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£2.45

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January 2015

Lancashire

& North West magazine

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Save our countryside

Andrew Harris on the battle to protect Lancashire's precious rural landscape

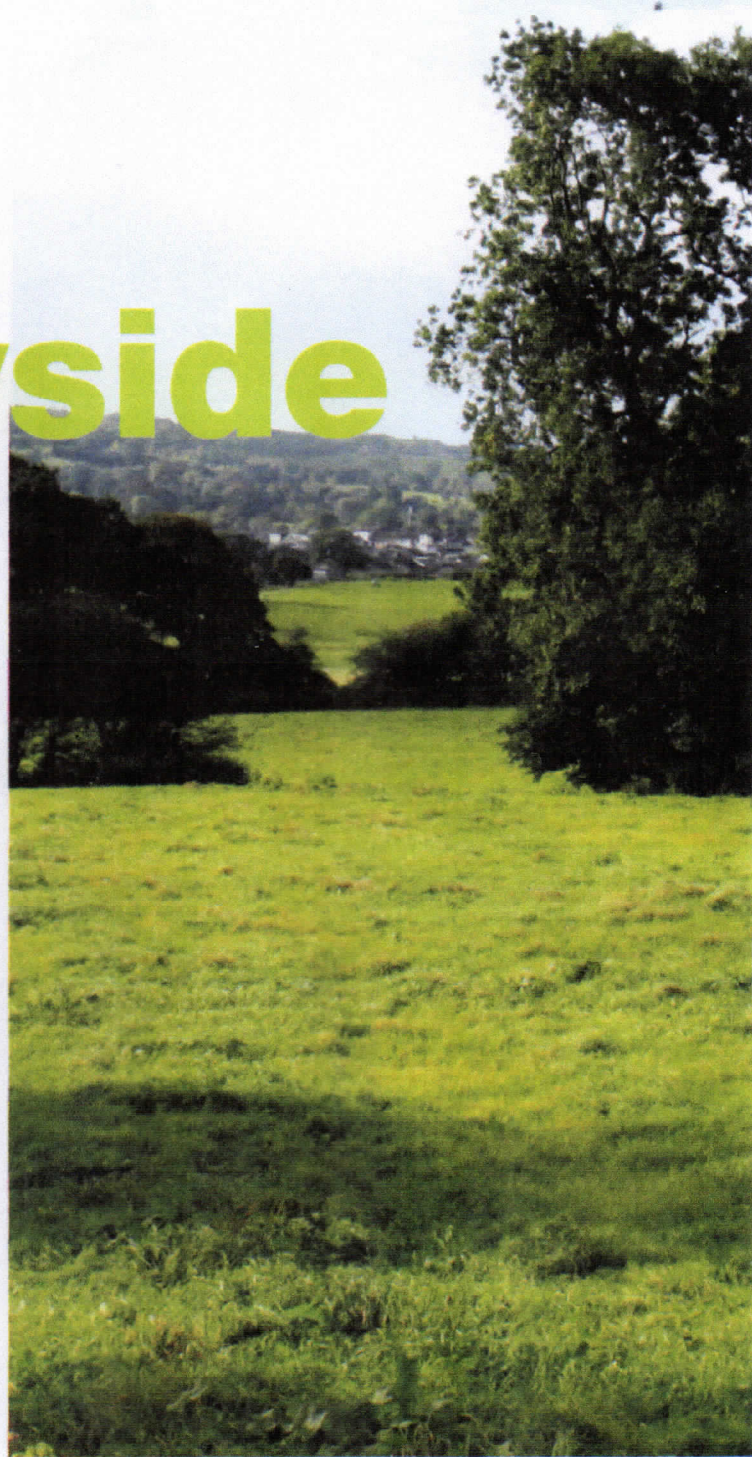
Do you ever think about our countryside? Or perhaps you just take it for granted. Well, it's always been there so who can blame you!

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) has been standing up for the countryside for over 80 years. In that time we've seen some remarkable successes. We campaigned for some of our most spectacular landscapes to be protected by becoming National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and helped to influence and apply planning laws that have – so far – preserved the special beauty and character of the English countryside against all the odds. The result is that everyone can enjoy and benefit from our beautiful and living countryside but it is now under threat as never before.

CPRE Lancashire recently asked local people to vote on current threats to the countryside. In descending order they identified fracking, Green Belt erosion, government housing policy, waste disposal sites, the proposed HS2 railway, loss of hedgerows, loss of public transport, new roads, wind farms, reduced farm viability, new overhead cables and solar farms. Every year a little more countryside is lost forever – often to urban sprawl and new housing when brownfield sites are slow and difficult to develop but rural sites are quick and easy. Faced with these challenges CPRE aims to play a constructive role by encouraging and supporting what is good, helping to amend what needs improving and opposing that which is unacceptable. Increasingly we aim to campaign positively for what is best. These are some of our stories –

- Councils in England are required to identify a supply of housing land for the next five years to accommodate the estimated housing need for their area. Unlike retail development where there has been a 'sequential' test to favour city centres and other shopping areas before out-of-town superstores there is no such test for housing land. If there was then previously-used brownfield sites in urban areas would be favoured over low-grade greenfield sites and Green Belt land would be more strongly protected. Government statements say that 'protecting our precious green belt must be paramount' yet their policies force councils to provide housing land in the Green Belt if necessary.

CPRE Lancashire is strongly opposing this loss of the



countryside in many ways. We have undertaken a major survey of housing land availability, Parliament's Select Committee for Communities & Local Government has published our evidence on the five year housing land rule, we have obtained counsel's legal opinion on the new rules and we hope to have a question in parliament shortly asking why government is professing support for the Green Belt whilst insisting on rules which can force councils to designate green field and even Green Belt land for new development. We are also busy opposing unacceptable planning applications and supporting local people at planning appeals.

- CPRE is not implacably opposed to fracking shale gas

MAIN: Land at Whalley which has been lost as countryside due to the five year housing land supply rule

Every year a little more countryside is lost forever



because the UK needs new sources of energy and such an uncompromising stance would prevent us from engaging with all the parties involved to make fracking more acceptable. In Lancashire we have engaged with the government's Office for Unconventional Gas & Oil, the trade association UKOOG, Lancashire County Council as the Minerals Planning Authority and the fracking company Cuadrilla. We have been able to make recommendations to all of them and now propose a 'mini- manifesto' to achieve six actions by government which CPRE Lancashire feels are vital if fracking is to be acceptable to the people of Lancashire. They are:

- New codified regulations as recommended by the Royal

Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering.

- A new and expert regulatory authority comparable to the Civil Aviation Authority.
- An Act of Parliament to give landowners rights mainly in relation to safety, pollution and contamination.
- A public information campaign about fracking from an independent source.
- Fracking sites to revert to agricultural use when fracking finishes.
- Government to commit to shale gas only being a transition fuel pending new energy sources which emit little or no carbon.

CPRE Lancashire has recommended 22 planning conditions in response to each of the planning applications by Cuadrilla and will continue to monitor the situation and suggest improvements when we can. We are taking more and more action to raise awareness of countryside issues and recommending improved ways of providing wind and solar farms when they are acceptable. Schemes currently underway include:

- Using the windows of some empty shops to display country scenes.
- Providing guidance notes to achieve best practice for new developments.
- Introducing an awards scheme to encourage and reward projects or initiatives which improve the countryside.
- A membership drive to enable more people to support our campaign to protect rural Lancashire.
- Applying for grants to boost our 'Fighting Fund' for challenging unacceptable development proposals.
- Appealing for volunteers to help with our work.

Readers in Greater Manchester should be aware of the 'Spatial Framework' planning proposals for where they live. Primarily concerned with housing and employment we are standing up for the interests of the countryside, recreation and farming which virtually don't feature at this stage. Our other inputs range from the impact of increasing home working on the need for business space to concern about the form of 'HS3'. If it mainly uses existing track and hugely improves travel times, destinations served and the quality of the service it could transform prosperity and quality of life in Greater Manchester and the other northern cities that would benefit from much-improved links.

CPRE Lancashire is a dynamic and forward looking organisation which is keen to play a constructive role to protect and improve rural life. We hope to report on much of our work in the months and years ahead. In the meantime we are responding to the many threats that face our precious countryside. We do this because our countryside needs us and we need our countryside.

• Andrew Harris is Chairman, CPRE Lancashire. ■



Lancashire CPRE Promotions Manager Anne Kurdock, Chairman Andrew Harris and Planning Manager Jackie Copley

We are standing up for the countryside and responding constructively to the threats that worry you most.

Loss of Hedgerows **Wind Farms** **HS2 Railway**
Solar Farms **Fracking** **Loss of**
Green Belt **Erosion** **New Overhead Cables** **Public Transport**
Government
Housing Policy
Waste Disposal
Sites **Farm Viability** **New Roads**

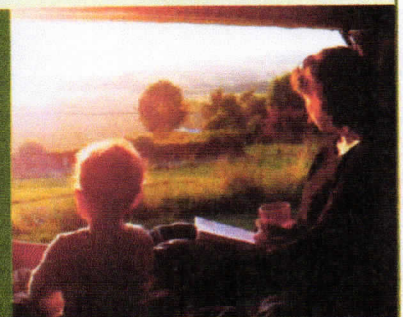


Lancashire

including Merseyside & Greater Manchester

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One of the CPRE's campaign posters