

CPRE manifesto for General Election 2017

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) campaigns for a beautiful and living countryside. We work to protect, promote and enhance our towns and countryside to make them better places to live, work and enjoy, for current and future generations. As well as our national office in London, we have almost 60,000 members and supporters, 43 county branches, eight regional groups and more than 100 district groups up and down England. Our members and supporters, including over 2,000 parish councils, are actively involved in working for the celebrated landscapes and wider countryside in which they live and work.

Summary

England's countryside is a patchwork of beautiful, thriving landscapes used and valued by people across the country as a place to live, work and connect with nature. Yet it is under increasing pressure from development - and is at risk of being ignored by political parties while they concentrate on the economic settlement post-Brexit.

Indeed, any discussion of economic prosperity must recognise the value of the countryside: the variety of our internationally renowned landscapes underpins tourism, fosters robust rural economies, and provides the food we eat, as well as sustaining the nation's health and wellbeing. Development in rural areas, including affordable housing or infrastructure, is necessary to maintain this - but can only do so when it is proportionate, sustainable and supported by local people.

The time has come to put more effort into making sure that the system delivers the homes and services that local people actually need and can afford. We must move away from the opportunist free-for-all that has characterised our approach to rural development, eroding our Green Belts and precious landscapes. It is possible to tackle the challenges this country faces without destroying one of England's greatest assets.

We call on all parties in this election to recognise the countryside's huge contribution to the economy and our sense of who we are as individuals and communities, and to develop policies that will protect and enhance rural areas. In this way, we can provide for current and future generations so that both can benefit from the nourishment our countryside gives us.

CPRE is calling for the following commitments in all parties' manifestos for the 2017 General Election:

1. Stronger protection for Green Belts, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Green Belts provide the countryside next door to 30 million people, prevent urban sprawl and help to ensure that the cities, towns and villages they surround remain vibrant places to live. Our countryside is an important social, environmental and economic asset that deserves the greatest possible protection from ill-judged development, especially in Green Belts, National Parks and AONBs. It is essential to shield such valuable areas from inappropriate development; simply releasing

more protected land for development will not solve the housing crisis. Any development in the rural areas must meet the needs of local people, especially in terms of affordability and high quality design.

2. Further investment in urban regeneration

Regenerating our towns and cities, especially vacant, derelict or underused “brownfield” sites, benefits both town and countryside. On one hand, this provides much-needed homes and jobs close to existing services and infrastructure, improving the attractiveness and competitiveness of those places. On the other, it relieves pressure for development on open land and in rural areas that are vital for agriculture, nature, and physical and mental well-being. Despite recent economic growth, large areas of the country have been left behind. Regenerating these areas in exciting and ambitious ways will revive local economies, while limiting unnecessary development in neighbouring greenfield and Green Belt areas.

3. Continued public funding for farming focused on the benefits beyond food

Farming needs to become more diverse if we are to be a resilient nation in terms of food and environment, reversing the decline in nature, in soils and in landscapes. Public funding is required, but it needs a new model that rewards wider public benefit. This would be a shift away from simply allocating money according to the area of land owned, as is currently the case. Such a change in direction for farming policy could sustain the production of our varied and delicious local food while providing beautiful countryside, abundant nature and recreational opportunities.

4. Reset roads policy with a smarter travel investment strategy

As demonstrated by CPRE’s *The end of the road?* report, road-building is failing to provide the promised congestion relief and economic progress - and continues to damage the environment. Rather than seeking to triple road spending, the next Government should commit to overhauling transport policy in favour of a better integrated and sustainable approach. This could include investment in existing public transport systems, with restored rail routes and integrated bus services, and a renewed focus on cycling and walking.

5. Reduce waste and pollution by committing to resource efficiency schemes, such as deposit return systems

Litter continues to deface our beautiful countryside, yet valuable materials such as glass, plastic and aluminium are used in the manufacture of many products designed only for single-use. Without efficient recapture and recycling systems, these resources are wasted and end up polluting our forests and streams. Building on the success of the carrier bag charge and ban on microbeads, introducing new measures that promote efficient use of our resources, such as a Deposit Return System (DRS) for capturing single-use containers, would be a significant step in reducing this blight on our beautiful landscapes.

6. Transpose all EU environmental protections into domestic law and introduce an ambitious new Environment Act

Exiting the EU is a pivotal moment to restore and enhance our natural environment - now and in the future. Fully transposing and maintaining existing EU environmental laws and principles through the Great Repeal Bill would provide a solid foundation for post-Brexit environmental policy. An ambitious new Environment Act would build on this by setting strong anti-pollution rules, resource-efficiency standards, and measurable milestones for environmental restoration for the decades that follow.