

HELP PREVENT A DISASTER FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE

Dear Member

I am sure you cannot have failed to notice the furore that has been widely reported about the government's draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). CPRE is one of a host of environmental organisations – including the National Trust – that have drawn attention to the extensive and widespread damage to the countryside that could result if the NPPF goes ahead in its present form.

CPRE fully supports the principle of simplifying the planning system, which almost everyone agrees has grown to become - too bureaucratic and cumbersome. Under the present proposals, detailed national planning policies, running to many thousands of pages, are to be replaced by a single framework document of not many more than fifty pages. This broad brush document will need to be interpreted by local planning authorities throughout the country, so it is absolutely vital that its principles set the right balance between economic, environmental and social matters.

We believe that the present draft NPPF has this balance seriously wrong in a number of important respects. For example:

- Because there will no longer be a requirement that urban (or 'brownfield') sites should be developed first, developers will inevitably target greenfield sites that are quicker and cheaper to build on, undermining vital town improvements in the process.
- Except in limited circumstances, your local authority will not be able to refuse developments where the local plan is not up to date. The Government is saying that the default answer to development should be "YES".
- Outside AONBs and the Green Belt, the countryside will no longer be protected from development "for its own sake."
- In the light of increasing concerns over long term food security, we need stronger policies to avoid the unnecessary loss of agricultural land, particularly that of the best quality.
- The government is suggesting that lack of transport facilities should no longer be a barrier to development. Thus, new housing could be built where there are no adequate roads or public transport, leading to even greater congestion.

CPRE fully recognises and supports the need for more housing, especially affordable housing. But it does not accept the line put forward by both government and the housing lobby that the planning system is responsible for the recent lack of house-building. There is no shortage of land with planning permissions but a shortage of housing finance.

In Gloucestershire and nationally CPRE has a number of actions in hand to try and get the draft NPPF changed. For example, we have written to the press. We have also written to all our local MPs and will be meeting most of them. Of course we will also be formally responding to the government's detailed consultation.

The views of CPRE as an organisation have already been registered by the government.

What we need now is for our members to make their voices known as individuals. We are therefore asking you to write a simple personal letter to Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, if possible copied to your MP. Your letter can be as long or as short as you wish but we hope you will be able to highlight some of the above points of common concern.

Yours sincerely

Charlie Watson

Charlie Watson
Chairman Gloucestershire County Branch

Please write to

The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

If you want to view the draft National Planning Policy Framework, this can be accessed via the website of the Department of Communities and Local Government – www.communities.gov.uk