV5>; Daily Mail: <http://bit.ly/sKWmwI>; Argus: <http://bit.ly/tggHJY>). In 2012, the Food Standards Agency is expected to advise that consumers should not drink milk from the concrete cows of Milton Keynes...



## About the CPRE South East eBulletin

The CPRE South East eBulletin is issued monthly. We cover planning and environmental news with a relevance to the remit of CPRE. Any views expressed are those of the editor, not of any part of CPRE. Our audience is CPRE and its friends. Please feel free to circulate this eBulletin.

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